



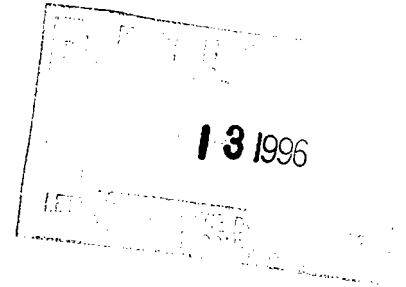
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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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December 12, 1996

TO: Alex Nagel
FROM: Bert Kritzer *Bert*
RE: Assessment Plans for the Department of Political Science



Attached are the proposed assessment plans for the Political Science Department's undergraduate major and graduate programs, as approved by our faculty at last Friday's meeting.

At that meeting, my colleagues directed me to come up with an estimate of the "cost" of preparing and reviewing the plans. To that end, I estimate that the equivalent of three to four person days was devoted to developing and considering this proposal, which works out to a cost of about \$1,500. (I estimate that the average per diem faculty cost in Political Science, including fringe benefits, is currently \$423.)

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

Goals

Political Science constitutes a core liberal arts major that is of special interest to students interested in pursuing careers in government service, publically active nonprofit sector, teaching, and law. The emphasis is the curriculum is on developing basic analytic skills in the context of governmental affairs, international relations, and public policy. The goals of the major can be summarized as follows:

1. To acquaint students with the broad range of foci and skills for political analysis. For curricular purposes we have divided our courses into four substantive areas, with students required to take at least one course from each area:

- a. Political theory and philosophy
- b. American government and politics
- c. Comparative (non-American) government and politics
- d. International relations

2. To provide students with skills in critical and analytic thinking to understand the complexity of issues in one or more areas of political life (broadly defined). This involves the following subcomponents:

- a. An ability to frame questions about government and politics.
- b. An ability to identify sources of information available to provide possible answers to those questions.
- c. An ability to evaluate evidence in support or opposition to the possible answers.
- d. An understanding of the inherent uncertainty and regarding answers to most of the issues related to government and political life.

Method of Assessment

The nature of the above goals preclude assessment based on any type of traditional testing modality. In principle, if a large proportion of our undergraduate majors took a small, identifiable set of capstone courses, we could build into those courses some vehicle that would serve a partial assessment purpose; to date, our efforts to get significant numbers of seniors into such courses has not been successful. However, even if we had such courses, an assessment based entirely on feedback from and/or evaluation of students at the end of the college career would provide at best a partial picture of our success in achieving the goals outlined above.

For both of these reasons, we propose to use a survey-based approach to the assessment. Specifically, we propose to do a mail survey of alumni. Our initial target will be to get 100

responses from alumni who are approximately one, three, six, and ten years post-graduation; after the initial data collection, we will repeat the survey every two years, each year targeting two of the four sets of alumni (i.e., one and six years out one biennium and then three and ten years out the next). We have developed a tentative survey instrument which we have attached.

Members of our Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC) will design a coding system for analyzing the responses to the survey. We will employ a graduate student paid on an hourly basis to carry out the actual analysis which will be reported to the UPC (as well as handling the survey process itself).

We estimate that the out-of-pocket cost of the initial assessment survey will be on the order of \$3,000-\$5,000 (includes xeroxing, two-way postage, mailing preparation, and analysis). We further estimate that faculty members will spend the equivalent of approximately 20 person-days (including designing the final instrument, designing coding schemes, committee meeting time, drafting reports, full faculty consideration); we estimate the value of the faculty time involved as about \$8,500. Thus, the total real cost of the initial round of assessment of the undergraduate major would be something between \$11,500 and \$13,500.

Feedback Mechanism

The Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC) will serve as the key feedback mechanism. Based upon the analysis of the survey responses, the UPC will determine what, if any, adjustments the Department might want to make to the undergraduate program for majors in Political Science. In addition, the UPC will prepare a short narrative report summarizing the results of the survey. The UPC's summary and recommendation will go to the Department Faculty for discussion and action.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument will be largely open-ended, but will also include specific information on year of graduation, current employment, postgraduate education, and gender. The preliminary set of open-ended questions follows (we will conduct a small scale pretest before implementing the actual assessment program):

1. Has your experience as a political science major helped you to understand the political world around you? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is the case?
2. If you had to research a political issue today, how would you do it? What resources would you use?
3. What do you see as the general normative issues in contemporary political discourse?

What are the specific normative issues regarding a policy issue that you are particularly interested in (please identify the policy area)?

4. In that same policy area, what are the central uncertainties, complexities and ambiguities?
5. How do you see yourself as making choices among candidates in partisan elections? Nonpartisan elections?
6. In what ways do you see domestic U.S. politics as being linked to politics in other countries?
7. In what ways do you use your experience as a political science major in your current work? Which specific courses or experiences are most important? Are there any specific skills that you learned that you find particularly useful?
8. In retrospect, are there things that you think should have been included in your education as a political science major which were missing? Why were they missing?
9. If you had it to do again, what would you have done differently as a political science major?
10. If you could change one thing about the Department of Political Science and its courses, what would it be?

GRADUATE PROGRAM

Introduction

At one time, the Political Science Department had two distinct missions in graduate education, one oriented to training academicians and one oriented to preparing people for government service in administrative and policy positions. The latter has formally shifted to the La Follette Institute, but many of our faculty are major contributors to the La Follette program. As it turns out, a number of our graduates, both those completing a Ph.D. and those who leave with a Masters, pursue careers in government service. Our program is designed primarily to train academicians; however, our assessment plan includes some attention to the contribution of the training we provide to the careers to those who do not go into academia.

Goals

Our goals in graduate education can be simply described as training first rate scholars and teachers of political science. This involves immersing our students in the core literatures of the discipline, training them in the methods of research used by political scientists, mentoring them in the initial research experiences, and, to the degree possible within constraints imposed by the University employment policies, providing them with opportunities to teach in a supervised setting.

Method of Assessment

Political Science is one of the disciplines which is the subject of periodic rankings of departments and graduate programs. These rankings are primarily reputational (i.e., they are based on the departments' reputation among scholars in the discipline). For many years, our graduate program has stood among the top ten departments in terms of effectiveness based on these ratings. Presumably, our program's reputation reflects a combination of the quality of the faculty and the quality of our graduates with whom other scholars interact. These ratings thus provide one form of periodic assessment of our graduate program, but one that focuses on academic and scholarly accomplishments of the graduates of the program.

We propose to supplement the reputational assessment by collecting information on the post-degree careers and accomplishments of our former students. We have identified three distinct groups of students from whom we will seek assessment information:

1. Those completing their Ph.D.'s and holding positions in an academic setting.
2. Those completing their Ph.D.'s and holding positions outside an academic setting.
3. Those leaving our program after two or more years without a Ph.D.

We do not propose to try to assess the effectiveness of our program for the fourth logical group, those leaving our program after less than two years. For the period we will be

looking at, completing two years of graduate work would typically bring students to the threshold of a first prelim, and thus a reasonable level of competence in at least one subfield of the discipline (along with basic training in methods for many students). We omit students who did progress to at least this level because we have not tried to design our program to service such students, and we believe that most of these students left the program for personal reasons (e.g., "significant others" in distant locations, realization that their interests in practical politics was not the same as political science, etc.).

We will identify students in each of the three groups listed above who completed or left our program five, ten, and fifteen years ago. (It may be a bit more problematic to identify students who left without a Ph.D., both because there is often ambiguity as to when students dropped out, particularly those who left as ABDs, and because it is less likely that we can obtain addresses for such students.) We will then contact the members of each group and request information on their job histories, publications, and other professional accomplishments. For those in academic positions, we should be able to obtain most of the desired information from their curriculum vita. For the others, we will provide a specific request for the information we need, along with a request that they provide us with a brief statement reflecting on the ways they have found their graduate training useful during their careers. We will ask all of those who completed their Ph.D.s in what ways our program might have been more effective in serving their career needs; for those who left without Ph.D.s, we will ask for information on why they left the program, and what might have encouraged them to complete their graduate educations.

We estimate the out-of-pocket cost of this assessment process will be on the order of \$1,000 to \$1,500 (xeroxing, preparing mailings, two-way postage, etc.). We further estimate that faculty members will spend the equivalent of approximately 15 person-days (reviewing the material received, committee meeting time, drafting reports, full faculty consideration); we estimate the value of the faculty time involved as about \$6,500. Thus, the total real cost of the initial round of assessment of the Graduate Program would be something between \$7,500 and \$8,000.

Feedback Mechanism

The Graduate Program Committee will (GPC) will serve as the feedback mechanism. Members of the GPC will examine the responses to our informational requests and determine what, if any, adjustments the Department might want to make to our graduate program. In addition, the GPC will prepare a short narrative report summarizing the findings of the assessment. The GPC's summary and recommendations will go to the Department Faculty for discussion and action.