

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
**Academic Program Review**  
**College of Arts and Sciences**

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM  
**Department of Politics**

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS  
Dr. Paul Apostolidis, Whitman College  
Dr. Kristin Bumiller, Amherst College  
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CAMPUS VISIT  
February 26-28, 2014

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 Deans 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 external review team rated the overall quality of the program as GOOD, explaining that the program is at “an acceptable level that one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal arts college or university, yet there are a few notable areas where improvements could be made.” The faculty members were praised for their teaching, research, and service. For the department to “achieve its full potential” the department needs to create a stronger governance structure and adopt curricular reform as discussed in the previous program review. The team emphasized that an “even more critical issue influencing our ranking is the current gaps in coverage of the curriculum due to recent departures of faculty and the urgent need for new hires.”

**2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?**

- The faculty “can be rightly proud of their capacity to provide an excellent undergraduate education” and were praised for attention they have paid to meeting the needs of “inadequately prepared or first generation college students.”
- Faculty members have an “impressive publication and research profile that exceeds the expectations of faculty at the University.”
- The Department has developed programs and initiatives that link them with “the most vibrant programs within the university, and with the larger off campus community with the University’s mission of community outreach.”
- The review team was strongly concerned with departmental governance, and supported the development of an active chair.

- The Department has been experiencing inertia with respect to curriculum reform, which may be related to governance issues, concerns over hurting collegiality, and an ambitious curriculum reform plan. The new curriculum, however, has the potential to contribute to community building across faculty, staff, and students.
- Group advising has not met the students' needs and a system where there is greater faculty contact with the students is needed. The reviewers believe that the department's new plan will serve as a model for academic advising in the University.
- The Department urgently needs new faculty hires.

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

According to the committee, the four main areas that warrant attention are: governance, advising, curricular reform, and staffing. The reviewers provided recommendations for improvement in each area in their report.

#### Governance

- The review team argued against trying to reach full consensus during the curriculum reform process. Instead, the Department has "much to gain from more decisive action and a speedier decision-making process."
- The reviewers understand that "union guidelines place restrictions on the department chair's functions as a supervisor". But, they believe that the Department would benefit from an active chair. They discussed several ways that the Chair and the Department could "enable a successful, final push forward for the new curriculum reform."
- The Department should modify the by-laws around issues related to decision-making, majority voting, agenda setting, and meeting minutes.

#### Advising

- The reviewers recommend that the Department immediately implement the new advising plan and the chair should assign first-year advisees until the First Year Advisor program becomes fully functional.
- It is also essential that all members of the Department share equally in their advising responsibilities.

#### Curricular Reform

- The curriculum includes "strong set of course offerings" and the team members "were impressed with the vigor the department has demonstrated in their curriculum reform efforts."
- The team is very supportive of the general framework of curriculum reform presented in the self-study, but work is still needed on curriculum goals, concentration definitions, and implementation issues.
- While each faculty member has a "vision of excellence for their courses", the Department still needs to reach a "collective commitment to a unified departmental program."
- The reviewers saw many benefits to well-designed areas of concentration outlined by

the Department, and the team provided specific feedback about the curriculum plan in their report. For instance, they suggested that the Department consider how three important skills for any liberal arts major (i.e., analytical, research, and writing) will be integrated into the new curriculum.

- The team discussed using careful cross-listing of courses and other cooperation agreements to create some flexibility, and develop the interdisciplinary component of the major.
- The team urged the Department to also play to its strengths, including the trans-disciplinary interests of the current faculty.
- They suggest that the Department consider revising the internship component of the major in relation to the “shifts in understanding service learning, especially the movement toward community engagement and community-based research” and “the opportunities students seem able to gain through the McCarthy Center.”

### Staffing

- The reviewers emphasized that the Department urgently needs new tenure-track faculty to replace recently departed staff, especially in the field of African Studies.
- When considering staffing needs, the Administration should consider the impact of the International Studies Program on the department during a time of limited university growth and increased competition for resources.
- New hires should be “introduced to the new curriculum and sign on to participating fully” and “interested in teaching in a liberal arts setting, envisioning the major in an interdisciplinary sense and committed to building up and being a part of a community”.
- The Department should adopt a mentoring program for all incoming faculty.
- The team praised the Program Assistant and suggested that the position could provide additional support for students with their outside activities (e.g., club activities, invite speakers, etc.).
- The faculty member designated as the First Year Advisor needs release time and/or financial compensation.

#### **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 was “impressed by the faculty’s strength as undergraduate teachers; they each bring to their courses energy, enthusiasm, and a broad intellectual agenda.” The faculty members are excellent researchers that are “productively drawn to interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship.” The team also encouraged the Department to “be attentive to encourage diverse candidates in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity” during the future hiring process.

- 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.*

According to the reviewers, courses are “well received by students and contribute greatly to the overall liberal arts curriculum as well as to the university mission emphasizing diversity, globalization and social justice in addition to academic rigor.” The “energy and enthusiasm” of the faculty is “reflected in the fact that the department has produced several college valedictorians and dean’s medal awards” and the faculty “showed real concern for their students and were particularly attentive to meeting the needs of inadequately prepared or first generation college students.”

*c. Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.*

The reviewers noted that the department curriculum is strong in American and California politics, internship and community outreach opportunities, and Peace Studies and Social Justice, which is an “excellent fit with the mission of the University to integrate with the city, the community and the state.” The reviewers stated that the Department has the “intellectual courage and foresight to reimagine how the discipline is presented and communicated to undergraduates. These efforts are essential for maintaining the contemporary relevance of the field, preparing students in a changing career environment, keeping up with changes in the focus of graduate education, and serving the university’s social justice mission.”

**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 courses taught in the department “contribute greatly to the overall liberal arts curriculum as well as to the university mission emphasizing diversity, globalization and social justice in addition to academic rigor”. Their course offerings and internships “allow students to take full advantage of their location in San Francisco” and Peace Studies and Social Justice focus is “an excellent fit with the mission of the University to integrate with the city, the community and the state.”

**6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?**

The next step is for the Dean and Associate Deans to meet with the department and discuss the action plan based on the self-study and reviewers’ report. Based on the reviewers’ suggestions, the Office of the Provost could assist the program by providing support for: 1) new faculty hires; 2) an active chair model, and 3) a revised advising program.

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

The department experienced unexpected staff losses just before the program review team arrived on campus.

