

Approved by AAC on March 30, 2017

AAC Response to the Political Science Self-Study

Introduction

The UWGB Political Science (PS) program is a disciplinary program that studies government, politics, exercise of power, and public policy. PS offers an array of foundational courses in American government and politics, public policy and administration, political theory, comparative politics, and international relations. PS is housed in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and is integrated within several interdisciplinary programs, Democracy and Justice Studies, Public and Environmental Affairs, and Global Studies. It plays a critical role in both DJS and PEA, with three faculty members housed in each, for a total of six faculty members. PS offers both a major and minor and also contributes significantly (8 courses) to the General Education requirements in the Social Sciences, Global Cultural, quantitative Literacy, and sustainability perspectives. Finally, faculty contribute to the graduate program in Environmental Science and Policy.

The PS program provides preparation for citizenship, a diverse array of future careers, and graduate work, especially in law, international studies, and public affairs. Faculty are committed to innovative teaching and contribute to community outreach through extensive service, especially as experts sought by local and national media.

Their previous self-study was completed in 2010.

Assessment of Student Learning

The Political Science program has done a commendable job in assessment. They have clearly established learning outcomes (which are also located on their program website) and engage in a significant amount of embedded assessment in a variety of courses. Included in their self-study were assessments from American content courses, international politics courses, and political theory courses from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016. Overall, the report meeting their learning goals.

Graduating seniors in PS and those who completed the alumni survey rate the major, educational experiences, and the PS faculty very highly, in most cases higher than the average at UWGB. Alumni are more likely to report lower salaries and are somewhat less likely to be employed in an area "very related" to their major. However, this may be the result of the number of alumni currently in graduate and professional school.

Program Strengths

The program has a number of strengths. PS strongly contributes to the social science general education, the three interdisciplinary units mentioned earlier, as well as Urban and Regional Studies. They are able to offer a breadth of courses in the sub-disciplines of political science as well as core courses.

Their focus on student success has resulted in a number of PS students receiving departmental, university and regional honors as well as placement into law schools and graduate schools. Faculty demonstrate commitment to excellence in teaching, including active involvement in the WI Teaching Fellows and Scholars Programs, Online Teaching Scholars, involvement with CATL programs, and teaching in the First Year Experience seminars. Two faculty have recently been recognized with student-nominated teaching awards.

Program Challenges

While the number of faculty has improved since the last self-study, PS is still in need of additional faculty. As they point out, while they have seven full-time faculty, one does not teach any courses (because he is the Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences). Additionally, the number of faculty who teach exclusively in PS is small. As a result, they have been unable to offer a capstone course due to other commitments by faculty.

The previous self-study indicated a steady number of majors and minors. The current self-study reports the number of declared majors and minors since 2009. The number of majors and minors has been declining, more so for majors (92 in 2009 and 65 in 2015) than minors (39 in 2009 and 31 in 2015). PS has offered several potential reasons for this including overall declining enrollment at UWGB and faculty attrition. They have developed several strategies to promote the university and increase the number of majors and minors including representation at Campus Preview Days and talks at local schools. Additionally, the number of students enrolled in PS courses has also decreased substantially from 2009 to 2015.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Political Science is a strong program that offers a wide range of courses that serve not only their majors and minors, but a number of programs as well as general education. It produces highly satisfied students and alumni who report strong preparation for future careers. Faculty are strongly committed to teaching, while continuing to be somewhat strained by the number who are only teaching in political science.

Somewhat concerning is the declining number of majors and minors. PS recognizes this and reports it is engaging in strategies to increase their numbers. As their faculty numbers have stabilized, the enrollment numbers may as well. The AAC also expressed concerns that the program is spreading themselves thin by offering four program choices. Additionally, the program may focus on the careers students enter after they graduate, since students are often interested in majors where there is a clear job at the end.

The future self-study should address why the number of students who have enrolled in political science courses in general seems to be declining and how that might be impacting faculty load.