

**College of Arts and Letters
Political Science
Program Review
February 20-21, 2020**

Review Team

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OVERVIEW

On February 20-21, 2020, the team of Dr. Robert Howard, Dr. Mack Shelley, and Dr. Evonne Rezler reviewed FAU's Department of Political Science (PS) and its academic programs, in the College of Arts and Letters at FAU. Dr. Aimee Aries, Associate Dean of Research and Creative Achievement, College of Arts and Letters, provided the reviewers with a self-study and associated documentation for its programs. A detailed itinerary was provided, and Department Chair Dr. Kevin Wagner and his faculty together with the Department's Program Assistant Jacqueline Nichols provided exemplary logistical support. During the site visit the review team met with:

- Russell Ivy, Senior Associate Provost for Programs and Assessment
- Michael Horswell, Dean, College of Arts and Letters
- Karin Scarpinato, Senior Associate Vice President for Research
- Kevin Wagner, Chair, Department of Political Science
- Faculty: Angela Nichols, Assistant Professor; Steven Roper, Professor; Renat Shaykhutdinov, Associate Professor; Annette LaRocco, Assistant Professor; Robert Rabil, Professor; Marshall DeRosa, Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies; Rebecca LeMoine, Assistant Professor; Timothy Lenz, Professor; Dukhong Kim, Associate Professor; Mehmet Gurses, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies; Eric Prier, Professor and Senior Research Associate at FAU Public Procurement; and Jeffery Morton, Professor.
- Graduate and undergraduate students
- Edward Pratt, Dean, Undergraduate Studies (via a WebEx interview on 3-4-2020)

The findings below are based on a review of the self-study document, and the information shared by faculty, students, and administrators during the February 20th and 21st, 2020 site visit, and an interview with Dean Pratt on March 4th 2020.

Strengths of the Department

The Department of Political Science at Florida Atlantic University has several strengths. The department appears to be well regarded by the administration of both the college and the university as a high-performing, productive, and strongly functional part of the college and the university. The faculty and the administrative representatives all spoke of the strong leadership provided by the Chair, Kevin Wagner. It is an extremely collegial, warm, and welcoming department that creates a nurturing environment for young faculty, and allows all faculty to concentrate on teaching and research. The level of collegiality was quite noticeable to the review team, and it seems to be exceptional compared to other departments in the university and in comparison to other political science departments at other colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The department is extremely dedicated to teaching as demonstrated through discussions with the faculty, measurable student outcomes, and the glowing assessments by political science undergraduate majors and graduate students. The four-year FTIC graduation rate, the median wages of graduates, the employment rate within a year of graduation, and the percentage of degrees awarded without excess hours are all well above the college average. For example, in the past three years the four-year FTIC graduation rate has averaged 46.1%, well above the college average of 42.0%, and university average of 37.1%. The department is always seeking innovations in teaching by fostering a practical program of instruction through the incorporation of a Model UN program and campaign internships, as well as being in the forefront, along with other departments, of designing a Masters-level program in Data Science.

Discussions with undergraduate majors and graduate students reinforce this creativity and these data. We spoke with a cross section of students, including both undergraduate majors and graduate students. Of the undergraduate majors some were traditional students, starting right after high school, while others were non-traditional, coming back to school after some time in the workforce. Some became political science majors as soon as possible after enrolling, while others were formerly majoring in other departments and disciplines, including computer science. All of the undergraduates spoke of the accessibility, dedication, and support of the faculty, while also noting the intellectual rigor and difficulty of the classes and the material. They also told of the individual attention and care they received from their professors in the department. In addition, they spoke very strongly about the relevancy of their political science degrees. Most mentioned that they thought the degree would be helpful in getting a job, and that they were well prepared for the workforce. The students noted that the professors emphasized both the theoretical and practical aspects of a political science education. The graduate students also spoke of the dedication of the faculty, and the opportunity to learn concrete teaching and research skills.

In meeting with the faculty, the reviewers were impressed with the conscientiousness with which they spoke of their commitment to their students, and the effort they put forth in their classrooms. In thinking about growth and additional lines for the department, the initial response of the faculty was to emphasize teaching over research needs.

This is not to say that the department does not have a strong research record and agenda. The faculty take research very seriously and are justifiably proud of their productivity. Between 2016 and 2018 the faculty published five books, 27 peer reviewed publications, 24 other publications, and attended

almost 60 conferences. For 14 full time tenured or tenure track faculty that have a 3 – 2 teaching load, that productivity would match up well with many larger departments in research universities with 2 – 2 teaching loads.

The department fits in well with the vision, mission, and values of Florida Atlantic University. The department is clearly promoting and providing innovation in teaching and outstanding research, and has significant public engagement through Professor Morton's Leon Charney Diplomacy program and the engagement of several faculty with the lifelong learning series. Through these programs the department contributes to the values of the university by promoting lifelong learning, and plays a vital role in the life of the surrounding community.

Finally, as shown through the key performance indicator metrics, and through the comments of the students, the department clearly contributes to preparing students to fulfill productive destinies in the workplace and in society through its emphasis on broader practical skills. Political Science majors graduate with basic data analysis training, and with the development of the Masters in Data Science students will have the necessary skill set to deal with all the issues of the 21st century.

Challenges/Threats Faced by the Department

Most of the challenges and threats faced by the department are external. These include, but are not limited to, the university's location in an expensive area, changing student population, an increasing emphasis on STEM education at the institution, the transition in the nature and character of the university, challenges of satellite campuses, and lack of sufficient female and minority representation in the faculty. We will assess each of these in order.

Cost: Almost all of the faculty mentioned the high cost of living with a university located in the City of Boca Raton and Palm Beach County. Housing, transportation, and other costs are much higher than both the Florida and national averages, making it difficult for younger faculty to purchase housing. In addition, as the department's self-study notes, the department cannot offer salaries competitive with peer and aspirational institutions. The starting salary for instructors is \$40,000 and it is \$60,000 for tenure track faculty. That is significantly lower than other peer institutions. Thus, despite the obvious attractions of an excellent university and department that are located in a warm weather, culturally diverse area, the department has difficulty attracting and retaining high-performing faculty. In the long-term, this will adversely impact the ability of the department to attract a more diverse faculty.

The difficulty with cost of living is not limited to younger, untenured faculty. Several of the more senior faculty complained of the salary structure, and that there are both compression and inversion issues in salary.

Student population: While the department has seen an increase in the number of students taking political science classes, the number of majors has declined. There has been a decline in the number and percentage of students attending law school since the great recession. Since political science often draws majors from those interested in attending law school, this is another external force behind the decline in majors.

System and university emphasis on STEM: While the university values all types of education, the Strategic Plan's emphasis on Pillars and Platforms means that science and technology will command significant resources from the university. Political Science faculty are actively exploring ways that they may align themselves within the pillars and platforms through curriculum changes and innovations such as the Masters in Data Science, and through exploration of federal funding. Federal funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation are learning to recognize the key role of the social sciences and humanities in incorporating expertise related to the broader impacts and the potential policy implications in the United States and globally of STEM research initiatives. Political Science could be in a good position to contribute in these and other aspects of the pillars and platforms.

University Transition: The university is transitioning in its mission and values. Its leadership clearly wants to move the institution from the status of a regional university to that of a national university and is prepared to invest resources to promote this transition. There is an expectation that faculty will work to obtain revenue-generating grants to help achieve this goal and national prominence. There are inherent difficulties within the discipline of political science that limits its ability to work towards this transition. First, the most prominent revenue-generating federal agencies for social science, such as the National Science Foundation and the Department of Defense Minerva program, are continually threatened with significant cuts or elimination by various members of Congress or the executive branch. Second, these grants are always going to be for much smaller numbers of research dollars than what is available in the natural and computation sciences. Finally, there are structural issues. Currently the Division of Research at FAU operates under a self-sustaining model, and thus receives all of its funding through faculty grant generation. Because of this limitation it returns a much smaller percentage of the overhead revenue-generating portion to the faculty and sponsoring department than do other peer and aspirational institutions. This reduces the incentive of faculty, particularly in the social sciences, to generate external grants.

Satellite campuses: Two full-time faculty and the current untenured faculty who are required to teach one course per academic year staff the Davie Campus. This is about 27 miles from the main campus and, depending on traffic, approximately 45 minutes to an hour drive. While both faculty who teach at this campus full-time emphasized that they do not feel isolated or separated from the department, this combination of distance and travel time does lessen the opportunities for some collaborative efforts. In addition, since new faculty members must teach one course a year in Davie, this means that the three tenure-track women in the department are the only members of the Boca Raton campus who teach and travel to the satellite campus. This gives the appearance of appropriateness for a department and university committed to diversity and inclusion.

Lack of minority and women faculty particularly at the senior faculty level: Currently there are only three full-time tenure-track women in the department, and all three are at a relatively junior Assistant Professor level. While one woman, Aimee Arias, is an Associate Professor, she is currently an Associate Dean for Research and not a full-time member of the Department. One other woman, Kristin Shockley, is a Senior Instructor. The rest of the department are men and all of the Full Professors are male. There are currently no African American, nor Latinx faculty.

Progress on Recommendations from Previous Program Review

The previous Academic Program Review was conducted in 2013. In general, the Department has made good progress toward responding to the recommendations of that review and to fulfilling their objectives regarding personnel, curriculum, and outreach.

Personnel: Dr. Annette LaRocco and Dr. Angela Nichols were hired as Assistant Professors to fill the requested faculty replacement positions. LaRocco specializes in African politics and conservation policy, and Nichols focuses on human rights. The three requested new Graduate Teaching Assistant positions were obtained. A faculty member at the Davie campus was reassigned to the Boca Raton campus. The number of tenured and tenure-earning faculty has remained steady as has the number of Instructors, instead there has been an increase in the numbers of Adjuncts and Graduate Teaching Assistants.

Curriculum and Students: In response to the department faculty members' request to play a role in the doctoral program of the College of Arts and Letters, they now have increased access through the Ph.D. track in Social Science. Large-enrollment classes were added to the department's course offerings. The department's review of requirements for the Political Science major resulted in the addition of Honors Introduction to World Politics and effectuated a better balance between courses in American Politics and those in International Relations and Comparative Politics. The department revised its Honors in the Major program. Undergraduate enrollment has increased, graduate enrollment is static, and the numbers of both undergraduate and graduate majors have slightly declined. Average undergraduate class size has declined modestly, while mean graduate course enrollment has changed only slightly. The number of undergraduate courses offered has increased noticeably, while the number of graduate courses has been fairly stable with a slight increase. The number of degrees awarded has fluctuated in a narrow range, and has not changed appreciably.

Outreach: Some progress was made regarding recommendations to redesign and update its webpage and to add a newsletter.

On balance, the Department appears to have been successful in responding to recommendations from the previous external review and does a highly commendable job in fulfilling its mission in times of resource constraints.

Recommendations Concerning Program Goals Discussed in Self-Study and Questions for Review Team

Each threat, of course, provides an opportunity. The department recognizes this and notes in its self-study that the Program Goals of the Political Science Department support the University's goals and strategic plan. Specifically, the department seeks to enrich the education experience of its students, inspire research, and foster community engagement. In support of these goals the department has begun an engagement in the Writing Enrichment Curriculum (WEC), a new Political Communication Lab, and the aforementioned Masters in Data Science.

In this section we make our *recommendations* concerning these program goals through the

questions that the department also has asked of the review team. They are:

1. How can the department acquire the necessary resources to address its gender and ethnicity imbalance?
2. At a time when the Provost's office is encouraging units to engage in revenue-generating endeavors, what opportunities can the department explore?
3. How might the department attract more majors given the national trend towards STEM majors?

The gender and ethnicity imbalance is closely associated with the department's aspirations to inspire research and support the strategic plan's emphasis on pillars and platforms. ***We recommend that the department focus on hiring additional new faculty in research areas likely to enhance the research reputation of the department, and in areas likely to attract minority and female candidates and/or fit within the pillars and platforms of the strategic plan.***

Several research areas would help, but ***we recommend that the department hires are all skilled in quantitative methodology and can teach graduate-level courses in methodology and data analysis.*** Currently three members of the department have high-level quantitative data skills. That is less than most of the aspirational and peer research departments in Political Science and insufficient to train the next generation of graduate students, particularly when the department is at the forefront of the Masters in Data Science.

The department can hire a methodologist who specializes in substantive areas that would enhance FAU's Pillars and Platforms and increase diversity. For example, the department can seek to hire someone who researches policy questions either in health care or the environment – both specific areas of the pillars. ***The department can also seek to hire someone who specializes in identity politics with these data skills.*** Identity politics is an emerging and important area of the discipline and a research area that has a significant number of female and minority scholars and graduate students. Usually identity politics scholars are associated with political behavior or institutions. Since the department has teaching and research needs in American institutions, particularly Congress, a scholar in identity politics would also support teaching and research in these areas.

We encourage the department to seek a tenure track junior hire and a senior tenured line at the Associate Professor level. That line could be specifically geared towards the hiring of a female or minority candidate. This would immediately address the gender and minority imbalance of junior and senior faculty in the department.

As for the second question, engaging in grant writing for revenue generating grants is challenging but more can be done to encourage the faculty to engage in such pursuits. While not necessary for promotion and tenure, it will generate revenue for the department and the investigator on the grant and greatly enhance the reputation of the department and the individual scholar. In short, it is a necessary condition for movement towards aspirational status.

We note that the department already rates the writing and submission of external grants as one of the possible requirements for a rating of "outstanding" in the Annual Review process. We encourage this and encourage the department to do more. ***The department could encourage collaborative research grants with scholars at other universities and it could work with the college to provide***

course release time for scholars actively engaged in grant writing for a major federal agency grant. In the alternative the department could consider allowing a faculty grant applicant to teach an online course, to give faculty more flexibility with respect to instructional time. ***Another avenue is to work with the Research Division to encourage grant writing workshops and bring in scholars from other universities to give talks on grant generation.***

In discussing the final question, the review team notes that although the numbers of majors in political science has declined, the number of students taking courses has increased. This indicates that political science courses remain very popular with the students. The goal is to move these students from just taking courses to becoming majors.

The department has teaching strengths that could encourage this movement. First, they have several scholars who teach and research in public law. Dr. Wagner has a law degree, and Dr. Lenz has engaged in significant teaching and research in this area. Dr. Roper teaches International Law. Many students who go on to law school are political science majors. We note that several of the undergraduate and graduate students that we met were considering applying to law school. ***We encourage the department to consider offering a major with a concentration in pre-law.*** We note that many political science and other social science and humanities departments (e.g., history, philosophy, sociology) across the country offer a concentration in pre-law to their majors. Most use this as a tool to attract students to major in political science. We encourage the department to consider this option.

The use of fully online learning courses is another way for the department to attract students. These courses work particularly well with the larger introductory courses in American Politics and Global Issues. We encourage the department to consider this option.

Other Recommendations

We noted earlier the difficulty of traveling between Boca Raton and the Davie Campus and how this burden was distributed unequally between junior and senior faculty and between genders. The commuting burden falls on the three female untenured faculty members. In discussions with the Provost's and Dean's offices, we make several recommendations.

First, we encourage the department to consider using long-distance technology learning tools. The Senior Associate Provost informed the review team that the technology exists on both campuses to allow video teaching of any course through several different university AV platforms. In turn this would allow the Davie Campus students a full range of political science courses.

Second, as we have discussed, the faculty should also consider utilizing fully online learning courses. Several faculty already use online learning as part of a hybrid teaching environment so this would not be a major disruption in the learning environment. This is another way to ease the commuting burden across campuses.

Finally, we encourage the department to ask the University and College for some upgrades in the classrooms, hallways, and offices. Several of the students and faculty noted the older and more

deteriorated condition of these in the building and department, especially as compared to other buildings and even departments sharing the same floor. We encourage the painting of the offices, hallways, and classrooms in a more modern, clean color and consider replacing the very old flooring with a more modern, safe design.