

Final Assessment Report

Political Science

Graduate and Undergraduate Programs (reviewed 2017/18)

A. Summary

1. The Department's Self Study was considered and approved by the Senate Academic Review Committee on February 6, 2018.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Joanna Everitt (University of New Brunswick) and Marlene Sokolon (Concordia University) and an internal reviewer, Gregory Betts (Brock University).
3. The site visit occurred on March 13-15, 2018.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received on April 17, 2018.
5. The Department's response was received on May 30, 2018.
6. The Senate Graduate Studies Committee response was received on May 16, 2018
7. The Dean of Graduate Studies response from Diane Dupont was received on June 6, 2018.
8. The Dean of Social Sciences response from Ingrid Makus was received on July 3, 2018
9. The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee response was received on September 20, 2018.

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on May 25, 2016.

The academic programs offered by the Department of Political Science which were examined and rated as part of the review were:

Program(s)	Excellent Quality	Good Quality	Good Quality with Concerns	Non-Viable
MA in Political Science	X			
BA (Honours) in Political Science	X			
BA (Honours) Co-op in Political Science		X		
BA (Honours) Co-op in Public Administration		X		
BA (Honours) in International Political Economy	X			
BA with Major in Political Science	X			
BA (Pass) in Political Science	X			
BA (Honours) Combined	X			
BA with Major Combined	X			
BA (Pass) Combined	X			
Minors	X			
Certificate in Public Law	X			
Certificate in Public Administration	X			

B. Strengths of the Program

The reviewers stated that the reviewed programs had several notable strengths including:

- Departmental dedication to students and to their educational experience.
- personalized attention for students and a supportive learning environment, including support for students at risk.
- commitment that the small seminar experience remains a vital and central part of the uniqueness of their program, which is a cornerstone of the Brock mission for student experience.
- a well-established graduate program that provides a broad training in the discipline and good preparation for further graduate work, as evidenced by the larger than usual number of graduates continuing academic work at the PhD level.
- the long-established recruitment of international graduate students from Africa, which also connects the Department to the University strategic initiative of internationalization.
- several faculty members actively engaged in either their research or teaching (or both), in ways that align with strategic initiatives of the University. This appears in areas as such as internationalization, emergent transdisciplinary programs, and sustainability.
- established experiential learning opportunities, such as the Co-op, internship and practicum experience. Several faculty members have also developed class assignment and activities that meet the criteria of experiential learning opportunities, as well as integrate other experiences such as the Model UN.
- creative curriculum revision, especially in first year offerings, such as developing broader thematic courses including Politics and Sports and Political Theory Through the Lens of Literature and Film. In addition, the Department has shown flexibility by introducing half-credit courses in some second-year courses.
- creative thinking and flexibility in responding to lower undergraduate enrollments by undertaking new initiatives such as career nights with alumni, more outreach at student fairs, and development of living learning community experiences. It also has been proactive in attempts to increase its domestic capture rate with new initiatives such as personalized contact with promising applicants and organizing off and on campus social events for prospective students.
- the collegial atmosphere - this is to be commended as is not always the case in university departments and requires longstanding leadership and community willingness to work together.

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

Recommendation #1

Strategize hiring priorities

In its response, the Department stated:

The department is receptive to the idea of hiring new faculty who crosscut traditional subfield boundaries. This recommendation is fundamentally intermeshed with recommendations 2 and 3. It should be pointed out that recent retirements and the move of one of our colleagues to a long-term administrative position will challenge our ability to develop such crosscutting themes.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the reviewers' recommendation that the Department discuss a future hiring strategy that connects to Faculty and University priorities and notes that requests for faculty positions are subject to budgetary processes and approvals within the Faculty and the University as a whole

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

Recommendations #1 and #2 focus upon departmental structure and how to build strength. This is clearly very important both for development of existing MA students and for attracting high quality future MA students. Given current interests in trans-disciplinary approaches to problems, it makes sense to consider hiring faculty who have strengths in broader areas (rather than more narrowly focused specializations). This can help to support the branding of the program and to make it attractive to varied student interests. I am unclear as to the rationale behind the department's response that the loss of a faculty member to administration is detrimental to the department's development of cross-cutting themes. Given the variety of interests in the faculty, one person's departure to administration does not seem to be key to achieving this goal. I encourage the department to continue its efforts to undertake strategic planning to make it stronger and more attractive to future students.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. It is expected that the Department will work through normal channels of advocacy for any new faculty resources identified as a result of the strategic planning.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2018/19

Recommendation #2

Develop and promote a consistent Departmental “brand” that reflects current program strengths.

In its response, the Department stated:

The department appreciates the need to develop and promote a unique identity or ‘brand’. This will be one of the subjects of our strategic planning exercise. It is expected that this exercise will incorporate, and be consistent with, ongoing strategic planning in the Faculty of Social Science and Brock University as a whole.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean’s office agrees with the reviewers’ recommendation that the Department develop a plan that reflects current program strengths and welcomes the Department’s participation in the Faculty and University-wide strategic planning process.

The Dean of Graduate Studies’ response to both Recommendations #1 and #2 is provided above.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee understands that reflection on the Departmental identity in terms of strengths, sub-specialties, thematic areas and marketing would address this recommendation.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2018/19

Recommendation #3

Adopt a more holistic approach to curriculum planning

In its response, the Department stated:

The department has some degree of curriculum planning within subfields but little at the departmental level. This is an excellent recommendation and the department will continue to work on scaffolding our offerings to support the branding process suggested in recommendation number two.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the departmental response to the reviewers' recommendation that the whole department engage in curriculum planning that crosses subfields.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

Regarding Recommendation #7 ... and Recommendation #3 ... one possible way forward is to examine the bank of courses being taught in other programs (e.g., social justice and equity studies, geography, economics, and other cognate disciplines) and to allow more flexibility in course substitutions. I am pleased to see that the department is enthusiastic about adopting recommendation #3 and encourage them to focus on graduate courses in their planning.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2019/20

Recommendation #4

Review the first-year course offerings to ensure that the twin mandate of recruitment into the program and the introduction of core concepts and ideas are met

In its response, the Department stated:

Since 2015-16 the department has offered a number of half credit courses at the first-year level. The department will be reviewing the success of this approach to first year education and will consider the addition of a mandatory half credit that covers the main themes of the discipline, ensuring students are prepared for more specialized upper year courses.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the reviewers' recommendation and the departmental response that first year-course offerings be reviewed and assessed in light of recruitment, retention and discipline-specific learning outcomes.

The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC) stated:

UPC ... feels that recommendations 4 and 5 will have specific implications for this committee. UPC looks forward to future discussion of these items when received with submissions.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Department is encouraged to undertake an ongoing process of curriculum review and revision, utilizing the curriculum map which was prepared for the cyclical review.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2019/20

Recommendation #5

Continue to expand experiential learning options in current and new courses

In its response, the Department stated:

The department agrees that experiential learning could be an important component of its brand. We have had meetings with the Coop office and received presentations from Brock personnel on the topic. Experiential learning is a major component of a number of courses and this will likely find its way into other courses. One opportunity to link student activity to coursework is the integration of the work of our Model UN club and relevant courses. We will also seek to increase student awareness of the experiential component of course work.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the departmental response to the reviewers' recommendations that experiential learning opportunities be expanded and notes that the Faculty of Social Sciences has a designated experiential coordinator that can assist the Department.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

I support adoption of Recommendation #6 ... and Recommendation #5 ... A variety of experiential opportunities can greatly assist students to prepare for post-graduation careers. While the department has supported a number of experiential initiatives in the past, these have been more academically focused. I believe some changes could be readily made with courses already being taught. For example, students noted that they did not feel they had been exposed to many experiential opportunities. The reviewers note in their recommendation that some alternative ways of achieving this goal can be done within the current courses being offered. It seemed that the Departmental response focused upon adding more courses (which was not deemed likely). Instead, I would like to see the Department consider additional group work (within existing courses) or the development of position/briefing papers that might mimic work conditions post-graduation. I would also like to encourage the department to remind students of the co-curricular opportunities offered by the Faculty of Graduate Students. For example, the MA students presented posters in a stand-alone event near the end of the term. One opportunity worth considering would be participation in the Mapping the New Knowledges Student Conference. This would give students the opportunity to have a wider audience to whom they could present their work and by which they could hone their presentation skills.

The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC) stated:

UPC ... feels that recommendations 4 and 5 will have specific implications for this committee. UPC looks forward to future discussion of these items when received with submissions.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee understands that experiential learning opportunities are already embedded in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. Increased awareness of the wide range of experiential learning options would benefit both faculty and students.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2018/19

Recommendation #6

Increase flexibility and experiential learning opportunities in graduate program[s] for graduates who do not intend to pursue academic careers

In its response, the Department stated:

This recommendation is worth considering but there are serious implications for the structure of our graduate program if we choose to add an experiential/co-op course to our offerings. The department is aware that graduate students consulted about this are very supportive of experiential content. The department will consider the role of experiential learning in the graduate program later this year.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the reviewers' recommendation that experiential learning opportunities for graduate students be increased and encourages the Department to seek opportunities for adjusting the graduate curriculum to be more flexible in response to student demand.

The Dean of Graduate Studies' response to both Recommendations #5 and #6 is provided above.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted for consideration by the Department. The Committee understands that experiential learning opportunities benefit students in the graduate program who move on to both academic and non-academic careers.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2018/19

Recommendation #7

Increase flexibility in the graduate program by expanding on cross-listed, transdisciplinary courses

In its response, the Department stated:

The department already has established transdisciplinary links with the Humanities cross disciplinary doctoral program and with CDAM [MA in Canadian-American Studies]. The Humanities doctoral program, has been a fruitful collaboration, especially for our colleagues in Political Theory. There is built-in flexibility in graduate programs at Brock as graduate courses are open to all graduate students and reading and special topic courses are possible. It should be noted that Political Science is already more transdisciplinary than other social science disciplines because it is relatively new and heavily influenced by older disciplines such as History, Economics, Sociology and others. The discipline has ancient and early modern elements (Political Theory) which is merged with a more recent quantitative and qualitative social science element. This means political science is inherently transdisciplinary, but, of course, graduate study is inevitably more specialized and focused. A careful balance must be struck. The department must also be cognizant of the potential that transdisciplinarity may undermine the development of a unique departmental brand (Recommendation #2).

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the reviewers' recommendation that flexibility in graduate programming be increased by encouraging cross-listing of courses and transdisciplinary initiatives that fit with Faculty and University-wide strategic priorities.

The Dean of Graduate Studies' response to both Recommendations #3 and #7 is provided above.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation as part of the curriculum review.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2018/19

Recommendation #8

Increased TA Training and improved TA feedback

In its response, the Department stated:

The department supports wholeheartedly the need to train and mentor teaching assistants. The university already has a certificate-granting program for TAs, but the department plans to experiment with a number of ways of supporting our TAs. The department will work collaboratively and pursue discussions about ways to provide practical training to complement our existing scholarly and theoretical training.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the Departmental response to the reviewers recommendations that increased TA training and feedback be provided both through available University-wide training programs and departmental initiatives.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

Recommendation #8 is very important since TA funding is a large component of the financial support given to graduate students. It also provides students with valuable and practical experience. I encourage the department to highlight to students the value in taking TA workshops through CPI but I also believe that a concerted effort by faculty members to clearly identify to TAs the practices and norms expected for Political Science seminars would be of great value. I would also encourage faculty members who direct TAs to institute an informal process of mid-semester feedback from students. A simple red/green approach could be employed (e.g., give students cue cards and tell them to identify one green item (what they like about how the TA approaches the seminar) and one red item (what they feel could be improved)).

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be not accepted as it lies outside the jurisdiction of the Committee and has implications with respect to the Brock University/CUPE Collective Agreement. The Committee expects that improved TA training and feedback would be of benefit to the programs and encourages the use of existing University resources and programs in place to help facilitate this.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted.

Recommendation #9

Nominate outstanding staff

In its response, the Department stated:

Both members of our administrative staff have been nominated for awards by chairs of the department. This is testament to their indispensable professionalism. The department has and will continue to prioritize recognition for its excellent faculty, staff and teaching assistants.

The Faculty Dean stated that:

The Dean's office agrees with the departmental response to the reviewers' recommendation to acknowledge outstanding staff and notes that an annual Faculty-wide Staff Award is being launched.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to reflect existing practice.

Implementation Plan

No action required.

D. Summary of Recommendations:

First Priority:

Recommendations #1,2,5,6,7

Second Priority:

Recommendations #3,4

Not Accepted:

Recommendation #8

Not requiring further action:

Recommendation #9