



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
Politics

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
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CAMPUS VISIT: March 8-10, 2006

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Dean and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

- 1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.**
 - The reviewers praised the “highly respectable program of undergraduate education” offered by the department, the impressive quality of instruction and the meaningful research agendas being pursued by the faculty. In their view, “the department is thoughtful, self-conscious and highly professional in organizing its curricular, scholarly and communal endeavors”. While not specifically comparing the department to top-tier liberal arts colleges and universities, the implication is that they rated the department and its programs as VERY GOOD/EXCELLENT.

- 2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?**
 - The reviewers noted the large increase in the number of Politics majors in recent years but were impressed that this growth had not been achieved at the expense of academic rigor.
 - The review team also found that “the department’s pedagogy is strongly and impressively consistent with the mission of the institution” and that it offers a “suitable and respectable array of courses” that are consistent with the latest developments and trends within the field.
 - In terms of scholarship, the reviewers praised the department’s high level of productivity but noted approvingly “scholarly engagement had not come out of the hide of the teaching program”. The reviewers attributed this in part to the generous reconfiguration of faculty courses loads (two-two-two-three) that had been of “great benefit to the scholarly lives of the faculty”.
 - The review team complimented the department on “its numerous interdisciplinary contributions” and noted the “high internal morale, collegiality and professional functionality” of the department.
 - While this was a “healthy and strong program”, the review team did offer some constructive suggestions to strengthen the program.

3. **What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?**

a) Curricular Coherence

- The reviewers observed that the department offered an “ambitious” array of courses covering the four main subfields plus Public Administration as well as numerous minor specializations. However, they were concerned that the breath of subfield coverage and proliferation of minors took place at the “expense of curricular depth and coherent sequencing of courses within the major”. They therefore recommended that the department develop concentrations within the major rather than affiliated minors.
- The review team noted the minimal requirements for the major and the focus of existing requirements on introductory courses. In order to develop a more coherent curricular sequence that linked introductory courses to mid-level and advanced coursework, they recommended that the department streamline and enforce requirements within the major.
- The reviewers strongly recommended that the department offer a methods course that addresses the epistemological and methodological foundations of the discipline (including research design, hypothesis testing, descriptive and inferential statistics, etc).
- The review team felt the department might achieve a better balance between breadth and depth if it were to “streamline the curriculum so as to avoid or eliminate courses that have significant overlap”.
- The reviewers recommended that the department hire another political theorist.

b) Teaching Effectiveness

- The reviewers recommended that the department re-evaluate its advising practices since they found some variance between faculty and student perceptions of its effectiveness.
- The review team urged the department to reemphasize “political writing”, a more formal effort “to ensure that every student majoring in politics has some experience of writing analytic papers that employ the distinctive theoretical and methodological tools of the discipline”.
- Without compromising academic freedom or the institution’s commitment to social justice, the reviewers suggested that the department “consider the possibility that incorporating in serious and systematic ways a broader range of viewpoints” might make the program even more successful and exciting.

c) Expectations

- The review team were concerned that the department (and the University) “reconceptualize” its aspirations, focusing less on comparisons with other schools and more on being a “great and distinctive institution in its own particular mold”.
- The reviewers recommended that the University clarify its expectations with regard to teaching, research and service to provide “realistic notions of research and service requirements”. They were particularly concerned that junior faculty “may be burdened with excessive expectations in these categories”.

d) Intellectual Community

- Given that the area has the second most expensive housing market in the United States, the reviewers noted that faculty residences “are widely dispersed throughout the Bay Area”, a fact that has serious implications for the sense of community in the department. They

therefore recommended that the department strive to find “institutionalized ways to ensure the department can gather more frequently”.

- The review team commented on the lamentable state of the current building facility. While noting that new facilities would be provided within the next two years, they urged that the faculty involve themselves in the design process and that students have more lounge and meeting space.
- The reviewers urged the University to develop suitable databases so that the department could track and contact its alums.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University’s strategic initiative in that it is;

- a. Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.
 - The review team noted the faculty’s enthusiasm for the ‘art and craft of teaching’ and the appreciation of the students for their professors “skills and intellectual passion in the classroom and their accessibility in person and by email”.
- b. Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.
 - Politics is known as “a no-nonsense major” that makes serious academic demands and maintains high standards for the students and itself.
- c. Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.
 - The review team was impressed with the students themselves – “engaged, articulate and even passionate” – and their regard for their professors who provided high quality, rigorous teaching and demonstrated a real concern for their well-being.

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?

- The reviewers noted that the Politics program “is substantially in keeping with, and very much supportive of, the larger mission of the University”. The mission was distinctive in its “very strong emphasis on service, on active engagement in public life, and on a commitment to the pursuit of social justice”.

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the AVP’s office do to appropriately respond to the review?

- The department needs to hire another political theorist.
- Support the department’s attempts to improve the coherence of the curriculum and its efforts to reorganize academic advising.
- Clarify the expectations surrounding teaching, research and service, particularly for the junior faculty.
- Help ensure that new facilities facilitate building and sustaining community.

7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?

- The reviewers stressed that their recommendations “should be understood not as urgent, desperately needed reforms” but as suggestions offered in a spirit of collegiality. In general, they felt that this is a healthy and strong program.