Dean’s Response to the Program Review Committee’s Final Report
Department of Political Science
October 2005

The Program Review Committee’s (PRC) report highlights the success enjoyed by the Department of Political Science in the seven years since its last review. The department has enjoyed effective leadership, recruited well, promoted collegiality, and become a highly effective unit. Commitment to students has not come at the expense of high quality research, and serious pursuit of research has not diminished high quality teaching and attention to students—whether majors or freshmen enrolled in general education courses. There are many indications that the department is serious about teaching and learning, including the active participation and leadership in BGeXperience, the expansion of the Model U.N. Program, the impressive number of students placed in internships, and the positive feedback faculty receive from students. One indication of the department’s success in creating a good environment for learning is the impressive growth of majors during the past several years. At the same time, most faculty are active scholars who are publishing in highly regarded venues as well as making contributions in the realms of applied and engaged scholarship. I would like to take this opportunity to convey my appreciation and congratulations to the department for the good work it has done as well as my thanks for its many contributions to making the college more vibrant intellectually and more effective in serving students.

As is to be expected in a process designed to provide constructive feedback, PRC indicated several areas that need attention. These include review of the graduate program’s focus and administration, reconsideration of the department’s learning outcomes and its approaches to assessment, and attention to the undergraduate curriculum. These are important but manageable issues. Given the department’s recent successes and the steps already underway to address these issues (as indicated in Dr. Simon’s response to the PRC’s final report), I am confident that the department will use the feedback provided by the program review process to become even more effective.

In his response to the PRC’s report, Dr. Simon notes that it is difficult for the department to plan in the absence of a clearer idea of the resources that

I accept the recommendations contained in the PRC’s final report with one qualification and the following stipulations:

1. The PRC notes that the department is accomplishing a great deal with limited resources. In his response to the PRC’s report, Dr. Simon elaborates on this point, noting that it is difficult for the department to set realistic goals without an indication of resources that will be forthcoming from the college. While I sympathize with the department’s position and agree that it is understaffed, the uncertainties of the budget make it impossible to make additional commitments at this time. I have spoken with the chair about opportunities we may have in the near future to increase the number of faculty positions and will be happy to continue those discussions. In the meantime, I am available to discuss with Dr. Simon how the department might develop a plan that will allow it to
make the most of existing resources (which have increased in recent years) and be ready to use additional resources that may be forthcoming in the next 2-3 years.

2. I agree with PRC that it is important for the department to develop criteria for research active faculty and that only those faculty members who meet those criteria be eligible for a 3/2 teaching load. The department should develop such a policy and submit it to the College by May 1, 2006.

3. In response to the recommendations of the Standards Committee on the Scholarship of Engagement, all departments will be reviewing and revising their promotion, tenure, and merit policies during the next year. I encourage the department to use this as an opportunity to clarify expectations for tenure and promotion. I agree with PRC that department guidelines should not be overly detailed and specify numbers and venues of publications. Rather, the guidelines should emphasize assessment of the quality and impact of candidates’ scholarship. Concerns that candidates for tenure will be held to the level of productivity of high achieving faculty who have preceded them are best addressed by the chair and senior faculty. Candidates for tenure and promotion should be considered on their own merits and judged against the department’s stated criteria. Decisions should not be made on the basis of comparisons with others, either inside or outside the department.

4. Appointment of a tenured or tenure track faculty member to serve as graduate coordinator is essential. I am delighted that Dr. Simon has developed a plan to do so, effective July 1, 2006.

5. I am persuaded by Dr. Simon’s response that replacing the M.P.A. with an M.A. may be ill advised and defeat PRC’s purposes for making its recommendation—i.e., creating a more competitive masters degree that will maximize opportunities for talented, productive faculty to participate and attract more highly qualified applicants. I believe that Dr. Simon’s proposal to reconfigure the M.P.A. program is consistent with the spirit of the PRC’s recommendation, and I support it. The department should develop its plan and prepare the necessary curriculum modification materials during the 2005-06 academic year. The goal should be to have the revised program in place when recruitment efforts for the entering class of 2007 begin in fall 2006.

6. The department must revisit its learning outcomes and its assessment plan, as suggested by PRC. I will ask Dr. Simon Morgan-Russell to meet with the department to discuss how they should proceed to develop a more robust assessment program. The department should submit revised learning outcomes and a new assessment plan to the College no later than May 1, 2006.

7. I agree with PRC that the number of sub-fields represented in the major is too large and am pleased that the department has developed a plan to reduce the number of sub-fields from six to four, as indicated by Dr. Simon’s response to the PRC’s report. The department should proceed with this plan and submit the necessary curriculum modification materials to the Social Science Curriculum Committee no later than January 2006.

Let me congratulate the department on its significant accomplishments in recent years. I look forward to working with Dr. Simon and his colleagues in the coming years to build on these accomplishments and make a strong department even stronger.
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Concurred:  
John W. Folkins, Provost