**Political Science Program Review 2021**

**Sonoma State University**

**drafted by Willie Gin, Assistant Professor, Political Science**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

As required by Sonoma State University’s Long-Range Academic Plan, California State University system policies, WASC standards, and the standards of external accrediting bodies, academic units at Sonoma State are required to assess progress on established learning outcomes. Assessment programs are composed of an articulation of department learning goals and objectives; a check on the existing degree of alignment between the objectives and curriculum; the implementation of teaching strategies by faculty in order to accomplish these goals; the development of direct measures to ascertain the effectiveness of these strategies, and the use of this information to evaluate and revise curricula appropriately in order to insure program effectiveness and to align with core University goals in promoting diversity and social justice; sustainability and environmental inquiry; connectivity and community engagement; and adaptability and responsiveness. Data from assessment is used to set University goals for improvement; to assist with student recruitment, admissions, and retention; and to facilitate administrative goal-setting, decision-making, and evaluation.. The information gleaned from the assessment process also is used by external audie33nces such as WASC and the CSU, and the Board of Trustees to describe the development of SSU students from entry into the University through employment; to set goals for system improvement and for evaluation of institutional effectiveness; and to help inform decision-making.

It is the primary goal of the Sonoma State University Department of Political Science (POLS) to prepare students to assume the duties and obligations of democratic citizenship. This includes developing knowledge and skills useful in public service and an understanding of human behavior as it relates to politics. Students are also taught how to analyze and understand global issues and current events, and are trained in appropriate research techniques for the study of political processes. In order to achieve these goals, the Political Science Department seeks to create a curriculum and a department culture that enhances student knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of political concepts and theories.

This report assesses and discusses the degree to which we believe we are successfully achieving these objectives, and considers how we can continue to develop our considerable strengths as a program. The last assessment was conducted in 2015. Over this period, our department has faced a number of externally-imposed constraints, which have impacted the breadth and number of courses offered and our capacities as academic advisors, all of which will be discussed in more depth later.

We recognize that there are some areas in our program that need improvement, and we discuss those at length later in this document. But we are also a department of considerable strengths, namely in the form of our faculty themselves. We believe that program weaknesses are due primarily to the chronic deprivation of resources necessary to keep the program running to the standards we have set for ourselves and our students over the years. It is true, as this document will detail, that in recent years we have managed to do a lot with a little. But the asymmetry between demands and resource capacities is untenable over the long term, and we hope that this document will make the case that given a bit more support, and perhaps collaboration, on the part of the University, we can not only successfully address gaps between our goals and outcomes, but can continue to evolve in a way that fully supports our vision for the department. At its core, political science is about the relationship between citizens and government. As citizens of the University, the faculty in the POLS department appreciate our responsibilities to contribute to the larger mission of Sonoma State. At the same time, when citizens are deprived of basic needs that are necessary to the task of fulfilling their obligations, it becomes incumbent upon government to address those demands in the interest of the larger community. We hope this document will be read in that spirit- as a recognition of the collaborative nature of the academic endeavor- and will respond accordingly.

As discussed in our previous self-study and as also applies here, the Program Review and Assessment Plan contained in this report is formulated on the basis of several assumptions about the assessment process in general and its use in this department in particular. We believe assessment can be a valuable resource, as long as it is carefully conceived and driven by faculty; is used diagnostically and formatively; is not used as a justification for comparison between individual faculty or courses; and is ultimately supported by resources necessary to achieve departmental learning objectives.

The program review self-study guide lists six significant areas of inquiry: program context and curriculum; faculty; program resources; student population, assessment, and a plan of action. The order of this document roughly follows that recommended sequence of discussion.

As part of this assessment, a survey of 11 political science seniors was conducted through Qualtrics. Where appropriate, their qualitative responses are included in this report. In addition, the external review by Professor Kim Nalder from Sacramento State has been referenced where appropriate (see Appendix 1).

**II. PROGRAM CONTEXT AND CURRICULUM**

***Departmental Mission***

The mission of the B.A. degree program in Political Science is to promote knowledge and understanding of politics and society through instruction and scholarship in the areas of American government, comparative government, political theory, and international relations. The Department seeks to develop in our students the skills of reading, research, analysis, writing, speaking, and political participation, and to promote the values of democratic citizenship. The Department serves students, the discipline, the university, and the broader community through teaching, research, and community service.

***Vision and Goals of the Department***

SSU is the only California university invited to be a member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, a prestigious group of 25 universities and colleges across the nation committed to providing superior liberal arts and sciences education to their students. Consistent with that designation, there is a long-standing consensus in the Department of Political Science that our students should receive a broad liberal arts education. We do not see our role simply to train students for a particular profession or vocation. Rather, we see our goal as creating an intellectual environment where students can develop their academic skills, think more critically about the world, and prepare to become more thoughtful citizens.

Political Science has never been dominated by one epistemology or set of theories. In fact, by its very nature, Political Science deals with recurring and current debates and controversies. This allows our discipline to draw on many approaches and fields, and allows for a degree of theoretical and pedagogical pluralism. The department’s curriculum reflects these values, and in our classrooms, there is both facilitation and encouragement of informed critical debate on theory, processes, and current issues related to the field.

The Department also believes that pluralism and diversity are not possible without respect for the values of pedagogical autonomy and academic freedom. We agree that all faculty members should have freedom to design their own courses and syllabi. Although we require some courses for our majors, we would not expect everyone who may teach these core courses to approach them in exactly the same. Each member of our faulty has his or her own perspectives and areas of expertise, and we should allow even required courses to reflect these faculty strengths. This also means that our curriculum should not be so rigid that we cannot incorporate new faculty members and areas of expertise, and perspectives into it.

The political science program at Sonoma State University offers excellent opportunities for the study of government and politics. More than 40 courses cover all the major aspects of the discipline. Students develop an understanding of human behavior as it relates to politics. They learn to discuss and analyze critically the many current public policy issues facing the United States and the world. They are taught how to analyze and understand world affairs and comparative politics. They are trained in appropriate research techniques for the study of political processes. By the time a student has completed the degree, our hope is that they have become a more informed global citizen.

The two previous program assessment documents list the following as the primary program goals of the department:

- To provide students with foundational knowledge of the major fields in Political Science including American Government, Comparative Politics, Political Theory, and International Relations.

- To provide students with the skills needed for lifelong learning in the area of politics and government.

- To promote the values associated with political literacy necessary for citizens in a democracy.

- To help prepare students for careers in public service, the law, public administration, teaching, politics, government, and business.

- To teach students to think critically about politics and political life and behavior.

- To teach students how to evaluate the legitimacy and functioning of political institutions, the development of public policy, and relations between nations.

The major is structured into four primary subfields: American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, and Political Theory. Each major is expected to take an introductory course in each subfield and then an upper-division elective within each subfield. The introductory courses in each subfield serve as a common core of classes all majors must take. These are: POLS 201 Ideas and Institutions; POLS 200 American Poltiical System or POLS 202 Issues in Modern American Politics; POLS 303, Comparative Political Analysis; and POLS 304 Theory and Analysis of International Relations. This delineation ensures that students understand the society they live in (American politics); understand political diversity outside of the United States, as well as the US’s global interconnections (Comparative Politics and International Relations); and understand diverse ways of thinking about how to evaluate the good society and policy (Political Theory). There is natural scaffolding built into the program as student are given a broad introduction to each subfield and then can go further into depth in a particular subfield with their upper-division elective in the subfield.

In addition, the political science major requires students to become literate in searching for information and engaging in research. Majors are expected to complete POLS 302 Research Methods, and following this, to engage in their own research project in POLS 498 Senior Seminar. In Senior Seminar students bring together in one class what they have learned throughout their education in the major.

A 20-unit minor in political science also is available. Although the minor most often is used in conjunction with such majors as communications, history, economics, criminal justice, and sociology, it can be paired with almost any major offered at the University.

The broad relevance of political science to understanding the world we live in means that there is a substantial number of courses within the major that serve as general education requirements. Traditionally, POLS 200 and 202 have been the only way to fulfill the CSU requirement on American Institutions related to education on the US Constitution and California State and Local Government, and the POLS 200 classes have been among the largest within the program. With ongoing GE reforms, it is possible other courses from other departments will become eligible to fulfill these requirements. In addition, POLS 201, 307, and 315 have in the past fulfilled GE Area D requirements in the social sciences related to expanding undergraduates’ exposure to contemporary international perspectives. Again, ongoing GE reform may change whether these classes continue to do so, and the degree to which other classes from other departments also offer ways of fulfilling these GE requirements. These changes could affect both future targets and resources available to the department.

**III. POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT FACULTY**

The political science faculty is made up of a diverse group of scholars. Most faculty members are active in their own research projects and some regularly offer the opportunity for students to participate in these projects, sometimes in paid positions. Most of the faculty have also traveled extensively abroad.

As of Spring 2021, the department faculty consists of seven permanent, full-time members. The most recent was hired in Fall 2018. In addition to the permanent faculty, the department also relies on several long-term lecturers. They too contribute in the classroom, in service and in scholarly activity, as well as having substantial professional experience that help enrich student learning.

Among permanent faculty, two specialize primarily in American politics; two in political theory; and three that cover both comparative politics and international relations. Even these divisions are not fixed and fast boundaries. For instance, Professor McCuan specializes in American politics but also teaches and writes about international terrorism. Some of the faculty have to cover for the master’s program in Public Administration, which relies heavily on part-time faculty.

What follows is a brief synopsis of each faculty member’s research and teaching interests as well as current scholarly activity.

**Permanent Faculty**

Diane Parness (Georgetown University): Professor Parness joined the faculty in 1991. She specializes in the politics of the left in Europe. Her research projects include the fracturing and decline of the Left in Germany, and the consequent transformation of the German party system; the rise of the Right in Hungary, and particularly the influence of Jobbik, a key nationalist, xenophobic, and antisemitic party; and the evolution and character of antisemitism and xenophobia in Europe, particularly in France. Professor Parness has directed SSU's Holocaust & Genocide Lecture Series, which brings a wide variety of notable speakers to the SSU community and has opened up a broad and compelling area of interest and study. This lecture series has been ongoing for over 30 years and is an exceptionally popular program, offered for GE credit, and coordinated out of the POLS department

Robert McNamara (University of Geneva): Professor McNamara joined the faculty in 1996. His scholarly interests include the role of civil society in the developing world, with a particular focus on Latin America. Within Latin America, this theme is of importance when considering the history of authoritarianism, the legacy of populist governments, and the evolving role of civil society and social movements. More specifically, he has researched in the role of gay rights movements within this context. His most recent work “Populism’s Perseverance in Latin American Politics” is currently under review. Professor McNamara’s extensive travels throughout the developing world are meant to inform his teaching in the areas of international relations and comparative politics of the developing world. Professor McNamara has also been actively involved in public health issues. He served as a Commissioner on the Sonoma County Commission on AIDS, co-chaired the Sonoma County HIV Prevention Planning Group, and co-authored "Sonoma County 3-year Plan for HIV Prevention."

Catherine Nelson (University of California at Davis): Professor Nelson joined the faculty in 1996. She teaches political theory and American government courses and the department's signature capstone Senior Research Seminar. Professor Nelson specializes in contemporary political theory and race, gender and politics. Her research has investigated the presence of neoliberal ideology in political campaign commercials. Her faculty development activities involve the integration of appropriate technology into the classroom and migration to an accessible syllabus format. She has served in the Academic Senate of the CSU, and was recently the chair of that body.

David McCuan (University of California at Riverside): Professor McCuan joined the faculty in 2003 and is the current chair of the department. He does research in two areas – state and local elections, particularly political campaigns and the general impact of ballot measures in California and other states; and the study of terrorism. He has held a position as a joint faculty member with the U.C. Davis-Sonoma State Joint Doctorate Capital Area North Doctorate in Educational Leadership, Ed.D Program. He has extensive overseas experience that includes teaching and research in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. He was a Fulbright Teaching Scholar from 2009 to 2010 working in the Czech Republic and also has taught at Jeju National University, Jeju, South Korea. He has an ongoing project for the California Initiative Project that examines data and creates case studies on the state’s direct democracy experience. He also continues to provide extensive analysis of politics to international, national, regional, and local media outlets.

Cynthia Boaz (University of California at Davis): Professor Boaz joined the faculty in 2008 and is expected to succeed Professor McCuan as the next chair of the department. Her expertise is in civil resistance, quality of democracy, gender politics, and political communication. Her work in civil resistance studies has taken her to India, Australia, Chile, Spain, and around the United States. She has interviewed Nobel Laureate Dr. Shirin Ebadi of Iran and has worked alongside veterans of the struggles in South Africa, Serbia, Burma, and the US Civil Rights Movement, including Rev. James Lawson. Dr. Boaz has published numerous book chapters and several peer-reviewed articles, and has contributed many pieces to popular media, including Truthout, Huffington Post, Common Dreams, Waging Nonviolence, Alternet, and Open Democracy. Dr. Boaz is the Faculty Advisor for the nationally award-winning Model UN delegation, which won Outstanding Delegation at the NMUN conference in New York in 2019. Dr. Boaz's current research project looks at the links between abortion bans and women's quality of life in ten states and in the summer of 2021, she interviewed dozens of women about their abortion experiences in states such as Texas, Mississippi, Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee.

Emily Ray (Virginia Tech): Professor Ray joined the faculty in Fall 2015. Her research is at the intersection of environmental political theory and environmental politics and policy. Her expertise is in environmental political theory and politics, with particular interest in the intersections of climate change, technology, outer space policy, land-use disputes, and social theory. She has been a prolific scholar within her field in the past six years. A sample of her publications include one on reimagining radical environmentalism; another on tar sands production, refinement, and transport with particular interest in the experiences of First Nations communities and women and their legal entanglements with the Canadian government; another publication analyzing the sexualization of resource extraction in North America; and a critical analysis of the discourse of outer space mining as a response to climate change. She was also recently the co-editor of a special issue in the journal *Theory and Event* focusing on environmentalism and political theory. She is currently working on a book on doomsday prepping for a major university press.

Willie Gin (University of Pennsylvania): Professor Gin joined the faculty in Fall 2018. His research is primarily in the field of minority politics, especially with regard to racial and ethnic politics, with interests in American political development, class and inequality, and technology and politics. He is the author of the book *Minorities and Reconstructive Coalitions: The Catholic Question* (2018), which looks at the transformation in the image of Catholics from stigmatization to normalization in three countries. He has also authored an article published in *Politics and Religion* comparing the use of religious rhetoric by politicians in three countries, as well as another article published in the *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* on the use of big data and its potential effects on increasing class inequality. He is currently working on projects exploring how partisan affiliation affects attitudes on race and class within the Democratic party.

***Lecturers***

Keith Gouveia (Gonzaga University School of Law): Professor Gouveia teaches four to five sections of Pols 200 each semester. He has also taught Pols 421 (Federal and Intergovernmental Relations) and 494/560 (Courts and Judicial Behavior.) Additionally he worked as a special consultant on the Student Learning Outcome development committee for Political Science 200 during the Fall of 2007. Professor Gouveia practiced law briefly as a personal injury attorney in Washington State and then worked in Washington, DC for U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye from 1993-2000 as a legislative assistant. His areas of expertise are foreign affairs/policy, justice/judiciary and energy and water issues.

Richard Hertz (Sonoma State University): Professor Hertz is a longtime Lecturer in Political Science. His teaching specialties are the American Political System and California State Politics and Government. In addition to teaching, he operates Hertz Research, a public opinion polling, market research, and software development consultancy. He has extensive experience developing websites that make it easy for voters to learn about their ballot choices, including their largest financial contributors. These platforms used by ABC-TV Network-Owned stations and others also provide those on the ballot with a way of reaching a large audience, at no cost. Hertz Research has also done pioneering work for the Sacramento Bee that makes it easier for journalists to report on money in California politics by deciphering the state’s antiquated campaign finance database. He has also developed advanced statistical analysis routines and software applications in other fields including professional baseball.

Barry Preisler (American University of Beirut, Lebanon): Professor Preisler has been teaching in the Political Science Department at Sonoma State for over 15 years. Working on his experience in Lebanon, he attended graduate school at UC Berkeley, and wrote his dissertation on Lebanon’s collapse into civil war entitled “Lebanon: The Rationality of National Suicide.” He received his Ph.D. degree from Berkeley in 1987. Dr. Preisler has taught many different courses for the department over the years but his primary area of expertise is the Middle East. He has taught over twenty different courses on the politics, history, anthropology and literature of the Middle East. He has published papers on Muslim/Christian relations in Lebanon, as well as the role of Hizbullah in the political life of Lebanon. He has represented Sonoma State University twice at the Oxford Roundtable conferences held at Oxford in the UK. Other than courses on the Middle East, Dr. Preisler often teaches International Political Economy, Modern Political Ideologies, Ideas and Institutions, and American Political Institutions.

Bob Switky (Claremont Graduate University): Professor Switky holds a Master’s degree in International Studies and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Claremont Graduate University. Prior to his recent stint at Sonoma State (starting in 2007), Dr. Switky was an Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska in Kearney. He has recently taught the American Political System, Ideas and Institutions, Modern Political Ideologies, War and Politics, and Business Statistics. His most recent book, Wealth of an Empire, explores how Britain secretly financed the first year of its involvement in World War II. He has also co-authored a textbook in international relations and a book on regional trading blocs. He has also published several pedagogical pieces in peer-reviewed journals on such topics as coalition governments and humanitarian intervention.

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As is readily apparent from this brief summary, the faculty includes many distinguished scholars with a wide variety of expertise. Many regularly are interviewed by the media, publish in the mass media outlets, and are connected to a variety of communities both domestic and international.

One of the proposals from the previous program review was to actively promote more diversity amongst our faculty. The most recent hire within the department has increased the racial diversity of the program. It should be noted that change is inherently going to be an incremental process, as new opportunities for hires are limited by the willingness of the university to approve new hiring lines and the flow of retirements within the department. It continues to be a recommendation that the department makes sure that when new hires become available that extra efforts be employed to attract qualified minority candidates to the hiring pool.

**IV. PROGRAM RESOURCES**

Having given an overview of the political science faculty, this report now canvasses student enrollment in the program and political science courses, so that the relationship between faculty resources and student needs can be assessed.

Before updates are provided for the current cycle, the following conclusion from the previous program review in 2015 is vital context for the discussion that follows:

*“Although the number of Political Science majors has increased more than 50% since 2000, the number of full-time faculty has actually decreased during this time, currently flatlining at six for the past several years. The FTES range during the past six years is also essentially flat, as faculty have increased their service commitments and pressure from administration to grow lower division GE courses has continued.*

*More concerningly, however, the department’s need over the last several years to rely extensively on lecturers to teach many of the introductory courses and several upper division courses as well, because of inadequate resources from the campus and substantial service to the university by permanent faculty, has increased the work of both administrative staff and the excellent, but too small, permanent faculty. The administrative staff must orient to policy and procedures and the permanent faculty must do adequate peer review. Despite the burden on faculty, the department has verified that the lecturers we have are qualified in what they do. Nonetheless, the problems continue and will undoubtedly get worse without more tenure track hires, and better compensation for our long term ‘temporary’ faculty. These concerns were raised in the previous program review and assessment document, but have not only not been alleviated, but have been exacerbated by the continued decimation of departmental resources over the past six years.*

*The combination of poor priorities by the campus and the school, including the lowest percentage of general funds that go to instruction of any campus in the CSU system and generational changes since 2008, which led to retirements and FERPs without replacement of permanent faculty, has seriously undermined POLS Department course offerings in exchange for meeting the General Education targets of the School. This places further pressure on the Department to offer regular upper division courses to undergraduate POLS majors, something which many students noted in their exit surveys. In the past few years, it is not unusual for a student to finish the degree without having had the opportunity to take a number of POLS catalog courses. The Department’s continued success is dependent on adequate resources from the administration of Sonoma State University, especially to strengthen upper division major course offerings.”*

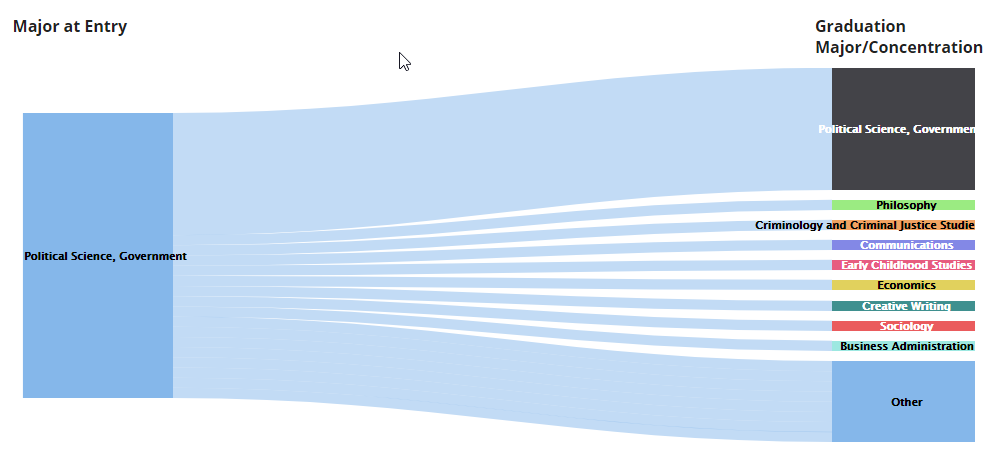
Having provided this historical context, this document now canvasses the state of the political science program in the past six years. As the external reviewer notes, “This is not a department that can spare a professor,” because of past resource cutbacks and current trends in student enrollment.

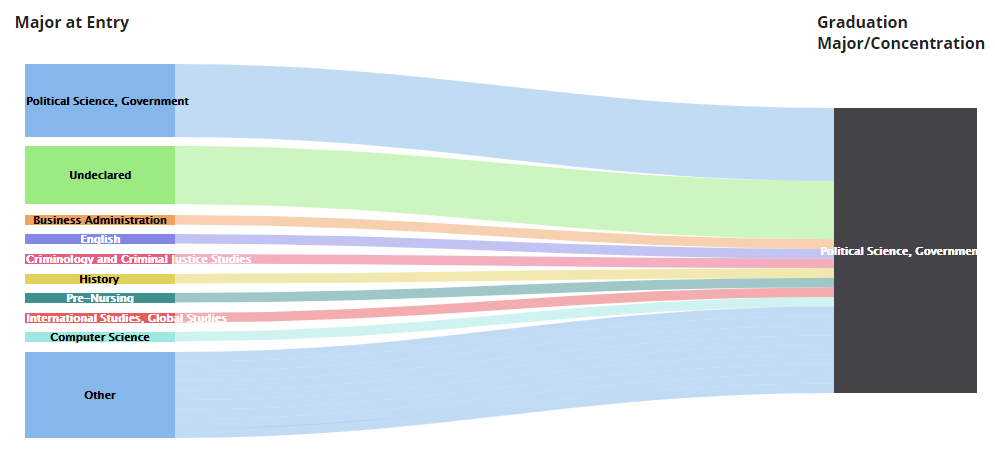
There are several indicators that prior to the current economic recession, student interest and enrollment in political science increased. This can be seen for instance in applicants to SSU who declare initially that their interest is in political science **(Figure 1)**. This data, available from SSU’s Tableau resources, show that interest in political science among freshmen and transfers picked up after 2015. Another noteworthy detail from this graph is that transfers are increasingly accounting for a bigger proportion of the students enrolling into SSU initially intending to major in political science. In fact, they were the majority of new enrollments in 2020, though that year might be atypical because of the pandemic-induced recession.

For the sake of comparison, one can also look at the numbers of enrollment within the School of Social Science as a whole **(Figure 2)**. This data shows that there has been a trend of decline in terms of enrollments in the School of Social Science. The data also indicates that transfers have typically been the majority of enrollments within the School as a whole, a trend that political science may also be starting to experience.

The data on initial interest in political science does not capture the actual number of students in political science, as students will either switch their major from or to political science. Migration charts available from CSU’s Faculty Dashboard **(Figure 3)** show that relative to initial declarations of applicants to SSU, there is a slight net migration to political science, which is not surprising given that many students come in undeclared and from this large pool there will inevitably be some who choose political science as their major, as well as those who migrate to the major from other majors. These migrations more than make up for those who migrate outside the political science major.

**Figure 3. Migration Charts for Full-time Freshmen Who Graduated in 2018, 2019, 2020**





One can directly look at the number of majors and minors in the program. As can be seen in **Figure 4** with figures provided by support staff, the number of majors within political science increased significantly after the Trump election. Compared to the prior average from 2014 to 2016, the number of majors increased 33 percent, from roughly around 150 majors to around 200 in the period between 2017 and 2019. This is likely because of the strong interest in politics that developed after the Trump election and the well-documented increase in polarization in politics in the United States, which has engaged partisan emotions and interest in politics to a higher degree. Other political science departments around the nation have also reported growth in enrollments. For instance, an American Political Science Association survey in 2018 found that over 38 percent of political science departments nationwide saw significant increases in enrollment from 2016 to 2018, compared to only 26 percent of political science departments reporting such an increase in the 2 years before the Trump election.[[1]](#footnote-1) With the COVID19 pandemic, the number of majors declined back to its previous level, though this is likely a temporary decline that will most likely rebound once the health and economic crisis has receded. The number of minors remained steady between 2014 and 2019, with a decrease associated with the pandemic. Hence, although there is a widespread perception that changes in the age structure of the US population will lead to some decline in university enrollment in the upcoming decade, this trend may not apply to political science. The department expects slight, yet steady growth in the numbers of majors moving from AY 2022-2023 forward.

Another indicator of growth in interest in political science can be seen in the number of full-time-equivalent students (FTES) enrolled in political science courses (**Figure 5**; data from Tableau resources). This would include not just majors and minors, but students taking political science courses as general education requirements or as electives. There has been significant growth within the political science department, discounting Fall 2020, in which FTES dropped systemwide because of the COVID19 pandemic and associated economic recession. The FTES data in 2019 (prior to COVID19) show that the political science department is the second biggest in terms of students in classes in the School of Social Sciences, behind psychology, which that same year had 480.8 FTES. The political science department stands out in the School of Social Sciences in that from the period between Fall 2014 and Fall 2019, it is one of only three departments to have experienced growth in FTES.

***Assessing Student Needs against Faculty Resources***

While FTES has increased for political science, full-time-equivalent faculty (FTEF), which consists of both tenure-track faculty and lecturers, has also slightly increased **(Figure 6)**. In terms of FTEF, the political science department is the second largest within the School of Social Sciences.

The student-faculty ratio (SFR) as calculated by FTEF divided by FTES, has essentially been flat from 2014 to 2019 **(Figure 7)**. Political science remains within the top three departments in terms of highest SFRs in Fall 2019 in the School of Social Science.

The number of tenure-track faculty has remained fairly constant over the time period from 2014 to 2019 (**Figure 8**). While a new tenure-track hire was made, that position made up for a previous early retirement. As depicted in the graph, the tenure-track number fluctuates given that there is an adjustment made based on the administrative duties and other release arrangements (i.e. sabbaticals) of tenure track faculty. What this indicates is that the growth of students within political science courses has largely been met by increase in usage of lecturers, who have flexibly adjusted to and absorbed this increase in student demand.

While the SFR has remained flat, there are consequences to the growth of the major that are not captured in the SFR number. Since tenure-track faculty has remained fairly constant, the majors-to-tenure-track-faculty ratio has increased (**Figure 9**). This has had consequences for both advising and teaching.

For instance, with the increase in majors, the advising workload within the political science department, which is done by tenure track faculty, has increased. Looking only at majors, the number of majors relative to tenure track faculty has increased. The tenure track statistic does not actually capture the advising workload, as one of the tenure track faculty is devoted to advising for the Masters in Public Administration program (which itself has experienced substantial growth, leaving that one advisor a greater workload as well). That leaves one less tenure-track faculty for undergraduate major advising. The grey line in Figure 9 captures that correction. Even without the correction, the political science department is above average in its majors-to-tenure-track-faculty ratio, ranking fourth in the School of Social Science in advising workload (behind psychology, sociology, and criminal justice). With the correction, advising within political science looks to be well above the average of 31.6 ratio of majors-to-tenure-track faculty within the School of Social Sciences. The external reviewer also noted that the system of dividing up advising equally among tenure track faculty can “create workload issues when faculty are on leave – increasing the burden on everyone else.”

It should also be noted that in general advising of undergraduates has increased because of the expectation now that-major advisors do not just do major advising, but also general education advising, which has been part of the push towards “whole-person” advising at SSU. Political science advisors not only advise on course selection with majors, but also on complicated issues like study abroad; what courses will count as transfers; and other issues. Generally, they are the first stop when any question regarding SSU occurs to a student. The pandemic introduced even more delicate advising issues related to finding course equivalents at other universities, academic withdrawals, and negotiating the new universe of remote learning. In addition, this shift in advising has increased paperwork requirements for advisors. Advisors are asked to sign off on university forms in which they have no specialized knowledge. For instance, advisors are asked to sign forms on overload requirements on school of extended learning; or asked to sign off on forms related to general education (not major) coursework substitutions. Where possible, the administration should streamline these processes so that advisors focus more on major-specific issues and sign fewer forms related to general college policies.

A second way in which the increase in ratio of students to tenure track faculty affects the program is in increasing bottlenecks in required courses within the major. Although increased FTES has been met with an increase in FTEF through use of lecturers, many core requirements are taught mostly by the tenure track faculty, including POLS 303 Introduction to Comparative Analysis, POLS 304 Theory and Analysis of International Relations, and POLS 498 Senior Seminar. This means that there can be specific pressure on these courses to quickly become filled up, given the increase in majors. This can either result in a higher student ratio in these classes, or else, if the class is capped, can result in majors and minors not being able to register for these classes as they quickly become filled up. This can potentially result in delays of graduation for some of our students. This is a resource question for the department as we seek to meet the demand for the core courses.

***Faculty Upper-Division Course Offerings***

It is appropriate at this time to talk more generally of the ability of our faculty to offer classes outside the common core of classes that meet the needs of our students. Given that the political science department is comparatively small, the political science faculty at SSU covers a wide range of specialties. Faculty must also provide a steady variety of upper-division electives for majors and minors to complete their requirements. Below is a partial canvas of upper-division electives offered 2015 to 2021:

**Note: The following may not be a complete canvas yet of all courses from 2015 to 2021. The information below is gleaned from syllabi stored in the common drive for the political science department.**

**American**

POLS 330 Race and Ethnic Politics 2019, 2020

POLS 391: Gender and Politics 2017, 2019

POLS 421 Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations 2015, 2017, 2019

POLS 426 The Legislative Process 2017

POLS 427 Presidency 2016, 2019

POLS 428 California State and Local Politics 2015

POLS 429 Interest Groups 2021

POLS 431 Politics and the Media 2016, 2018

POLS 484 Elections and Voter Behavior 2018, 2020

POLS 488 Special Topics in American Politics

Ethics in the Age of Trump 2018

Politics of Reproductive Rights 2019, 2020

POLS 494 Special Topics

US National Security Policy 2015

Politics of Direct Democracy 2016

Law Politics and Society 2020 (can count as American or Theory)

Freedom Equality and the Courts 2021 (can count as American or Theory)

Cross Listed:

POLS 405/422 Rights of the Accused (only five seats for political science students): 2017, 2020

**Comparative**

POLS 345 Model United Nations (every year from 2016 to 2019)

POLS 350 European Parliamentary Democracies (2017, 2018)

POLS 351 Politics of Russia (2016, 2017)

POLS 452 Politics of the Developing World 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020

POLS 453 Politics of Latin America 2018, 2021

\*note: POLS 307 Holocaust and Genocide Lecture series has been offered every, but does not count for Comparative subfield; this may be changed in the future

**International Relations**

POLS 444 US Foreign Policy 2015

POLS 446 International Relations of the Middle East 2016, 2019

POLS 447 Nonviolent Strategies in International Relations 2017

POLS 448 Terrorism, Violence and the Law 2015, 2018, 2020

POLS 449 Gender and Geopolitics in Science Fiction and Fantasy 2016 (as special topics class) 2019

POLS 486 Special Topics

Transpacific Partnership 2017

Israel Foreign Policy 2020

Peacemaking in the Middle East, 2021

**Political Theory**

POLS 315 Modern Political Theory (regularly offered)

POLS 311Contemporary Political Thought: 2016, 2017

POLS 312 American Political Thought, 2014

POLS 313 Critical Theory 2018

POLS 314 Environmental Political Theory 2018

POLS 415 Political Ecology 2016, 2019

POLS 494 Special Topics

Law, Politics, and Society (can count as either theory or American) 2020

Freedom, Equality, and the Courts (can count as either theory or American) 2021

As can be seen, even though the political science faculty is a fairly small group, a wide range of courses have been offered. As the external reviewer noted, “One welcome shift since my last review is some innovation and updating of available electives. I was pleased to see thought-provoking and up-to-date courses that reflect the current direction of the discipline.” The external reviewer also stated, “The department teaches an incredibly solid array of essential courses in each sub-field and all of the critical courses for the discipline that one would expect to find at any respectable university.”

Inevitably, there are gaps. For instance, the department has not offered area studies courses on Asia or Africa in a long time. Ideally, specialty courses would be offered every 2 to 3 years, to give students an opportunity to take the specialty courses that interest them. (It should be noted that from transfer student perspectives, they would typically be at SSU only 2 years, so they would miss out if there was a 3-year cycling of courses). In an informal survey of 11 senior students, 7 indicated that they thought they available selection of classes was “too few.” The following is a sample of student feedback on class selection:

*For class selection, most semesters would offer only one, maybe two courses in each of the upper division fields. While this allowed students to check off their graduation requirements, it limited student ability to pick classes that complemented one another over the course of their entire degree program.*

*I love the diversity of classes that are offered on the course catalog, but most of these only happen every other year or otherwise are rarely offered.*

*Availability was a bit of trouble because sometimes I could not take the classes I wanted but I was still able to get my requirements in.*

*More than one class a semester should be taught for upper division POLS categories. Registration was incredibly stressful when only one IR or Comp Gov class is being offer each semester.*

Given the current size of the department, it is not feasible to offer a greater range of courses. Such issues can become even more critical when coupled with economic crises.

**Other Issues Affecting Faculty Workload**

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, there is also work that the faculty performs that is currently uncompensated. One faculty member is in charge of advising for internships, and there is no release time allocated for this. In addition, running the award-winning Model United Nations program requires the faculty member to spend extra time preparing for the conference and traveling to New York for the conference. This is treated like a normal 4-unit course when in fact the time required for the course exceeds a normal 4-unit course. As with advising for internships, there is no release time granted for this extra workload.

**Discussion of Pandemic and Recession**

As has already been discussed, the small size of the department makes meeting student demands a challenging endeavor for both core class and upper-division electives. This becomes even more challenging with the documented increase in student demand for political science courses. The challenge becomes nigh impossible to solve given the coronavirus, subsequent economic recession and budget cutbacks.

Limited availability of courses became especially acute during the pandemic. Although new enrollments declined because of the recession, there was a preexisting “bulge” of already-enrolled students making their way through the political science program. Due to budget cuts only one section of required political science courses (such as POLS 201, 302, 303, 304) were offered. Research Methods is the one bottleneck in our major, in that it is a prerequisite for taking the Senior Seminar. Given the trend in the growth of Political Science major, the reduction in the number of required courses offered meant that many could not take required courses in a timely manner. For instance, a second-semester junior not getting into Research Methods in the first-semester of their senior year means that their graduation was delayed. This also affected many students who were taking research methods during the first semester of their senior year. If they did not pass the course--understandable, given the abrupt switch to online learning because of the pandemic--they suddenly could not get into the following spring’s Research Methods class because registration for the next semester takes place in the middle of the semester (before a student could conclusively know that they were not getting an adequate grade in Research Methods). As a result they would have to wait until the following academic year to take Research Methods in the fall, and then Senior Seminar in the spring—a one-year delay in graduation

This has further delayed student graduation and will impact the political science’s 4-year graduation rate and 2-year graduation rate once Junior status is achieved going forward.

**GE Curricular Reform and Program Resources**

Another issue that will affect program resources is the ongoing general education reform and changes to the American Institutions requirement. As a result of GE reform, POLS 202 will now be offered as a 3-unit course instead of a 4-unit course since it was decided that all courses that count for the GE must be offered as 3 units. In addition, POLS 201 and 315 may also be reduced to 3 units, depending on whether the department decides to continue to offer both as GE courses.

These potential reductions come on top of preexisting cuts to GE seats to the department over the past review cycle. As can be seen in Figure 10, POLS has experienced cuts to seats in GE at a rate faster than other departments over the past few years.

**Figure 10. GE Seats Allocated to POLS in the D4 Area**

**Historical cuts in GE D4 / AI to POLS over the last seven semesters –**

**Spring 2019 to Spring 2022 (*proposed*)**

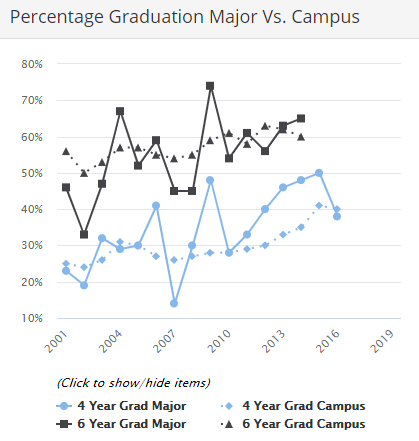
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **GE Category** | **Course** | **Semester/Yr** | **# of Sections** | **Total Seats**  **Scheduled** | **Net Change Formula (+/-) Over Previous** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D4 | POLS 200 | Spr 2019 | 12 | 865 | **-** |
| D4 | POLS 202 | Spr 2019 | 2 | 70 | **-** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D4 | POLS 200 | Fall 2019 | 13 | 908 | **+.05%** |
| D4 | POLS 202 | Fall 2019 | 2 | 70 | **0.0%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D4 | POLS 200 | Spr 2020 | 12 | 680 | **-25%** |
| D4 | POLS 202 | Spr 2020 | 2 | 70 | **0.0%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D4 | POLS 200 | Fall 2020 | 12 | 742 | **+0.09%** |
| D4 | POLS 202 | Fall 2020 | 2 | 76 | **+.085%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D4 | POLS 200 | Spr 2021 | 9 | 540 | **-27%** |
| D4 | POLS 202 | Spr 2021 | 1 | 33 | **-57%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D4 | POLS 200 | Fall 2021 | 7 | 420 | **-22%** |
| D4 | POLS 202 | Fall 2021 | 1 | 30 | **-9%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D4 | POLS 200 | *Spring 2022* | 8 | 448 | **+0.06%** |
| D4 | POLS 202 | *Spring 2022* | 1 | 30 | **0.0%** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **MEANS, PER SEMESTER** | **POLS 200** | **Means =** | **10.43** | **657.57** | **Per Semester Avg.: -10.06%** |
| **Dates of Study** | **POLS 202** | **Means =** | **1.57** | **54.14** | **-9.52%** |
| **Spr ’19-Spr ‘22** |  |  |  |  | **CUMULATIVE AVG. CUTS: 19.58%** |

As the external reviewer notes, these reductions “may negatively impact the budget of a department that is already overburdened and stretched thin.” The chair of the department writes, “Overall, the POLS GE D4 classes have been cut at a faster / higher rate than other GE components of the University and within the School of Social Sciences…. In the last two semesters alone (Spring 2021 to Fall 2021), the cuts are especially acute as the School target has gone down slightly, while fewer students enroll at SSU, with worries about enrollments overall…. Nonetheless, the slope of the cut is at a much higher rate for POLS GE D4 classes than is warranted. For just the period of Fall 2020 to Spring 2022 (proposed), the seats for POLS 200 will be cut from 12 sections to 8 sections, thereby removing over 33% of the seats for this class alone – that will be just in the last two years.”

**V. STUDENT POPULATION AND SUCCESS**

Several indicators are available through the CSU Faculty Dashboard and Tableau resources to give an overview of the student population in political science and their success. First, one can look at the graduation rates of political science majors. **Figure 11**, taken directly from the CSU Faculty Student Success Dashboard, shows that recently, the four-year graduation rate of political science majors has exceeded the university average (the blue line in the graph). Freshmen who entered into the program in 2011 and on have all graduated at a higher rate than the average for the university. The exception is freshmen who entered in 2016, which corresponds with the graduating class of 2020, which have attempted to complete graduation requirements under an extremely unusual situation: COVID19, the biggest economic recession since the Great Depression, and an abrupt switch to remote learning without adequate preparation for making sure that basic elements like computers, webcams, speedy Internet connections, and a quiet workspace were available to students. Prior to COVID19, the trend for graduation rates is increasing within the political science department and the college as a whole.

**Figure 11. Graduation Rates for Political Science Compared to Entire Campus, Tracking Incoming Freshmen**



The data above can be supplemented from data from Tableau that shows the two-year graduation rates of those who reach junior status; the two-year graduation rates of juniors who entered as transfer students; and the four-year graduation rates of those who entered SSU as freshmen **(Figure 12)**.

There has been improvement in graduation rates of those who reach junior standing, and of freshmen graduating in four years. The political science department should be especially pleased with these results given that many of the program’s students are working part-time, or even full-time. In the informal survey of 11 seniors, 9 indicated that they worked during their studies, with 5 indicating that when they were working, they worked 35 or more hours per week.

Improved graduation rates may reflect better advising, which was a priority in the previous program review. Of 11 seniors informally surveyed, 9 indicated they sought out advising at least once a year or more. Where the political science department may need better outreach is in transfer students, whose two-year graduation rate after transferring has declined slightly. The discrepancy may be caused by advisors not reaching transfer students. Anecdotally, there have been occasions where students who have taken the equivalent of POLS 200 in junior college end up repeating the credits by taking POLS 202. Similarly, students who have taken the equivalent of introduction to political theory and introduction to comparative politics at the junior college level may not know that these two 3-unit courses can count as credit for the 4-unit POLS 201 course, Ideas and Institutions. Lack of knowledge of such policies will lead to students repeating units that they do not need and unnecessary delays in their graduation.

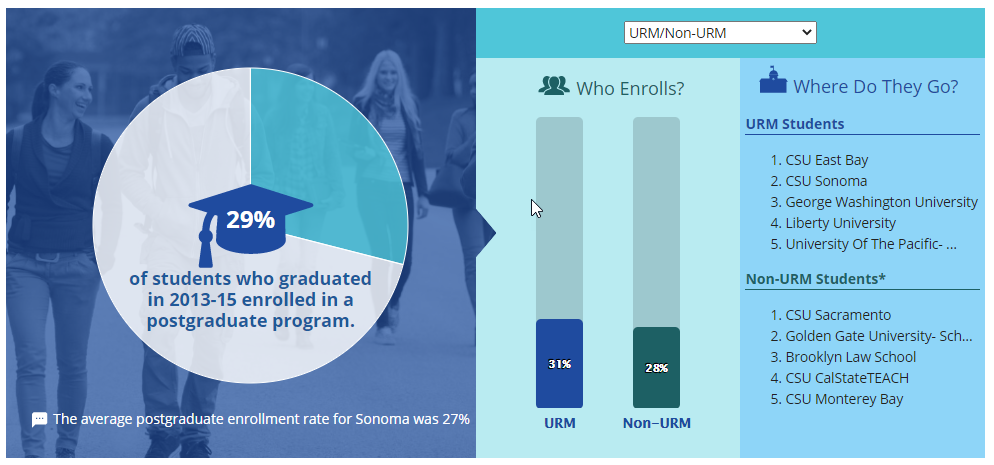
Some difficulty in reaching transfer students may be related to the fact that typically advising for students for the next semester occurs in late October/early November during the fall, and in April in the spring. Since transfer students may be coming in after these periods, they may miss the typical calls for advising that occur at these times. In addition, transfer students may be coming in after the traditional registration period. Because of the increase in the size of the major, required courses like POLS 302, 303, and 304 fill up fairly quickly, leaving incoming transfer students who may have completed the vast majority of their GE requirements in junior college locked out of the ability to take essential courses in political science. (Anecdotally, the author of this document knows of one transfer student who ended up taking POLS 202 even though they had already completed the equivalent of POLS 200 because they felt they needed to sign up for some POLS class and nothing else was available.). The core required courses in political science tend to be taught by the tenure-track faculty in political science, so the increasing ratio of majors to tenure track faculty creates more potential bottlenecks within the major. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic and economic recession, which has led to only one section each of 201, 302, 303, and 304 being offered, and has sometimes led to usually only one upper-division elective in each of the four subfields being offered, which also fill up quickly. This shows how many factors contribute to problems faced by transfer students: high advising workloads; high major to tenure track faculty ratios; budget cuts because of the economic recession.

Another difficulty with transfer students is that because they are new to SSU, they are not yet acculturated to the norms of advising here, unlike students who start out as freshmen at SSU. Many may be coming from junior colleges where the ratio of students to advisors is likely much higher and norms of advising are much different. This becomes even more problematic considering the sometimes byzantine nature of transfer credit options and the intricacies of fulfilling requirements within the GE and major. For instance, many transfer students will come into the major having taken introduction to American government, which will give them 3 units of credit as POLS 200. They may not realize that this leaves them potentially one unit short in the major, since typically political science majors take 202, which is four units. (Again, anecdotally, the author of this document knows of one transfer student who did not realize this and their graduation was delayed an extra semester.)

***Other Indicators of Student Success: Postgraduate Program Enrollment and Labor Market Performance of Graduates***

There is limited data on students who graduated from 2013 to 2015 **(Figure 13)**. The political science department is in line with the School of Social Science, in which 27 percent of students who graduated went on to a postgraduate program. In addition, there is no difference in postgraduate enrollment between underrepresented minorities and non-URM. More recent data is not yet available.

**Figure 13. Postgraduate Program Enrollment, Political Science Graduates**



Another measure of the strength of the political science program is in their labor market performance after graduating. **Figure 14** below shows that considering all years for which data is available (graduates from 2001 to 2016), the median earnings of SSU political science graduates compares favorably to political science graduates throughout the entire CSU system. In fact, SSU political science graduates tend to earn slightly more than comparable CSU political science graduates 2, 5, and 10 years after graduation. This holds also if one only looks at political science graduates in the most recent five-year time period for which there is data (2011 to 2016, **Figure 15**). SSU political science graduates also compare favorably in that time period to graduates from the SSU School of Social Science in general (**Figure 16**).

***Diversity Metrics***

The university’s strategic plan identifies Diversity and Inclusiveness as a key objective, with the first and proximate goal being to “Ensure that all student, faculty, staff, and administration constituencies are representative of the diverse population of California.” The reasons for this are obvious: it is difficult to create a welcoming environment in the absence of genuine representation. On this goal the political science program has made progress. In terms of majors, there has been progress in both gender and racial parity. Data from the Student Success Dashboard sheds light on the diversity of our student clientele.

While the School of Social Science and SSU in general has typically been majority women, the Political Science department has historically been an outlier in its gender composition, with proportionately more male than female majors. Since the last program review, more women have been declaring themselves political science majors, and now the proportion of women to men in the program is roughly equal **(Figure 17)**. It should be noted however that Sonoma State as a whole, two-thirds of the student population is female, so the 50-50 parity in gender in the Political Science department can still be said to underrepresent women relative to the proportion of women on campus, though not as much as in the past.

**Figure 17. Gender Diversity with Political Science**



In terms of racial/ethnic background, the composition of the Political Science department closely reflects that of the School of Social Science and Sonoma State as a whole **(Figure 18)**. In 2020 for instance, roughly 38 percent of Political Science majors were Hispanic/Latino; the corresponding numbers for the School of Social Science and Sonoma State were 37 and 35 percent. Asian American and African American students constitute such a small proportion of Political Science majors, that the data was not included in the Student Success Dashboard for privacy protection. In the School of Social Science, Asian American and African American majors have been essentially flat for the past 10 years, at about 3 to 4 percent for Asian Americans and 2 to 3 percent for African Americans.

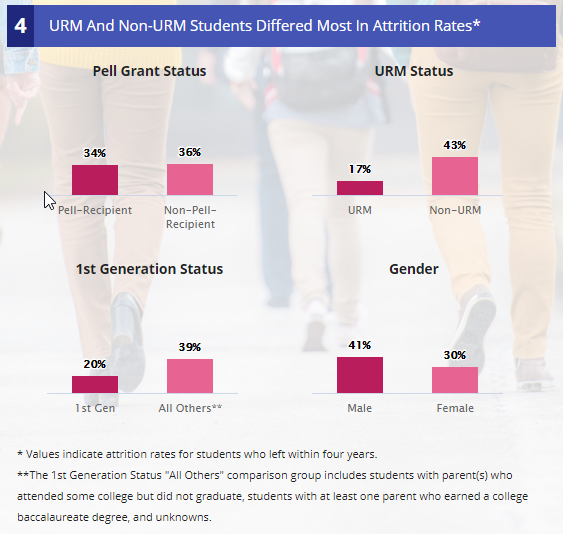
**Figure 18. Racial Diversity within Political Science**



One of the proposals from the previous program review was to actively promote more diversity amongst our faculty, in the courses offered, and in co-curricular activities and events the department sponsors. In terms of gender, the department is already fairly diverse. Four of our seven permanent faculty are women, which is a positive step towards modeling more gender balance amongst our student clientele. As already mentioned, the most recent hire has improved the racial diversity of the political science faculty, though progress will necessarily be slow.

In addition to looking at the gender and racial composition within political science, there is also some data on the performance of different subgroups. On some measures of performance there are some indicators that suggest the political science department is doing well, and others that merit continued attention (**Figure 19**). In terms of attrition rates of difference diverse groups, the political science department is generally doing well. Four-year attrition rates for Pell grant recipients, underrepresented minorities, women, and first-generation college students were all lower than non-Pell grant recipients, non-URM, men, and non-1st generation college students. It is unclear from the dashboard whether the data is looking only at freshmen who declared political science as their major, or whether it tracks all freshmen who end up declaring political science as their major at some point in their career.

**Figure 19. Attrition Rates within Political Science by Various Subgroups**



Another data source available are GPA comparisons of various groups, available from the CSU Faculty Dashboard by department (**Figure 20**). The data looks at all courses between 2011 and 2020, excluding smaller classes. In terms of gender, there is no discernible pattern of GPA discrepancy within political science courses. In terms of the GPA discrepancy between first generation college students and non-first-generation, there is a small gap, but in line with the average of the School of Social Science and actually better than the college as a whole. Where the political science department may be falling short however is in the GPA discrepancy for underrepresented minority groups and Pell grant recipients. The GPA gap for such groups in political science is larger than Sonoma State overall (though as noted before, there does not appear to be a resultant discrepancy in attrition from the major as a result of this URM and Pell Grant GPA discrepancy).

Why this gap exists cannot be determined from the data. Given the legacies of institutionalized discrimination in the United States, it is possible that URM are coming from schools and backgrounds where URM have not had as many opportunities to improve their educational capital relative to non-URM students. Political science also tends to be a rigorous program in terms of reading and writing requirements. Perhaps reflective of this high expectation is the fact that GPAs tend to be slightly lower in the major compared to other majors, and it is possible that that this exacerbates the GPA gap for URM and Pell Grant recipients.

In the future. more attention should be given to observing why the URM and Pell Grant GPA gap may exist. While there should not be any decline in the standards of the department (which clearly translates into future job market success), the faculty within the SSU should consider ways in which the rigor of the program might be maintained while thinking of ways in which the GPA gap for URM and Pell grant recipients might be lessened. It should also be noted that the ability of faculty to address the URM and Pell grant GPA gap may be hampered by trends that make it harder for faculty to spend one on one time with students who may be struggling in their courses. As class sizes increase, it is more likely that URM and Pell grant recipients may not receive the assistance they may require in political science classes. As with any problem, the solution has to be multifactorial, involving faculty not only reflecting on the practices within their classrooms but also ensuring that there are resources available to faculty to engage in this reflection and resources to students to address the difficulties they may be facing in classes.

**VI. PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT**

The process of periodic review is essential as a vehicle for the improvement of education and student development, as better programs tend to ensure better student outcomes. Previous program reviews have identified the following as the major skills, skill indicators and assessment instruments, and outcomes for the degree in Political Science.

**Skill Indicators for POLS Degree**

*A. Information Processing and Competency Skills*

Outcome 1: SSU Political Science graduates will acquire the techniques for skillfully reading and interpreting different types of writing, such as textbooks, scholarly books and journal articles, case law, newspaper articles, government documents (including those that employ statistics), and original philosophical texts.

Outcome 2: Graduates will be able to assess information, including demonstrating the ability to distinguish between the central and peripheral aspects of a piece of writing, and between well-substantiated arguments and unsupported assertions.

Outcome 3: Graduates will be able to find scholarly Political Science information using books, peer-reviewed journals, and available electronic databases and demonstrate knowledge of and ability to use social science methods of analysis.

*B. Written Communication Skills:*

Outcome 4: Graduates will be able to write knowledgeably, correctly, clearly and logically.

*C. Listening and Speaking Skills:*

Outcome 5: Graduates will be adept at listening, taking notes, and commenting on material presented in class.

Outcome 6: Graduates will be able to participate effectively in classroom dialogue on controversial political subjects, challenging the facts and ideas presented by others and defending their own.

Outcome 7: Graduates will be skilled at oral presentations and argument.

*D. Additional Skills:*

Outcome 8: Students will take responsibility for their own learning.

Outcome 9: Students will have an understanding of the field of Political Science as a whole and be able to relate knowledge in the different sub-fields to each other.

Outcome 10: Students will have the experience of making personal contributions to political knowledge and understanding, both individually and by working collaboratively with others. Students, for example, will see the relationship of Political Science to the real world of politics and feel empowered to use their political knowledge and sophistication as citizens of their communities, their nation and the world.

In addition to these skill outcomes, the political science program reviews in the past have also listed other program learning goals, which are summarized in the Appendix 2.

**Assessment Instruments**

Many of the outcomes can be measured by performance in Senior Seminar, which by design is a capstone course in the major. Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 are captured in the literature review that students are required to do for the Senior Seminar paper. Outcome 4 is captured in the final paper that students write for the Senior Seminar. Because the Senior Seminar requires an oral presentation and reaction to other students’ presentations, that also captures Outcomes 5, 6, and 7. Because the Senior Seminar paper requires students to come up with their own independent research project, that can capture Outcome 8 and well as aspects of Outcome 10. While many of these outcomes are captured in all the other coursework that political science students engage in, as a matter of efficiency and convenience the Senior Seminar seems the most logical place to assess skill acquisition within the political science department.

To this end, the political science program has proposed assessing the Senior Seminar on these dimensions going forward. Although this assessment hasn’t been conducted formally in the past, the department has asked four professors who have taught the course recently to assess their students on these program learning outcomes. The sample includes four classes of senior seminar offered in the past two years, for a total of 40 students assessed.

Six questions were assessed: (1) Whether the student successfully developed an independent research project (Outcomes 8 and 10); (2) whether student successfully conducted a literature review (Outcomes 1, 2, and 3); (3) whether student successfully used appropriate data to evaluate their hypothesis (Outcome 2); (4) whether student demonstrated appropriate writing skills (Outcome 4); (5) whether student participated in class and responded to other students appropriately (Outcomes 5 and 6); and (6) whether student successfully made an oral presentation of their work (Outcome 7). Each professor independently assessed their students on the six questions.

Figure 21 shows the results of the assessment in 6 areas that capture the program outcomes. The data shows that 87.5 percent or more of students who attempted the class met or exceeded the expectation in the assessment in six of the areas.

In addition, in the past, the political science department has utilized exit surveys to assess students’ subjective evaluation of whether the program has been successful in promoting their skills in these areas. Exit surveys were not administered since the last program review. What the department has decided is that going forward, all participants in senior seminar will be asked to fill out a survey assessing how well the political science department has done. The previous program review made the recommendation to do the exit surveys this way.

Exit surveys were conducted of the two senior seminars that were taught in Spring 2021. Based on slightly less than 50 percent response rate, 11 students were able to submit data. This is not a representative sample of all seniors in the past six years, especially since the senior seminars were conducted online through Zoom as a result of the pandemic. The summary numbers and the opportunity for student to contribute qualitative information in the form of open-response items however do support many of the conclusions of this report. Some of this qualitative information has already been presented in earlier sections of this report. This assessment source also helps assess some of the other program objectives that are covered in the appendix of this report.

First, students were asked to respond to a series of questions about specific learning objectives on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The questions and results are reported in Figure 22. For many of the items, the average is around 6, which corresponds to “agree.” The areas in which the department performs strongly in is in basic content around American politics, comparative politics, and international relations; providing intellectually stimulating content; promoting critical and analytical thinking; and motivating students to pay attention to politics and be more involved in their community. Where the department performs relatively less well at is in developing speaking skills, quantitative analysis, and doing independent research (though even in these areas the average is around “some agreement” in terms of the department’s contribution to the student’s education in those areas).

**Figure 22. Survey of Senior Seminar Students**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **I have gained an understanding to effectively analyze, understand, and evaluate policy and politics across a range of governmental institutions** | **6.09** |
| **I have gained basic understanding of the subfield of American Politics.** | **6.55** |
| **I have gained basic understanding of the subfield of Comparative Politics.** | **6.64** |
| **I have gained basic understanding of the subfield of International Relations.** | **6.45** |
| **I have gained basic understanding of the subfield of Political Theory.** | **5.91** |
| **The course content has been intellectually stimulating and given me a grasp of the issues.** | **6.45** |
| **The curriculum has helped me understand the society in which I live.** | **6.18** |
| **The curriculum has helped me develop critical thinking skills.** | **6.55** |
| **The curriculum has helped me develop my analytical writing skills.** | **6.36** |
| **The curriculum has helped me develop my speaking skills.** | **4.91** |
| **The curriculum has helped me develop my quantitative analysis skills.** | **5.27** |
| **The curriculum has helped me develop my ability to find and evaluate the objectivity of information.** | **6.09** |
| **The curriculum has helped me develop my ability to conduct independent research.** | **5.45** |
| **The curriculum has motivated me to pay more attention to politics and be more involved in politics and my community.** | **6.73** |
| **The curriculum has helped me develop a better idea of what a just society would be and what it means to act ethically.** | **5.82** |

Overall, both the assessment of instructors of Senior Seminar on specific skill dimensions and the subjective assessment of students based on answers to survey prompts indicate that the political science department is meeting its stated educational skill and content objectives.

***From Previous Program Review: Assessment of Connection between POLS 302 and 498***

The transition from 302 (Research Methods) to 498 (Senior Seminar) was discussed in the previous program review as a point of emphasis and remains an ongoing topic of discussion. The external reviewer met with one senior seminar and had this to say: “The skills on display in the capstone course were incredibly impressive, showing a depth of training, interest in the content, and personal support that is rare in public universities these days. Kudos to the department for holding the line on rigor and maintaining high expectations for student success.”

Despite some improvement, students continue to express some discontent with the connection between 302 and 498. The data from the exit surveys shows that students continue to feel that the connection between the two courses can be improved. Four out of 11 students felt that 302 did not prepare them for 498; 6 out of 11 stated that they felt 302 only contributed “a little” or “somewhat”; and only one respondent felt that 302 contributed “a lot” to their preparation for Senior Seminar. It should be noted that the pandemic played some role in this, as for some students, Research Methods was taught online and particularly for learning about statistics and using statistical software, online learning without a physical lab is highly unideal (as noted by one student who said that 302 did not contribute to them being prepared for 498). In addition, another question asked students in which area of the political science curriculum did they feel their training was the weakest. Of the 11 students who responded, 7 mentioned some aspect of conducting research, whether it was qualitative or quantitative methods, and 6 explicitly made suggestions for increasing training on research.

Part of the continuing disconnect may also be related to the different approaches that professors take to conducting research. As noted by a few students, some felt that the research methods course they took emphasized quantitative approaches using statistics and survey analysis that they ended up not using for their independent research paper. Other respondents felt that both courses should be longer to allow for more practice and time to absorb the different methods as well as more time and experience doing things like literature reviews. It is interesting to note that the one student who responded that 302 contributed “a lot” to their preparation for Senior Seminar stated that they felt that way because they had the same professor for 302 and 498.

That 302 and 498 remains an area of concern is not surprising, given that doing independent research is one of the most challenging aspects of the program. It does signal that continued efforts should be made to try to assist students more in this highly demanding aspect of the political science program.

One approach to make the senior seminar more productive was to allow for themed 498 seminars. The idea behind this reform was that professors teaching the seminar would be able to offer more assistance to students’ research projects because they would be more knowledgeable on the theme. Since political science is divided into four major subspecialties, it is not feasible that any one professor could be knowledgeable on all possible research topics that students might wish to research. From the informal survey, some students liked having themes, others did not. A few students felt limited when two sections of senior seminar were being offered, and both were themed on a topic the student felt did not match their interest. One suggestion from the Qualtrics survey was that in any given semester, if there were a themed seminar, the other should not be themed, so that students have more choice if they did feel the themed seminar captured their particular interest.

***The Place of Political Theory in Research and Student Projects: A Note for Potential Future Reform of 302 and 498***

Because one of the stated goals of the program is to increase knowledge of each of the four major subfields of political science (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, and political theory), it is striking in assessing the Senior Seminars that no student attempted a project based on political theory. It seems that the program has historically placed a strong emphasis on students completing empirical papers, as opposed to independent student work on normative or interpretive questions. Given that discussions about how to improve the connection between 302 and 498 are ongoing, perhaps discussion of whether space can be made for students who do wish to do a political-theory-oriented independent project can be folded into those discussions.

**Assessment of Broader Civic Mission of the Political Science Department (Outcome 10)**

One of the primary goals of the political science department is the promotion of responsible citizenship and civic-mindedness, which is captured in Outcome 10. Assessing this directly is a tricky matter, since it is not something that can be measured with a class assignment. It should be noted however that the political science department provides many opportunities in which students can engage with their communities. These include the following.

***Political Science Internships***

The department offers several programs through which students may gain practical experience while earning academic credit. Internships in the POLS department are divided into two categories. Currently, Professor McCuan coordinates internships with political campaigns and elected representatives and Professor Boaz coordinates internships with non-profits and other non-governmental organizations. In recent years, students have been placed in a diverse range of internships including Rep. Mike Thompson’s office, Rep. Jared Huffman’s campaign, Muelrath Public Affairs (political consultants), the North Bay Organizing Project, the North Bay Labor Council, Sonoma County Conservation Alliance, the Metta Center for Nonviolence Education, and many more. Internship opportunities are available in both Fall and Spring semesters, are flexible in terms of units and schedules, and can be designed to work around the student’s coursework. In addition to the regular internships, the department also sends selected students to the state Capitol to participate in the Sacramento Semester Program under which they work with members of the Legislature, officers of the executive branch, or lobbyists to gain a fuller understanding of the political process firsthand.

***Model United Nations (POLS 345)***

For many years, Sonoma State has participated in the world’s largest and most prestigious simulation of the United Nations, the National Model United Nations (NMUN). The MUN program is coordinated out of the Political Science department and corresponds to an upper-division elective course, POLS 345: Model United Nations. With the assistance of IRA funds, the program takes 20-25 students per year to New York City for MUN. This experiential learning opportunity has provided hundreds of undergraduates over the years with enhanced skills in public speaking, research, writing, collaboration, communication, and diplomacy. It is an invaluable component of our department’s offerings. In the past eight years, the Sonoma State University team has been awarded Outstanding Delegation in 2019 (United States), Distinguished Delegation in 2018 (Iran), 2013 (both Serbia and Ukraine), and 2011 (Azerbaijan), and Honorable Mention in 2017 (France), 2016 (Ireland), 2015 (Nigeria), 2014 (Cuba), and 2012 (Venezuela). Our student delegates have won additional awards for best Position Papers in 2018, 2017, 2014, and 2013, and Outstanding Delegates in committee in 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, and 2014, for a total of nearly two dozen awards in eight years. We have also had several MUN veterans return to serve on the NMUN staff at the conference in New York.



***Holocaust and Genocide Lecture Series (POLS 307)***

This lecture series recently celebrated its 30th year on the SSU campus. It is an exceptionally popular program, offered for GE credit, and coordinated out of the POLS department. In recent years, Political Science undergraduates have worked as teaching assistants in the series. The program gives undergraduates the opportunity to learn first-hand from witnesses or victims of the mass atrocities they study in other courses. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this series is the personal eyewitness accounts of Holocaust survivors and more recently survivors of the Rwandan, Cambodian, and Bosnian genocides. Students are encouraged to consider issues of individual accountability, reconciliation, and to formulate ideas about how genocide might be prevented. An archive of the visiting lecturers that have presented at the series is at: https://web.sonoma.edu/holocaust/lectures/previous.html.

***Panetta Fellowship***

Each year, one upper-division Political Science student has the opportunity to be nominated by the department faculty for the Panetta Institute Congressional Internship Program. The institute selects one student from each California State University to participate in a 13-week, all-expenses paid program working in a Washington D.C. congressional office. The program was founded by Leon and Sylvia Panetta, and is run through a non-profit devoted entirely to the support of this program. Many of the department’s past Panetta Fellows have gone on to permanent positions on the Hill or elsewhere in D.C. as a result of their placement in this program. A list of SSU Panetta fellows is here: https://studentaffairs.sonoma.edu/panetta-congressional-internship-program/panetta-congressional-interns

***Study Abroad***

The department has strongly encouraged international study abroad for political science students and has arranged for appropriate credits for courses of study at international universities.

***Political Science Student Club***

As of the Fall of 2014, a group of POLS students have re-chartered the Political Science Student Club after several years of quiet. There are currently about a dozen active members. The club supports POLS majors in several ways: career advising, sponsoring debates and panels on topics of interest to majors, networking with organizations and people in vocations of interest to students, resume and curriculum vitae guidance, and graduate school information. The club is supported by all members of the departmental faculty, who serve as resources and offer guidance to the student members.

***Research Assistantships and Collaborations with Faculty***

In recent years, members of our department have engaged in research collaborations with undergraduate students and/or have hired students as research assistants on major projects. These collaborations have resulted in attendance and presentations at professional academic conferences, including the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. These experiences offer especially valuable tools for our students who hope to do graduate study or to work in a research capacity with an organization. We hope to continue and expand these collaborations and research opportunities for our students into the future.

**VII. OTHER ISSUES**

***Crises***

Over the past six years, it would be remiss to not include a discussion of the recurring crises that have affected SSU. These include devastating wildfires that have become an annual occurrence in the region, which disrupt classes and the home lives of students and faculty living in the area. These crises have been eclipsed by an even greater one, the pandemic and the economic recession.

The reason it is worthy to reflect on these recurrent crises is the obvious enormous impact they have on our students’ learning and progress within the major. If departments and faculty are to be able to deal with the fallout from the crises on our students, then there needs to be the appropriate resources and time to do so. The university needs to carefully reflect on trends such as increasing class size, increasing workloads, and increasing service and tenure requirements that make it harder to have the time to work one on one with students to address the impacts from these crises.

***Instructional Space and Modalities***

In the past, instructional space often was hampered by the poor design of Stevenson Hall. In the future, this issue will be potentially resolved by the remodeling of Stevenson Hall. However, in the near term, the temporary closure of Stevenson Hall threatens to reduce instructional space even more. This issue is exacerbated by the pandemic, in which there are increased spacing requirements to accommodate classes, which further decreases the pool of available classrooms for face-to-face instruction. For instance, in the fall, some faculty members could not even schedule half of their classes face-to-face because there were no spaces available; instead the faculty member had to schedule the class to be online.

The space issue also potentially affects advising in in the next two years. Since the temporary offices are located in an open floor plan in the library, there simply will be a less welcoming space for advising. Although there will be private rooms available to meet privately with students, such a situation is not comparable to meeting a professor in their designated office room.

**VIII. ACTION PLAN**

***A. Curricular Coherence***

1. Greater sharing of syllabi; this may help in creating connections between lower-level requirements and upper-division electives within the major; this may also help in improving connection between POLS 302 and POLS 498 in particular.

2. Continued discussion of effects of changes in GE, what courses the department wants to keep as GE, and how the department may revise major requirements in light of such changes.

***B. POLS 302 and 498: Research Methods and Senior Seminar***

The department should continue discussion on how to make the connection between 302 and 498 stronger, as well as how to better prepare students for 498 and make the experience more productive. The following have been suggested as possible reforms:

1. Divide 302 into two classes, one qualitative, the other quantitative. Students could choose which method they would like to specialize in. Or make research methods two semesters, so that students would get more exposure to both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This may be feasible given unit-reductions that will occur with the elimination of a 4-unit 202 class, and with possible reductions to 3 units for POLS 201 and 315 due to GE reform, potentially leaving a 3-unit deficit for majors to reach 40 units.

2. Incorporate aspects of 302 into other classes. For example, writing literature reviews could be aspects of other course offered by the department. Quantitative and qualitative approaches could be explicitly discussed in other classes.

3. If there are themed senior seminars in any given semester, make sure there is also an option for an un-themed seminar to allow for greater student choice; publicize such options before the appropriate registration periods.

4. Assess student interest in political-theory-based senior research projects and discuss how such projects might be assisted. Consider greater incorporation of teaching of political theory-type papers in Research Methods classes. This may be more feasible if the Research Methods class is split into two classes. Alternatively, consider incorporating research design in upper division political theory electives. Such changes should be assessed in conjunction with review of whether there is appropriate number of political theory faculty to teach 498 who can assess such student projects.

5. Encourage student participation in SSU’s Week of Research and Creativity as part of 302 and 498, so that students can add an accomplishment to their resumes as a result of their research and see more clearly value to the classes.

***C. Advising***

Given the increase in advising burden over the past review cycle, the department, the School of Social Sciences, and the university as a whole should continue to think of ways in which to streamline the advising process. The following suggestions may help alleviate the growing advising workload:

1. Group advising sessions rather than individual advising sessions, for greater efficiency

2. Creating student/peer mentoring and advising, perhaps even as a credit option.

3. Streamlining paperwork to require fewer signatures from major advisors on college and university policies as opposed to department policies.

4. Bringing in adjunct faculty to engage in advising, with appropriate compensation.

5. Greater flexibility on office hours rather than fixed time slots (one hour face-to-face for each course) as currently required. Office hours by appointment gives students more flexibility, and the reality is that many students have to schedule appointments outside posted office hours, which leads to professors wasting time sitting in designated hours when students cannot come.

***D. Transfer Students***

As transfer students have become a larger proportion of POLS majors, more attention should be given to the particular difficulties these students may be facing. Possible reforms include:

1. Reserving seats in classes for transfers

2. Specific advising sessions designated for transfer students

3. Encouraging advisors to email transfer advisees between the semesters

4. Coordination with the college so that advisors know exactly the list of transfers coming into the department before the spring and fall semesters so that they know to contact these students for advising.

5. Consider mandating that transfers get approval from advisors before being allowed to sign up for courses.

***E. Career preparation***

Students expressed a desire for more career preparation. Possible reforms include:

1. Linking with other CSU internship programs; Sacramento State may offer particularly good resources in terms of offering political science internships, given proximity to the state capitol.

***F. Resources***

The long-term trend in the department is declining resources due to a variety of factors, including budgetary cutbacks, loss of permanent faculty positions, increasing program enrollment, and changes in GE requirements that will affect department resources. This trend has contributed to increasing faculty workload. Many of the issues identified in this document cannot be addressed without resolving these resource issues.

1. Work with School and College-level administration to identify ways in which either resources can be increased or workload decreased.

2. Review RTP requirements to reflect that increased workload of faculty is recognized.

3. Request release time for uncompensated work like advising for internships and for classes like Model United Nations which require travel commitments.

***G. Diversity***

1. Continue to make sure that all qualified minority candidates are considered in future hires.

2. Consider adoption of a diversity statement from candidates applying to tenure-track positions in political science.

3. Reflect on course content to better understand if course content changes might reduce GPA gaps for underrepresented minority groups without sacrificing the high standards of the department.

***H. Future Assessment:***

1. One limitation of assessment during this current cycle was that there were no exit interviews conducted of seniors. This assessment cycle relied on a Qualtrics survey administered to Senior Seminar students. It is recommended that this instrument be used for every Senior Seminar going forward so that a larger sample size will be generated, as well as allowing for a better detection of trends.

2. In addition, this assessment cycle for the first time required professors teaching Senior Seminar to independently evaluate students on a variety of assessment goals. It is recommended that this evaluation be continued for every Senior Seminar going forward.

3. Consider streamlining skill indicators and learning objectives for the program, as currently existing objectives may provide too many outcomes to be individually assessed (see Appendix 2).

**IX. CONCLUSION**

Assessment has shown that in terms of objective indicators (graduation rates, career outcomes, professor evaluation of individual skill outcomes, student participation and success in community events like Model United Nations); subjective indicators (student perception of satisfaction with program and achievement of skill outcomes); and independent third-party evaluation (external review), the political science department continues to be a strong program while maintaining rigorous expectations and facing rising workloads. The self-study has noted some areas in which the department should continue to monitor and address, and suggestions have been offered for continuing evaluation and reform.

**APPENDIX 1: External Review Document**

Program Review, B.A. in Political Science

Sonoma State University

Spring 2021

Kim Nalder, Ph.D.

Professor and Director, Project for an Informed Electorate and CalSpeaks Poll Director

Department of Political Science

California State University, Sacramento

**Overview**

In my role as external reviewer, I was able to (virtually) meet separately with senior faculty, junior faculty, lecturers, students (a meeting without faculty present and a classroom observation), Chair David McCuan, AVP Stacey Bosick and Dean Troi Carleton.

Prior to writing this report, I also reviewed a number of documents, including a draft of the Political Science Department’s self-study from Spring of 2021, the previous external review by that I did for the department in 2015, data on POLS section shifts due to GE revision and AI requirement changes, recent student faculty ratio data, diversity data for the department and SSU overall, the departmental website, and the SSU Mission Statement. I also reviewed the curriculum of similar sized CSU Political Science departments.

My overall impression is that the department does an exceptional job of preparing its students to be engaged, thoughtful, discerning participants in our democracy. The department has a clear commitment to maintaining academic rigor (this came up again and again) and equipping students with strong critical thinking and analytical skills which are increasingly necessary in our disinformation-filled landscape, along with core competence in all of the major sub-fields in the discipline. The department does a remarkable job of pulling off a complete political science program with only seven tenure line faculty members (including the chair) and a handful of lecturers. They are capably performing the truly life-expanding work expected by the liberal arts mission of Sonoma State.

The department is remarkably collegial – noted among tenure-line faculty, lecturers and also students. I was impressed by the feeling of cohort connection the senior students I observed and talked with had. They clearly have a sense of connection and reliance on each other, even in this bizarre Covid time.

The department does face some daunting challenges, from a GE shift from 4 to 3-unit courses (a special issue for lecturers who essentially just get a pay cut for each course), changes in the American Institutions requirement, adaptation to AB1460, displacement from their building while its under construction, and of course, a pandemic --- all at the same time.

Since I last visited Sonoma State for a review, there have thankfully been a couple of new tenure-line hires (but also retirements), bringing fresh perspectives, diversity, and energy into the department. Preparing for turnover due to anticipated retirements in coming years is needed to keep the department on track going forward.

**Curricular Currency and Coherence**

The department’s curricular mission is completely appropriate for a strong comprehensive undergraduate Political Science program at a university that emphasizes a much-needed liberal arts training for all students. The department does an excellent job of instilling a sense of political competence and civic and political engagement in its students. The curriculum aligns well with the learning outcomes and goals the department sets for students in the program. The curriculum is current and coherent. One welcome shift since my last review is some innovation and updating of available electives. I was pleased to see thought-provoking and up-to-date courses that reflect the current direction of the discipline. For example, POLS 313: Critical Theory: Race and Gender, POLS 314: Environmental Political Theory, POLS 446: International Relations of the Middle East: Israel, the Palestinians, and the United States, POLS 449: Gender and Geopolitics in Science Fiction and Fantasy, POLS 481: Politics of Regulation and Land Use, POLS 485: Political Power and Social Isolation and POLS 466: Political Psychology. There is also dynamism and flexibility with the POLS Special Topics offerings, featuring such timely courses as “Ethics in the Age of Trump” “Politics of Reproductive Rights” “Politics of Direct Democracy”, “Freedom, Equality, and the Courts” “Transpacific Partnership”, among others. The department should be commended for this growth and adaptation.

Along with those, the department teaches an incredibly solid array of essential courses in each sub-field and all of the critical courses for the discipline that one would expect to find at any respectable university. The department seeks to prepare them for public service, the responsibilities of citizenship, and skills that enable them to truly explore and comprehend the world around them. Students report that they feel amply prepared for anything in their futures that emphasizes research, “understanding of why things are the way they are”, and critical analysis. All of this is done while upholding high standards. One student noted that, “we do really well because our professors push us.”

There are nevertheless a few bumps that could use attention. One that I heard a fair amount about not only this year, but also six years ago, is the disconnect between 302, the research methods course, and 498, the senior capstone course. I should say that there have been some positive changes on this since the last review, with more rotation of the course between faculty members. However, students still complain that the methodological focus of 302 varies with the instructor and may or may not slot in well with the expectations of the professor teaching 498. Many felt unprepared for some aspect of the capstone course (which, to the department’s credit, is taught with a high level of rigor).

I have a few suggestions. The first came up in discussions with faculty and is at least somewhat underway. The idea is to create paired, thematic 302/498 courses taught by the same instructor. That way, students who had an interest in qualitative methods and certain applications could choose that course pair, while others might take the more quantitative route. This would do a great deal to alleviate student concerns about a mismatch between the courses. However, this may be realistically difficult to achieve, given the rotation of courses and limited scheduling options due to the size of the faculty. Another, perhaps complimentary approach could be to devote more time in other upper division (or even lower division) courses to utilizing the skills from 302 to better cement them and prepare students better for the capstone. For example, other courses could require literature reviews in their assignments, or they might assign journal articles using varied methodological approaches to better familiarize students with these concepts outside of 302. Library sessions could be scheduled and taught by librarians to help teach skills like how to do proper literature reviews. Regardless of the approach the department chooses, something needs to change. The fact that the same issue persists 6 years later certainly proves that.

Course availability is another challenge for the department, since there have been reductions of the numbers of sections offered in some cases and some courses rotate only every 2 years. This means students may not be able to take classes in the proper sequence and worst case, graduation might be delayed. Proper stair-stepping is vital to student success in terms of absorbing course content as intended. The solutions here are tricky, given obvious constraints. Part of the answer is in careful advising, especially for transfer or interdisciplinary students who sometimes fall through the cracks. Ultimately, offering more sections is best, via new tenure-line hires, and/or better college-level compensation for faculty on buy-out or leave.

Another recurrent issue is the variation in the way the same course is taught by different faculty members. If the pre-requisite course is not taught consistently, students in the subsequent course may have different understandings of content. Though faculty clearly bring different emphases and perspectives, and rightfully so, there could be more communication – perhaps sharing syllabi and considering some common goals.

Something the department is considering is increasing the writing intensive courses so that students could readily fulfill that requirement within the major. More could also be done in relation to other disciplines. Some students wished the department capitalized more on the courses in other fields that might benefit them, such as communications for those wanting to go into political journalism, for example.

The department might also consider offering a sophomore experience course that might draw more students into the major. It seems that there is also room for 200 to be more tailored to non-majors as a way to enable them to more easily connect to the content, which might result in more major recruitment as well.

Though the curriculum includes courses focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and identity, more could be done to integrate these topics into all courses (this is done reasonably well now, but the current environment demands increased effort on this from all of us).

I came away from my meetings at Sonoma State impressed with the comprehensive, relevant, and high-quality education the very fortunate

students at your university are getting from the Political Science Department. The skills on display in the capstone course were incredibly impressive, showing a depth of training, interest in the content, and personal support that is rare in public universities these days. Kudos to the department for holding the line on rigor and maintaining high expectations for student success. The department does all of this with very few faculty members with many demands on their time and energy, which is truly impressive.

**Learning Outcomes and Assessment**

The department has come up with a very clear, comprehensive, and appropriate set of learning outcomes. These are even featured on the departmental website. In addition to learning outcomes, they have gone beyond that to identify specific skills that students should acquire in each of the 4 main sub-fields after taking courses required for the major. These are extensive, specific and for the most part, measurable.

Assessment can of course be a mixed bag. In the worst case, it is an empty busy-work exercise that saps energy that could be devoted to just doing the work. In the best case, it shines a light on areas of needed improvement and leads to such adjustments. Given the heavy time demands on the faculty at Sonoma State, I worry that it may feel more like the former. However, department members do show evidence of open-ness to new ideas and innovations and appreciative of feedback. The draft self-assessment is quite thorough and shows thoughtfulness about how to adapt to changing expectations from the university and evolving student needs. Students report that they feel free to give feedback to the department as well. One area that might use some attention is in student evaluations of faculty. Given the importance of those evaluations to the RTP process, the department could afford to provide students with some explicit education on the inherent racial and gender bias in those tools – thereby inoculating them a bit prior to filling them out.

**Student Needs**

This department places a great deal of emphasis on the needs of students. The student faculty ratio is still low enough to allow a great deal of personal interaction between faculty and students, and this faculty succeeds at creating

a welcoming and stimulating environment for students. They respect the students as scholars, not customers, as is the trend in some quarters. Students were downright glowing in their reports about faculty and the program. They felt like they were provided with the tools and knowledge they need to succeed and inculcated with a devotion to service as well. They clearly get much more personalized attention and feedback on their work than many students in the system do. They said that early courses in the major enticed them to stick with it. They mentioned time and again that the faculty were “super great” and professional about de-escalating ideological disagreements in class (a big occupational danger for political scientists), being respectful and inclusive of varied opinions and ideologies. They feel respected and welcomed and nurtured. They also report good relationships with their fellow students, which enhanced their college experience. Faculty work closely and individually with students, and it shows.

**Advising**

The department divides out its advising responsibilities equally amongst tenure-line faculty alphabetically (with one professor solely responsible for MPA advising). This is equitable and reasonable, but does create workload issues when faculty are on leave – increasing the burden on everyone else. Another advising issue is the increasing expectations from the university for faculty to advise not just on the major, but on everything, putting even more time and energy pressure on the faculty. Advising software is also apparently not ideal, not connecting all the information one needs to properly advise students.

Perhaps some creative thinking on advising could lighten the load. Though some advice is very personalized, a significant portion does not vary much. Perhaps the department could schedule some group advising sessions during the semester in a classroom or conference room so that multiple students could be served at the same time. This could be especially effective for transfer students, for example. It would be even more helpful if group advising sessions on GE could be done at the college or university level. Or, perhaps creating a student mentoring/advising program, wherein advanced students pair up with incoming ones and help them along. It requires a little training, but could be mutually beneficial. It could even possibly be a 1-unit course – they could add on things like attending relevant university events, library sessions, etc.

**Transfer Students**

It looks as if the department (and maybe the university) is experiencing an uptick in the number and proportion of transfer students. There have been some issues with them not being able to register until courses are full, problems with unit comparability for some courses, and curricular disconnects. I urge the department to think systematically about what might be done to ease the transition for these students.

If it isn’t already done, perhaps some seats in key courses can be reserved and held for transfer students so that they can get courses they need. Maybe there could be specific drop-in advising sessions for transfer students to help them get oriented and integrated into the department. They could be targeted for student mentorship. Perhaps a 1-unit course could be developed to make up for the unit gap that sometimes occurs. Since they may not take the core courses that subsequent courses build upon, perhaps the advanced courses could devote a short amount of time to refreshing everyone’s memory – as well as orienting the transfer students.

**Career preparation**

Students mentioned that they would like to have more specific career preparation in terms of awareness of options, but also internships during their time at Sonoma State. The department does connect students with internships, but perhaps more purposeful and comprehensive efforts are needed. Maybe a session where the Sacramento Semester director for the CSU system (Jaime Jackson at Sacramento State) Zooms in to explore options? Maybe a practitioner guest lecture series? Alumni visits to encourage and inform students about future options? As I write this, I do recognize that all of this requires additional labor that is a scarce commodity. Perhaps coordination with other university internship programs could lighten the load?

Students do appear to be involved in actual politics, volunteering for campaigns, non-profits, etc. In addition, some are involved in the award-winning (and much praised) Model United Nations program and otherwise preparing themselves in practical ways to be global citizens. All of this is key for a truly well-rounded experience in political science.

**Resources**

It appears, when reviewing data on enrollment from Spring 2015 to Spring 2021, that the enrollment numbers and numbers of majors and minors peaked in 2017-18, and declined after Covid lockdown measures changed the landscape for everyone in 2020. Interestingly, this same decline did not happen with the MPA program, which actually continued to add students during lockdown – perhaps because night classes seemed more reasonable and feasible to working professionals if they could just Zoom in from their home office where they’d been Zooming all day anyhow. It also looks like the drop in enrollment was not as significant for POLS as for some other programs in the college – perhaps due to the more evidently vital nature of our discipline during the upheaval of 2020 and 2021. It’s hard to know exactly how things will shake out after the pandemic, but it seems reasonable to expect that the numbers will climb once again, increasing the need for additional faculty.

The decision to reduce GE courses from 4 to 3 units is having a serious impact on Political Science, along with the AI shift which has created serious reductions in sections of intro courses and students served. Ultimately, that may negatively impact the budget of a department that is already overburdened and stretched thin. Some administrative allowance for this adjustment would be most useful of course. Short of that, the department will have to be more creative in structuring the major and attracting more students. Creating excessive demand is likely to result in additional course offerings, benefitting all.

Relatedly, it became clear in my evaluation that the department, while exceptional in terms of internal functioning, may want to consider working more on participation in college and university level functions. Building solid working relationships with other campus units and offices often pays dividends, even if it can feel difficult to add yet another level of engagement to one’s workload. Attracting new students to the major is also easier if the department is more visible across campus. For example, I heard from multiple interviewees that that there is some resentment of pressure on faculty to engage in recruitment and student outreach activities. While these sorts of efforts are certainly not part of the job description and may be well outside of most faculty’s wheelhouses, the stark reality is that enrollment has been dropping – not just at Sonoma State, but at other peer institutions across the country. Smaller, liberal-arts focused colleges have been especially hard hit (this began pre-pandemic and will likely continue after). Putting some work into attracting more students to this very appealing program may be necessary for longer-term survival for the university, regardless of how we feel about such extra work.

Another resource concern is the advising overload that has to be shouldered by remaining faculty when a tenure-line member is on sabbatical, release time, or other leave or buy-out. Though in some of those cases (like sabbatical), the college provides teaching replacements, there is no such workload counter-balance for advising. In a larger department, this may not be a major burden, but at this size, it may mean a 20%+ increase in advising load for each tenure line faculty member. In a department that takes student mentoring this seriously, that is significant. Perhaps the college could consider hiring some adjuncts to do a few hours of advising a week in these circumstances. There are likely to be savings on their salaries due to the GE unit reduction, so perhaps this is the perfect time to implement such a program.

Adjuncts report feeling supported and welcomed and that their needs are responded to by the department. They do express some additional need for resources, such as graders that can access the course management system.

Many of the issues the department is experiencing with class availability and order, diversity, advising load, etc. could only truly be alleviated via additional tenure-line hires. Luckily, the state budget is actually in surplus at the moment, though we have yet to see how that shakes out for the CSU. In addition, the Biden administration’s Covid relief packages are bringing extra funds to campuses this year and likely next. Though those funds are not able to be used for faculty hiring, they could and should be used for extra assistance and support for high-functioning and over-stressed departments such as this one.

**Other Observations**

The department has made some positive strides on diversity in terms of hiring since the last review, hiring a junior faculty member who specializes in racial and ethnic politics. The department should work extremely hard to pro-actively encourage candidates from diverse backgrounds to apply to their next tenure line openings. I suggest also asking for a diversity statement as part of the application process to better identify applicants who prioritize this vital work. There are also a number of course offerings that focus specifically on social justice, civil rights, identity and other DEI related topics, which is fantastic. Some student feedback was that they wished there was more of an emphasis on social justice throughout the curriculum. Additionally, a concerted effort needs to be made to make sure faculty of color don’t carry most of the weight of student needs around DEI – a common occurrence across many campuses. The department should also show a clear commitment to defending faculty who may face harassment from students due to race, gender, or other demographic factors.

Another concern is that junior faculty may struggle with a lack of clarity on the department’s RTP expectations. This can create a situation in which Associate professors feel pressured to accept all assignments to be sure that they are above the bar for tenure and promotion. Vague RTP standards can allow for flexibility for faculty with different emphases and skill sets and can be used to protect those who might vary from the norm, yet at the same time, some explicit guidance about minimum expectations could be useful and reassuring for junior faculty – something to think about if/when the dept. gets new hires in coming years.

**Conclusions**

The Political Science Department at Sonoma State University is doing a wonderful job of delivering an excellent education to students enrolled in the program. This is true in spite of some serious challenges in terms of how far faculty are stretched and the ability of the department to consistently offer the full range of courses that students desire in the semesters that work best. The department is a bit top-heavy, with 5 full professors, and when I visited, 2 assistant professors and no associates (though Emily Ray was simply waiting for final confirmation of her promotion). This creates the risk of retirements happening in coming years that upset the delicate balance of responsibilities for courses, advising, and service. In a perfect world, new lines would be granted so that there is no gap in offerings between a retirement and a hire. Hiring may not even be automatic after a retirement, but this is not a department that can spare a professor. One hopes that the rosy California budget ends up creating a favorable fiscal environment for new hires. If so, this department should be prioritized, given the smaller decrease in majors due to Covid and the intense necessity of civic involvement and competence at this moment when democracy is under threat around the globe.

I want to commend the department for holding up so well under so much pressure, especially in the last year in which everyone struggled with the transition online due to the pandemic. They are handling multiple moving parts with GE, and AI changes and making accommodations in the curriculum. This review period is an opportunity to think in fresh ways about how to handle the future. I feel confident that they will emerge even stronger.

**APPENDIX 2: Goals for Student Learning Outcomes in Current Department Documents**

***Student Learning Outcomes for BA in Political Science***

- Upon completion of the program, students will have developed critical thinking skills necessary for the evaluation of social scientific concepts, including the ability to distinguish between, and use, techniques of deductive and inductive reasoning.

- Upon completion of the program, students will develop persuasive analytical thinking and writing skills, e.g. the ability to articulate, support, and defend an argument.

- Upon completion of the program, students will understand the research process in the social sciences, e.g., differences between normative and empirical perspectives; the differences between probabilistic and deterministic reasoning; and the differences between the major analytical approaches used in applied research.

- Upon completion of the program, students will have a developed understanding of the concept of power and how it is manifested in various ways in political interactions, including through the processes of democracy itself.

- Upon completion of the program, students will develop the requisite skills for sophisticated information competency and civic literacy.

- Upon completion of the program, students will comprehend the obligations and expectations of citizenship at all levels.

- Upon completion of the program, students will understand the dynamics between citizens and political institutions for shaping political outcomes.

- Upon completion of the program, students will comprehend the multiple motivations and constraints underlying political behavior.

- Upon completion of the program, students will be able to identify the multi-causal nature that characterizes the political world.

- Upon completion of the program, students will be able to present a reasoned argument in support of a policy position of relevance to Social and Political Science topics.

- Upon completion of the program, students will have designed, implemented, written up, and presented to their capstone seminar an original primary source research project.

In addition to general political science knowledge and skills, each subfield of the discipline calls for and enhances knowledge and skills in specific areas. We describe these expectations below.

***Specific Skills for American Politics:***

- Upon completion of the program, students will understand the major theoretical schools of thought in the field of Political Science and analytical tools used by scholars conducting research in American politics.

- Upon completion of the program, students will be able to evaluate and compare the constitutional basis of US government with historical and international alternatives.

- Upon completion of the program, students will better understand the role and functioning of the major institutions of American government, including Congress, the presidency, the courts, the bureaucracy, and the institutions of state and local government. Students will understand how these institutions interact with each other and civil society.

- Upon completion of the program, students will better understand the role of mass political behavior in the political process, including the nature and influence of public

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opinion, elections, and other forms of political participation including the impact of organizations in the political process, such as political parties, interest groups, and the mass media.

***Specific Skills for International Relations:***

- Upon completion of the program, students will understand the major theoretical schools and developments and analytical tools used by scholars conducting research in international relations.

- Upon completion of the program, students will have acquired the tools necessary to analyze sophisticated political and social processes across and within nation-states

- Upon completion of the program students will understand the confluence of structural, social, economic, and political factors for shaping international interactions.

- Upon completion of the program students will have a general understanding of relations among nation-states, international organizations, non-state actors and international public policy.

- Upon completion of the program students will understand common concepts such as power, sovereignty, rule of law, human rights, and global governance, as they apply to global politics.

***Specific Skills for Political Theory:***

- Upon completion of the program, students optimally will have knowledge of the differences between ancient, modern, and contemporary political thought and be familiar with a range of theorists within and outside the traditional canon.

- Upon completion of the program, students will be familiar with the schools of thought advanced by major political philosophers such as Aristotle, Machievelli, Madison, Marx, and Rawls.

- Upon completion of the program, students will understand how theories arise out of and have influence beyond a particular historical context.

- Upon completion of the program students will be able to evaluate differing views of principles central to the study of political theory and the practice of public life, which include justice, freedom, the social contract, democracy, diversity, deconstruction, and power.

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***Specific Skills for Comparative Politics:***

- Upon completion of the program, students will understand the elements of comparative research design including theoretical constructs (such as the state, regime type, civil society, and sub-state actors) central to analysis of comparative politics.

- Upon completion of the program, students will develop an understanding of the causes and consequences of different institutional arrangements.

- Upon completion of the program, students will be able to discuss and analytically compare the interplay of political, economic and social/cultural variables that shape the political systems around the world.

- Upon completion of the program, students will understand how different political systems produce different outputs in terms of, for example, the level of effectiveness of legal and administrative systems, the types of social and economic policy, and the degree of legitimacy of the government among its various regions and ethnic groups.

- Upon completion of the program, students will develop an understanding of the major theoretical schools and developments and analytical tools used by scholars conducting research in comparative politics.

- Upon completion of the program, students will be competent in current events as they relate to issues of stability, legitimacy, and quality of governance in states around the world.

1. https://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/APSA%20Files/Data%20Reports/Charts/2018-November-cotm.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-090838-727 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)