

External Review Report

7th Cycle Program Review
Department of Political Science
College of Liberal and Creative Arts
San Francisco State University

November 2019

Dr. Teresa Wright
Department of Political Science
California State University Long Beach

Dr. Jane Junn
Department of Political Science
University of Southern California

Table of Contents

Section	Page #
1.0 Overview of the Program (based on self study and campus visit).....	2
2.0 Program Quality	2-5
2.1 Program Planning.....	2-3
2.2 Student Learning and Achievement.....	3-4
2.3 The Curriculum.....	4
2.4 Faculty.....	4-5
2.5 Resources.....	5
2.6 The Program's Conclusions, Plans, and Goals.....	5
3.0 Commendations of Strengths and Achievements	5-6
3.1 Student Success.....	5-6
3.1.1 Assessment.....	5
3.1.2 Program/Curriculum.....	6
3.2 Faculty Excellence.....	6
3.3 Leadership and Staff Excellence.....	6
4.0 Recommendations and Strategies for Program Improvement	6-8
4.1 For the College/University.....	6-8
4.1.1 Tenure-track Hiring.....	6
4.1.2 Support for PLSI 200 Instruction.....	6-7
4.1.3 Release Time and Administrative Support for Moot Court.....	7
4.1.4 Continuation of Release Time for Advising Coordinator.....	7
4.1.5 Expectations for Online Instruction.....	7
4.1.6 Support/Backing for Department Work to Address High DFW Rates.....	7
4.1.7 Faculty Housing.....	8
4.2 For the department.....	8
4.2.1 Action on DFW rates.....	8
4.2.2 Assessment.....	8
4.2.3 Curriculum.....	8
4.2.4 MA Program.....	8

1.0 Overview of the Program

We are highly impressed with the Political Science Department at SFSU. The department's faculty members are dedicated teachers and productive scholars who actively serve the department, college, and university. The department has a broad and vibrant undergraduate and graduate curriculum that provides students with the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed in the major and their future careers. The undergraduate major is very popular, with overall numbers increasing dramatically in recent years. Faculty members are open and eager to innovate in ways that facilitate student success, including skill development, course availability, attention to high DWF rates, on-time completion of the degree, preparation for post-graduation education and careers, and MA student recruitment. Our recommendations to the university, college and department will help to build on the department's strengths and address areas that might be improved. With appropriate administrative support, we are confident that the department will continue to hone its already excellent work in support of the mission of SFSU.

2.0 Program Quality

The department offers three programs: an undergraduate B.A., an undergraduate minor, and an M.A. All are well-constructed to ensure breadth of exposure and foundational skill development, while allowing some student choice and providing a meaningful culminating experience.

The department's 40-unit B.A. program provides and requires core and breadth courses that give students exposure to research methods as well as the discipline's main subfields (with International Relations covered through cross-listed courses). At the same time, students are allowed some choice, enabling them to craft their degree plan in line with their interests and career goals. The department recently has developed "road maps" that students interested in pre-law; activism and social movements; and research may use to guide their course selections. The major's culminating experience is a senior seminar. The undergraduate minor ensures some breadth of subfield exposure but allows substantial flexibility, with the total unit load recently reduced from 21 to 18 units.

The department's 30-unit M.A. program includes core courses that ensure breadth and foundational knowledge/skills (including research design); elective seminars in the student's chosen area of specialization (theory, American, comparative); and a culminating experience in the form of a thesis or comprehensive examinations.

2.1 Program Planning

The department has put great effort into program planning and revision. Faculty regularly have met to discuss student skill development and deficiencies, and have acted on their conclusions.

At the B.A. level, for example, after identifying a need to develop undergraduate students' writing and research/analytical skills earlier in the program, faculty members developed two

new courses—PLSI 303 [Fundamentals of Political Science] and PLSI 302 [Writing for Political Science GWAR]. Further, new tenure-line hires have been targeted to address prior issues with sufficient course availability of the required PLSI 300 [Scientific Inquiry in Political Science]. To aid students in understanding and meeting their degree requirements, the department recently created a “Requirements for Degree” checklist that is available to students as a handout and has been enlarged as a poster on the entry wall in the department office/student lounge.

At the M.A. level, PLSI 700 [Research Design] has been added as a required course for first-year students, ensuring a strong foundation in research skills early in the program. Further, the number of units per course has been lowered from 4 to 3, enabling students to encounter broader subject exposure through an increased number of elective courses.

2.2 Student Learning and Achievement

As noted above, the department’s faculty members have worked diligently to enhance student learning and achievement through ensuring adequate development of foundational research and writing skills. We met with roughly ten undergraduate and graduate students, and they expressed great satisfaction with and appreciation for the knowledge and skills that they have gained through their political science programs, including both coursework and extra-curricular activities such as Moot Court and internships. In particular, students emphasized that their work in the department has given them “tangible real-life skills” that will serve them throughout their lives, including written and verbal communication, networking, and analytical and research skills. Perhaps less tangibly, students reported that the program has developed their “grit” (ability and determination to work hard and sacrifice in the short term to achieve long term and lasting gains); has bolstered their self-confidence and given them a feeling of empowerment; and has fostered an environment of inclusion. Similarly, in a 2018 survey of alumni, over 80% of respondents reported being “confident,” “very confident, or “extremely confident” in their writing and qualitative reasoning skills, and credited their coursework in the major for developing their skills in writing, research, analysis, critical thinking, communication, and public speaking (listed in order of frequency mentioned) (Self Study, 12).

The department’s new and growing Moot Court program deserves special note. We agree with the department’s Oct. 2019 self study update, which states that “student performance has been extraordinary for such a new and modestly funded team” (Self Study Update, 4). Under the leadership of Dr. Nick Conway, the Moot Court team—which is highly diverse in terms of gender and race/ethnicity and includes many first-generation students—has competed in roughly half a dozen tournaments per year, regularly earning awards and finishing near the top of the pool.

To ensure timely degree progress, the department has put special effort into advising in recent years. Since spring 2018, the department has held two three-hour advising “open houses” each semester, with 40-70 students attending each session. In fall 2019, the department held a New Student Orientation and Welcome, and ran an “Advising 101” workshop for all tenure-track faculty hired within the prior three years.

Further, we were extremely impressed with the research/M.A. thesis projects that the graduate students described for us; their work is highly professional and topical, displaying the excellent training that they have received in the program.

2.3 The Curriculum

The department's curricular offerings are broad and vibrant, with particular strengths in political theory and quantitative methods. SFSU students can take an array of theory courses from introduction to political theory to more advanced topics such as political theory of sexuality, critical social thought, and anarchism. In methods, the department offers a course in scientific methods in political science (PLSI 300) that introduces students to empirical research through quantitative methods, including hands-on experiences working with data. To better prepare students for the scientific methods course, the department has introduced a new foundations course (PLSI 303) covering principles of social science inquiry. Supplementing this strong foundation are courses in applied public opinion research, as well as a class on data analysis. This variety in political theory and methods is matched by well-balanced course offerings in comparative politics, covering Latin America, China, Russia, Mexico, the Middle East, and East Asia. In American politics, students can choose from courses in race and American democracy and urban politics, for example. In addition, the department offers classes that cross fields and complement the concentration in activism and social movements, including courses in politics and community organizing, social change, and political movements. Finally, the department provides robust course offerings for pre-law track students with classes in the judicial process, courts in comparative perspective, several areas of U.S. Constitutional law, jurisprudence, and the moot court curriculum.

2.4 Faculty

We could hardly be more impressed with the department's faculty members. We were struck by their dedication to mission of the CSU and SFSU; they truly embody the "research active, teaching focused" ideal. Their commitment to excellence in teaching and mentoring is evident in the effusive praise conveyed by their students, who told us numerous anecdotes about faculty members reaching out to help them master material and skills, and making students feel that their instructors "truly care" about not only their academic success but also their well-being as people. The faculty's emphasis on teaching is also demonstrated by their creation of rubrics for peer evaluations of teaching, which according to department policy occur on a regular basis, particularly for new faculty.

Relatedly, although faculty members have not employed the traditional language of assessment, they have displayed a remarkable desire to assess and enhance student success through regularly discussing program requirements, curriculum and student skill development; creating, implementing, and reviewing student and alumni surveys; and reviewing institutional data.

At the same time, the faculty's scholarship is truly impressive. Despite a high teaching load relative to the discipline at large, the overall research and publication profile of the department is at the level of many UCs and other R1 institutions. Faculty members also engage

in notable work as public intellectuals, regularly participating in local community projects and sharing their expertise in mass media outlets. Their scholarly output and engagement are not just important in and of themselves; as captured by the teacher-scholar model, faculty members' research enhances their teaching and their students' skill development.

2.5 Resources

In some respects, the department's resources are adequate: the main department office is spacious and has been nicely designed to provide a space for department meetings and events, informal socializing, studying, and general rest and relaxation. Tenure-line faculty members have their own offices, and lecturers have a large shared office that adjoins the department office. The department has access to a research lab that appears sufficient for its needs. The level of staff support, which includes a full-time professional staff person and multiple part-time student assistants, also is sufficient.

As discussed more fully under Recommendations and Strategies for Program Improvement, the department is in dire need of additional resources in a number of areas. Most importantly, these include: additional tenure lines, release time and administrative support for the Moot Court program, continued release time for the advising coordinator, and support for PLSI 200 instruction.

2.6 The Program's Conclusions, Goals and Plans

The department is strong and should continue on its present trajectory. As outlined below, the department recognizes the areas that would benefit from strengthening, and has articulated clear goals and strategies to achieve them. With the provision of necessary resources, and continued attention to addressing issues related to student success, the department's few areas of relative weakness may be resolved.

3.0 Commendations of Strengths and Achievements

3.1 Student success

The most important purpose of the university is educating students, and the department's strengths and achievements in this regard are to be commended.

3.1.1 Assessment

The department has engaged in meaningful assessment and has taken concrete actions to "close the loop." For example, the department surveyed its students to find out what they want, and what changes they would like to see. Based on this input, the department has: (1) created undergraduate "road maps" in pre-law, activism and social movements, and research; (2) designed and held workshops on graduate/law school preparation and career transitions; and (3) created a "requirements for degree" checklist. Further, when faculty identified student skill development deficiencies, they developed two new courses to develop writing and research/analytical skills early on in the major. In addition, when course availability issues became apparent—particularly in the required quantitative "methods" course (PLSI 300)—the department prioritized new tenure-line hires that successfully have resolved this problem.

3.1.2 Program/curriculum

Political science majors have potentially broad career outcomes, but probably the plurality enter the field of law. For virtually all career paths, students are well-served by a curriculum that emphasizes their ability to think abstractly/conceptually, engage in analytical reasoning and critical argumentation, weigh the validity of competing explanations, and express these clearly in writing. These abilities are especially developed through coursework in political theory, research design, and comparative analysis. In all three of these areas, the department excels. Its strength in political theory, which is unusual in the wider discipline but critically important in developing all of the abilities listed above, is to be particularly lauded.

3.2. Faculty excellence

As discussed above, SFSU political science faculty members are truly outstanding. They are highly dedicated to their students' success and well-being, and generously devote their time to ensuring maximal student learning and effective advising and mentoring. The department's research output is truly extraordinary given the high teaching load, and multiple faculty members have quite stellar national and international scholarly reputations. The department also is remarkably collegial and democratic, and includes many faculty members who actively contribute their service to the department, college, university, discipline, and community.

3.3. Leadership and staff excellence

Students, faculty, staff and administrators recognize the excellent leadership in the department, including present and past chairs. We were similarly impressed by the department's leadership competence, openness to new ideas, and dedication. Related also to faculty excellence, the department's junior faculty feel supported, and believe that that tenure and promotion expectations and procedures are fair, transparent, and reasonable. The department has highly competent administrative staff who are much appreciated by the faculty and students. We voice our support here for a raise in salary for the department's Administrative Analyst/Specialist, Yu Ting Emily Yu.

4.0 Recommendations and Strategies for Program Improvement

4.1 For the college/university

4.1.1 Tenure-track hires

The department is in dire need of at least one tenure-line hire in the very near future and two or more in the not-too-distant future. The number of undergraduate majors has increased sharply, while the number of tenure-track faculty has remained stable at best. As a result, the department's SFR is the fifth highest in the college. The department's plan to hire in the field of American politics with a focus on race/ethnicity should be supported. There is strong student demand in this area, and the retirement of Robert Smith has left a significant gap in the faculty and curriculum that should be filled as soon as possible. Hiring in this field also is likely to further enhance the diversity of the department's faculty.

4.1.2 Support for PLSI 200 instruction

Because PLSI 200 serves the vast majority of students who must fulfill the CSU's American institutions and ideals graduation requirement, the department must offer 12-15 sections every semester. To ensure both adequate course availability and student success in this

important course, support from the college and/or university is needed. This may come in the form of additional instructor units for large lecture sections, the hiring of GAs or GTAs, supplemental instruction, or other support as the department sees fit. The creation of GA and/or GTA positions for this course also may help with MA student recruitment and the training of MA students for future teaching careers.

4.1.3 Release time and administrative support for Moot Court

Moot Court is a model High Impact Practice, and the department's Moot Court program has become extremely strong in a short period of time under the leadership of Dr. Conway. However, the success of the program cannot continue on Dr. Conway's generosity alone. Long term institutional support is needed, including release time for Dr. Conway and supplemental funding to meet the growing student interest in the program. We note that at CSULB (the home institution of reviewer Wright), the Moot Court director receives 3WTU of release time every semester, and the college and university have a standing agreement to provide supplemental student travel funds when IRA funds run short. It should be recognized that the Moot Court Director works with students throughout the calendar year, including winter, spring and summer breaks, and accompanies the teams to each of the roughly six multi-day competitions in which the team participates every year.

4.1.4 Continue release time for advising coordinator

The course release given to the department to support an Undergraduate Advising Coordinator has enabled Dr. Garcia-Castanon to develop an array of materials and activities that have been hugely beneficial to the department's students. These include the major requirements checklist and "road maps" referenced above, as well as multiple workshops on graduate and law school preparation and career readiness. To ensure the continuation and further development of this important work in service of student success, the release time to support this position should be maintained.

4.1.5 Expectations for online courses

To meet student demand—particularly for PLSI 200, but also for other courses—the department has begun to offer multiple online courses. But absent formal college or university guidelines and expectations, the department has a limited ability to assess and ensure the quality of its online instruction. Because the department has taken a leading role in developing online course offerings, it is uniquely suited to provide input regarding best practices in online instruction. We encourage the college/university to consider working with and supporting (perhaps through a stipend or release time) successful online instructors to prepare training and oversight materials to ensure quality in online course offerings.

4.1.6 Support/backing for department work to address high DFW rates

The Self Study includes data on courses with high DFW rates, but this aggregate data is not useful in identifying the causes of and effective remedies for high DFW rates. Disaggregating the data will be time-consuming but is critical. The college and/or university should assist the department in this effort. And, once the causes and remedies are identified, the college/university should back the department's actions to implement the remedies that are identified.

4.1.7 Faculty housing

The university should continue to work on ways to provide affordable faculty housing. Concerns about housing costs imperil the recruitment and retention of tenure-line faculty. High housing costs also make it difficult for the department to hire a sufficient number of lecturer faculty to meet student demand.

4.2 For the department

4.2.1 Action on DFW rates

Aggregate data on DFW rates by course over a multi-year period suggest that high DFW rates are an issue that must be addressed. However, identifying the causes and most effective remedies requires more nuanced analysis that reviews data on individual course sections and the particular students therein. We urge the college and/or university to work with the department to procure and analyze this data, and to formulate and implement effective strategies to reduce high DFW rates.

4.2.2 Assessment

The department engages in meaningful assessment, but does not describe it as such in its self study and update. We recommend that in the future, the department use the common language of assessment to describe what it is doing to assess student learning and achievement and how it is “closing the loop.” As it does so, we encourage the department to think about the characteristics of its students, in addition to what is happening in the classroom, and the role of the instructor.

4.2.3 Curriculum

We encourage the department to recognize and enhance its curriculum toward methods broader than traditional quantitative methods. Doing so can open broader lines of inquiry into systematic methodology beyond quantitative perspectives.

4.2.4 MA program

The relatively small number of students in the MA program is a concern. However, this is true across the CSU and seems to be reflection of larger societal trends. The department has undertaken impressive outreach and publicity efforts, and the program has a strong reputation. The department, college and university are encouraged to work on ways to increase the yield of admitted students. As noted above, the creation of GA/GTA-ships may help in this regard. We note that a number of current lecturers in the department are graduates of its MA program. One potential outcome of supporting greater admittee yield could be a more diverse and plentiful lecturer pool.