

**Approved by Senate: February 8, 2012**

**Final Assessment Report  
Academic Review**

**Political Science**

**A. Summary**

1. The Department's Self Study was considered and approved by the Academic Review Committee of Senate on February 5, 2011.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Jeremy Rayner (University of Saskatchewan) and Francesca Seale (Concordia University), and an internal reviewer, Michael Ripmeester (Geography).
3. The site visit occurred on March 30 – April 1, 2011.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received on May 12, 2011.
5. The Department's response was provided on June 13, 2011.
6. The decanal response was received from Dean Tom Dunk on September 23, 2011.

The academic programs offered by the Department, which were examined as part of the review included:

BA in Political Science  
Public Administration Co-op  
Certificate in Public Administration  
Certificate in Public Law

This is one of the first reviews conducted entirely under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on May 16, 2010.

## **B. Strengths of the Program**

The Reviewers state:

Our summary assessment is that the Political Science Department is an effective, respected and highly collegial unit. Without exception, the faculty members with whom we spoke provided evidence of a deep commitment to excellence in undergraduate teaching and to “the centrality of the student experience” described in Brock’s value statement. Evidence on learning outcomes from the self study document and from students themselves generally supports this impression.

They then go on to provide “a number of recommendations for relatively minor changes.”

Subsequently, the reviewers identify an outcome category of “B” and go on to say:

The Department of Political Science achieves provincially-recognized excellence in undergraduate education with a curriculum that is sufficiently flexible, broad, and diverse to enable students to tailor their educational experience to their particular interests and background. The seminar system remains a defining feature of the program and the Department’s faculty is impressive in terms of their collegiality and commitment to teaching and research. The Department has developed several areas of strength, including public policy and administration, political theory and public law. With appropriate resources and well-defined strategic priorities in hiring and curriculum development, the Department is well-placed to continue to build on its strengths while responding to new challenges and opportunities.

## C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

The reviewers provided nine discrete recommendations. These are considered as follows:

**1. A significant factor in the credibility of the department within the larger political science community and a key component of its success in attracting undergraduate students is its ability to offer a range of courses across the recognized fields of the discipline. Pending retirements threaten that ability. The department is encouraged to develop an explicit long-term plan to replace retiring faculty in an orderly way that preserves the current scope and balance between the fields and to seek a commitment from the administration to support the plan.**

The Department responded as follows:

The department accepts this recommendation and will continue to consult with the Dean of Social Sciences about securing replacements for all retiring faculty members. As the reviewers suggest, the credibility of the department and its undergraduate program depends on its ability to offer a range of courses in all five subfields of political science. However, over the next couple of years, the department is facing at least five faculty retirements (almost one-third of its faculty complement) and every subfield will be affected. The department agrees with the reviewers that replacing all of these retirements is imperative to maintaining the current strength of the undergraduate program and it will continue to pursue this. The department also welcomes the reviewers' suggestion that it engage in a planning exercise to prioritize its tenure-track hiring needs. Accordingly, it will engage in such a planning exercise within the next twelve months, in advance of the first wave of faculty retirements in July 2012.

Dean Dunk responded:

The comments of the reviewers on the importance of fields and the department's thoughtful response to them is appreciated. In an ideal world perhaps every retirement would be replaced with an individual who possesses the same specialities as her/his predecessor. I say perhaps because disciplines evolve and fields or areas once thought central to a discipline may fall by the wayside while other new areas develop. Thus, "preserving the current scope and balance between fields" may be appropriate although it seems to presume a stability in Political Science that is probably not found in many other disciplines. Moreover, the department's current scope and balance in practice is that each of the five fields must have a minimum of three faculty members, thus assuming a minimum full-time faculty complement of 15. The logic behind the assumption that there must be three faculty members per field is derived from the OCGS requirements for the Graduate program, not a specific relationship between undergraduate student interest and the fields. Since undergraduate students do not officially enrol in the fields – they are required to take a number of courses in each of the fields – it is impossible to determine the relationship between program structure and enrolments. The reviewers state that 'International Relations, Political Theory and Public Policy and Administration are among the most popular sub-fields among

the students' (p.6), although how this was determined is not made clear. They also state 'The overall credibility of a political science department is often judged by its ability to offer courses in all the major subfields ... For students, balance is achieved by requiring students to take courses from at least three subfields...' (p.4). How this relates to the necessity of maintaining at least three faculty members in each of five fields is not clear. Moreover, it is impossible for a Dean to commit 15 full-time faculty members to Political Science in perpetuity without considering issues such as enrolment, competing program demands, and the budget realities within which he/she must operate.

At the moment, I have approved advertisements for two replacement positions in political science and another position cross-listed with labour studies. Portions of the Faculty of Social Sciences' budget proposal for 2011-12 were rejected by the Budget Committee and the Faculty is yet to find approximately [\$]400,000 in savings in addition to whatever the budget exercise of 2012-13 may require. I have also considered competing demands from other programs and enrolment trends. In other words, there are budget realities that must be considered.

Let me emphasize that none of my comments are intended to suggest that I do not share the reviewers' high opinion of the undergraduate program in political science at Brock. It has been a core department in social sciences for many years and will continue to be. Some of the university's most productive researchers and well-known scholars have been or currently are members of the Department. The undergraduate program has provided a solid basis for one of the oldest and most successful graduate programs at the university. Maintaining the strength of the Political Science program is very important for achieving many of the university's strategic goals in undergraduate and graduate studies, research, and community engagement. Unfortunately, it is impossible at this moment to promise any more than I have above. As some other recommendations make clear the current arrangement of courses is not necessarily making the best use of the department's resources.

ARC considers that this recommendation has been accepted in that the Department and the Dean are committed to developing a prioritized list of required appointments. This agreed list would then be implemented (by the Provost and the Dean) to the extent that the availability of resources will allow.

#### **Implementation Plan (First Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Dean and Provost/VP, Academic
Responsible for resources:	Provost/VP, Academic
Responsible for implementation:	Dean and Department Chair
Timeline:	Dean to report by December, 2012.

**2. The effectiveness of the seminar system is clearly evident in the department's learning outcomes and a departmental culture of undergraduate seminar teaching would be very difficult to recreate once lost. Dropping seminars entirely should not be considered as a way of freeing resources to maintain breadth in the undergraduate program and the department should not be penalized for its commitment to the seminar system as a signature component of undergraduate education at Brock. Nonetheless, it may not be necessary to offer seminars in all years and the Department is encouraged to reconsider the contribution of seminars to learning outcomes in different years of the undergraduate program.**

The Department responded:

[We] remain committed to the preservation of the seminar system in the undergraduate program. It is crucial to the achievement of learning outcomes in the undergraduate program and it provides an important source of employment income for students in the graduate program. However, the faculty recognize the need to re-evaluate the pedagogical role of seminars in their courses and some may experiment with dropping seminars, on these grounds.

The Dean responded:

The Department's commitment to the seminar system is very clear. Despite the comment above about the effectiveness of the seminar system, the reviewers' report actually notes both student satisfaction and student dissatisfaction with the seminar experience. For example, 'While many of the students [n=7] spoke highly of the seminar experience, several raised concerns ....' Indeed, reliable data regarding the effectiveness as a learning tool and student satisfaction with the current seminar system is not available.

That small group learning experiences are very important parts of a positive learning environment is well established in terms of the pedagogical literature. That this means it must always be a part of every class and that it must always be done the way it has been done at Brock for optimum learning and student experience is not established. I welcome the faculty's willingness to re-evaluate the pedagogical role of seminars in their courses. There are various ways of delivering small group learning experiences. Dropping seminars in their current form does not necessarily mean there will be no such elements in a course.

I do not understand the reviewer's comment that the 'department should not be penalized for its commitment to the seminar system.' I have no idea what they are referring to. No unit in the Faculty has ever been penalized because they are committed to seminars. As my comments above suggest, I would like to broaden the discussion of small group learning experiences in the Faculty so that it is not solely focused on the false Manichean dichotomy between seminars in their current form or no small group learning experiences. This is particularly important in a period of budget constraint.

ARC considers that the core recommendation, that there be a reconsideration of the “the contribution of seminars to learning outcomes in different years of the under-graduate program” has been accepted by the Department. However, as the Dean’s response makes clear, this is an issue which transcends departmental (and Faculty) boundaries. It is an issue which Senate needs to address (probably through the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning Policy). Thus, ARC requests that the Chair of Senate request that the Committee undertake a review of appropriate and effective small group learning experiences.

**Implementation Plan (First Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Senate
Responsible for resources:	Chair of Senate
Responsible for implementation:	Chair of Senate
Timeline:	Chair of Senate to report by December, 2012.

**3. The co-op program in public administration has proved very successful, both in terms of reported learning outcomes and attracting new students. While the extension of the co-op program to other political science students has not been without difficulty, consideration of further expansion of this program is recommended if resources can be found to develop new and relevant placements. The Department should be prepared to tolerate a certain level of dissatisfaction amongst students about the availability of placements and should work with the co-op office to develop realistic expectations about the availability and relevance of placements among students. Moreover, the department should designate a faculty member as a co-op liaison officer in order to monitor the progress of students in this program.**

The Department, with the concurrence of Dean Dunk, reports:

The department recognizes the success of the longstanding co-op program in public administration and sees great potential in the more recently introduced co-op program in the other subfields. It will monitor all of the existing co-op programs over the next three to four years to determine if new co-op program opportunities are available. The department also recognizes that it should take a more active role in fostering its co-op programs. Accordingly, the mandate of the existing Co-op Advisor position will be expanded to involve more coordination with the Co-op Office, to involve more monitoring of student progress, and to develop more collegiality amongst students in the co-op programs. Steps in this direction have already been taken over the last couple of years, but these efforts will be accelerated in short order.

ARC considers that this recommendation has been accepted and is in the process of being implemented.

#### **Implementation Plan (Second Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department and Co-op Office
Responsible for resources:	Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department Chair and Co-op Office
Timeline:	Chair report by December, 2013.

**4. The delivery of the undergraduate program is at present unnecessarily complicated by different approaches to the use of prerequisites in each of the subfields. In this respect, the recent review and changes made in the Public Administration stream are exemplary and it is recommended that the other subfields conduct a review on similar principles. At the very least, the Department is encouraged to use second year foundational survey courses as prerequisites for upper year courses in each of the sub-fields.**

The Department, again with the agreement of Dean Dunk, reports that:

To some extent, the department has already acted on this recommendation through changes in curriculum requirements that are included in the 2011-12 course calendar. In the Canadian politics subfield, POLI 2F12 has been designated as 'strongly recommended' for a number of upper-year Canadian politics courses and, similarly, in the comparative politics subfield, POLI 2F30 has been designated as 'strongly recommended' for a number of upper-year comparative politics courses. Most of the subfields recognize the need for further curriculum review along the lines recommended by the external reviewers. However, they also feel that it is prudent to postpone these curriculum reviews until the uncertainty over retirement replacements is resolved. New faculty coming into the undergraduate program will have teaching strengths and specializations that must be reflected in curriculum design, particularly in upper year course offerings. Faculty replacements were a significant factor driving curriculum change in the public policy and administration subfield, referred to by the reviewers as a potential model of curriculum reform, and this will be very important in the other subfields, as well.

ARC considers that the Department has accepted this recommendation in that further curriculum review will be undertaken.

**Implementation Plan (Second Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department Chair
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Chair to report by December, 2013.

**5. Half year introductory courses appear to have been developed in an ad hoc fashion largely as a defence against the recruiting efforts of other departments and even other fields within the Political Science department itself. The Department should undertake a series of experiments involving the temporary discontinuance of one or more of these courses to observe the effect on enrolment and with a view to phasing out these courses in the long run. The Department may also want to consider offering these theme-oriented half credit courses on-line.**

The Departmental response:

The department accepts this recommendation and is taking steps in this direction. First, as suggested by the reviewers, the department will put some of its first-year, half-credit courses on hiatus to determine what impact this may have on enrolments. The first course to be put on hiatus is POLI 1P98 starting next year and others will follow. POLI 1P91 has not been offered on two occasions in the past several years, and the department did see a drop in the number of students entering the Public Law Concentration. Second, the department plans to offer no more than two first-year, half-credit courses in any academic year. This will allow it to maintain some of the more popular and effective first-year, half-credit courses without allocating an undue amount of faculty resources to them. Third, the department will review its curriculum to eliminate some first-year, half-credit courses that are no longer taught and can be taken off the books. All of this said, the department is concerned about the budgetary and staffing implications should we find that cutting half-credit introductory courses does lower our enrolments in higher-level POLI courses or number of POLI majors; in other words, that we would find ourselves in a vicious cycle, where course reductions for budgetary reasons lead to long-term cuts to our faculty complement and program size. Finally, the department is intrigued by the possibility of offering online courses, but would like to investigate further to determine whether there are any real cost-savings or other benefits to be gained.

The Dean's Response

I agree with both the recommendation of the reviewers and the Department response including the steps it is currently taking in this direction. However, budget issues may drive the discontinuation of first-half courses more quickly than the Department would like. The reality is that the Faculty of Social Sciences is now in a position where it is difficult to achieve the required budget reductions without some rather dramatic actions. The enrolment consequences of the reduction of first year course options is indeed an open question, however, the elimination of some or all of the first-year half courses may free up resources for deployment at more senior levels. It should be noted that Political Science is the only department in the Faculty of Social Sciences that offers more than a 1F90 course in first year, with the recent exception of the new service learning course

in Sociology (and there is a UPC submission coming forward that proposes re-assigning this course to second-year).

With regard to online courses, I am not certain that replacing the current introductory half courses with online courses would be the best use of resources. However, I support the development of alternative modes of course delivery and the Dean's Office will support to the extent it can the department's desire to investigate these possibilities.

ARC considers that this recommendation (a series of "experiments") has been accepted and is in the process of being implemented.

**Implementation Plan (Second Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department Chair
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Chair to report by December, 2013.

**6. A mandatory research methods course is a common feature of political science undergraduate programs in Canadian universities. We therefore recommend that the Department offer a mandatory research methods course or courses that would cover qualitative and quantitative research methods.**

According to the Department (with the support of the Dean):

This recommendation seems to be based on a misconception of the undergraduate program's research methods requirements. The department already requires that Pass and Honours students complete a mandatory, half-credit research methods course covering introductory quantitative and qualitative research methods (POLI 2P80). In addition, Honours students are already required to complete more advanced and detailed instruction in either quantitative research methods (POLI 3P91) or qualitative research methods (POLI 3P92). These facts about the program structure were stated on two occasions earlier in the review, but seem to have been overlooked in recommendation #6.

ARC considers that this recommendation has been accepted and implemented.

#### **Implementation Plan**

ARC notes that the Department has implemented the recommendation and no further action is required at this time.

**7. The department currently has a somewhat laissez faire attitude towards the development of identity and community spirit amongst its undergraduate students. While fully recognizing the need for undergraduate identity to be built from the bottom up, some consideration should be given to providing dedicated space for undergraduate students to meet in the vicinity of the department itself and a junior faculty member assigned to provide support and guidance to an undergraduate political science society (which has apparently fallen into abeyance).**

The Department, with the support of Dean Dunk, reports that:

The department accepts this recommendation. It will petition to have Plaza 312 – a space adjacent to the department which often lies unused – designated as a new undergraduate student lounge. Furthermore, in the upcoming academic year, the department will try to resurrect the Brock University Political Science Students Association (BUPSSA) and will assign it a designated faculty liaison.

ARC considers that this recommendation (the development of identity and community spirit) has been accepted and is in the process of being implemented.

**Implementation Plan (Second Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department Chair
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Chair to report by December, 2013.

**8. While the department has already been active in a number of inter- and transdisciplinary ventures across the faculty and university, the department should recognize the advantages inherent in the university's commitment to build "transdisciplinary spaces" and consider the possibilities of protecting the subfields and growing the department through further joint appointments.**

The Department states that:

The department has a strong track record of participation in trans-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary initiatives, such as the Honours BA in International Political Economy, the Humanities Ph.D. program, the Liberal Arts program, the Labour Studies program, the Niagara Community Observatory, and the Brock Environmental Sustainability Research Unit, and will continue to participate in the development of new trans-disciplinary spaces in the university. While the department welcomes the development of new trans-disciplinary spaces, it believes that these spaces should not be introduced at the expense of longstanding and proven programs such as ours. Core programs need to be adequately resourced before embarking on new trans-disciplinary ventures. Accordingly, the department would consider joint appointments as a means of expanding the department beyond its current size but agrees with the reviewers that joint appointments are not an appropriate substitute for retirement replacements.

Dean Dunk, while concurring fully with the Department's response, notes that: "In the current budget situation it is unlikely there will be growth positions in the Faculty in the short run so it is impossible to commit to joint appointments so as to expand the department."

ARC considers that this recommendation (concerning joint appointments) has been accepted and is in the process of being implemented (in conjunction with Recommendation 1), by the Provost and the Dean, to the extent that the availability of resources will allow.

**Implementation Plan (First Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Dean and Provost/VP, Academic
Responsible for resources:	Provost/VP, Academic
Responsible for implementation:	Dean and Department Chair
Timeline:	Dean to report by December, 2012.

**9. Similarly, the department is encouraged to support the university's wish to foster more community involvement, not only through the co-op program, but by building on other innovative ways of delivering programs that are already in place.**

The Department notes that it “will continue to foster more community involvement through its lecture series and its partnerships with regional colleges, as well as through the various public service and media consultation activities of the faculty.” Dean Dunk commends the Department’s involvement and reports that” the Faculty will continue to encourage and support these activities to the extent resources allow.”

ARC considers that this recommendation (on community involvement) has been accepted by the Department and is in the process of being implemented to the extent that the availability of resources will allow.

**Implementation Plan (Second Priority)**

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department Chair
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Chair to report by December, 2013.

**D. Recommendations to be Implemented**

The IQAP requires that ARC “set out and prioritize the recommendations that are selected for implementation.” Using the specific ARC proposals enunciated above, the following priorities are proposed:

First Priority:

Recommendations 1, 2 and 8.

Second Priority

Recommendations 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9.

Implemented Recommendations

Recommendation 6.

**E. Recommendations that Will Not be Implemented**

None.

January 31, 2012

/pb