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Political Science
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
May 2024

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Social Science	
Degrees Offered	B.A.	
Date of Last Review	2015-2016	
Modules Reviewed	Honours Specialization in Political Science Major in Political Science Minor in Political Science Honours Specialization in Global Justice Major in Global Justice	
External Reviewers	Dr. Tamara Small, Department of Political Science Guelph University	Dr. Royce Koop, Department of Political Science University of Manitoba
Internal Reviewer	Dr. Andrew M. Johnson, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Programs Faculty of Health Sciences	Evan Abbey Honours Specialization in English Language & Literature SUPR-U member
Date of Site Visit	January 22 & 23, 2024	
Date Review Report Received	March 5, 2024	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program: May 6, 2024 Faculty: May 24, 2024	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: September 18, 2024 ACA: October 1, 2024 Senate (for information): October 11, 2024	
Year of Next Review	2031-2032	
Progress Report	June 2027	

Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Political Science Program delivered by the Faculty of Social Science.

This FAR considers the following documents:
- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Social Science.

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Subcommittee on Program Review – Undergraduate (SUPR-U) and ACA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the undergraduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Political Science Department, Faculty of Social Science, and SUPR-U.

Executive Summary

The Department of Political Science teaches students about the political world, the ways in which institutions and behaviours come together, and about the methodological skills required for research in the social sciences. Courses and research opportunities are offered in all the traditional subfields of political science, including Canadian politics, comparative politics, international relations, local government, political theory, public administration and political methodology. Over the last five years, the program has made a suite of modifications to make offerings easier to navigate, increase enrollments, and improve EDI-D content by creating new courses on decolonization, racial injustice, and gender politics, and transgender policy.

The self-study was largely informed by a student survey administered in spring 2023 with over 150 responses, as well as a dedicated retreat with program faculty members

and student representatives to discuss departmental priorities, student perspectives and EDID goals. As part of the retreat, members of Western's Centre for Teaching and Learning facilitated a SOAR analysis and subsequently supported a curriculum mapping exercise. Lastly, the program undertook a Literature Review on Student Employability to better understand the prospects for graduates of the program.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Political Science Program. They offer three recommendations specific to political science offerings with considerations for further enhancement.

In addition to feedback about the offerings in political science, the review surfaced issues regarding the International Relations Program held jointly between history and political science. Given the nature of the feedback, but from the perspective of only one joint program partner, a dedicated review of the joint International Relations Program has been initiated.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- High proportion of award-winning professors, outstanding researchers, and faculty members who serve in leadership roles in the Canadian Political Science Association. The flagship journal, *The Canadian Journal of Political Science*, has been edited both in the past and recently (2020-2023) in the Department. Other departmental highlights include:
  - a Canada Research Chair in Political Methodology;
  - creating and hosting the annual MapleMeth meeting, one of four international conferences of the Society of Political Methodology;
  - home of the Consortium on Electoral Democracy, a SSHRC Partnership Grant project ($2.5M) including the long-running Canadian Election Study series; and
  - global leader in computational social science and political methodology.
- Formally involved in teaching and research in interdisciplinary programs or centres at Western University including the Network for Economic and Social Trends (NEST), the Centre for Computational and Quantitative Social Science, The Centre for the Study of Political Behaviour, The Centre for Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconstruction, the Centre for Urban Affairs and Local Governance, and the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism.
- Significant increase in course enrolment: +156% since 2019-20.
- Strengths of the program, as identified in the student survey, include: 1) strong preparation for careers in law, politics, and government; 2) classroom environments are inclusive, equitable, and respected diversity; 3) excellent training in Indigenous or non-Western ways of knowing; decolonization; anti-oppression; critical theories; post-colonial theories; queer and trans- theory; and 4) faculty support for student research activities and writing.
- Recently re-structured and re-organized classes and degree requirements to create more options and a better experience for students, including: maintaining

smaller upper-level classes, fostering a culture of mentorship and co-authorship, and integrating EDID content across the curriculum.

- Labs and Field Trip Opportunities such as: the *Leadership and Democracy Lab; the Body Politics Lab, and the Power in the City Walking Tour.*
- *Student Associations and Undergraduate Journal*: Faculty are involved in the three main student extra-curricular activities: the student-run Political Science Association (PSA), Model NATO, and the undergraduate student journal *The Social Contract.*

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Amidst growth in course enrolments, the number of tenure-stream faculty has declined from 20 to 16 over the last seven years.
- While course enrollments have increased significantly, program enrollments have not. Program enrolment in political science was 511 in 2014-15, declining to 451 in 2022-23.
- Average class sizes in political science have more than doubled since the last review.
  - Large classes result in heavy workload and reduced research opportunities for faculty.
- Most frequently emerging areas of improvement, as identified in the student surveys, were: 1) Honours program needs a more developed structure for writing a thesis; 2) better access to social science academic counsellors;
3) communicate program expectations more explicitly to social science academic counsellors; 4) improve classroom management training for TAs; 5) need for more information on career options for political science graduates; 6) more opportunities for political science students and faculty to interact outside the classroom setting; 7) offer more tutorial sessions for the course 1020E; 8) offer more entry-level training in quantitative methods in 1st/2nd year; 9) offer a wider variety of course options; and 10) provide more opportunity for paid and/or volunteer research.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, an internal reviewer, and a student reviewer were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met in-person over two days with the:

- Vice-Provost (Academic Programs)
- Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty Relations)
- Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Dean, Faculty of Social Science

- Associate Dean, Undergraduate (Academic), Faculty Social Science
- Department Chair
- Undergraduate Chair
- University Librarians
- Administrative Staff
- Program Faculty
- Program Students

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Dean for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR) of Political Science Program. The FAR is collated and submitted to SUPR-U by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers' Report

External reviewers shared that "w*hile the department has strengths in many fields of political science, over the past five years it has become a leader in Canada in political methodology and computational social science both in terms of research and teaching capacity.*"

Strengths of the Program

- Faculty maintains high levels of research productivity and hold national and international recognition for their scholarship through various publication prizes, awards and research Chairships while teaching in numerous interdisciplinary programs.
- Notable departmental achievements are: 1) the creation and hosting of annual international MapleMeth meetings; 2) the flagship journal, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, was recently edited at Western; 3) commitment to small fourth-year seminars which allow for rigorous and in-depth class discussion and extensive writing opportunities.
- Innovative aspects of the curriculum that distinguish the program as a leader in political methods include: 1) the Introduction to Data Science in the Honours Specialization (Political Science 3325F/G) in addition to the traditional two methods courses; and 2) 2100 series of courses (e.g., Global Violence and Injustice, Politico-tainment, and Politics and Pop Culture) and a Beginner's Guide to Canada (1030A/B).
- The program is effectively utilizing all available resources and has excellent administrative support.

Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider

- The structure of the first-year introductory course (1020E) should to be revised as either a half course or two half courses. *Embedded in recommendation #1*
- Limit the 2100 course series offerings to ensure that these are taught by experienced faculty. *Embedded in recommendation #2*
- While the department has seen substantially increased course enrolments, this has unfortunately not yet led to the hoped-for outcome in program enrolments. Might the 2100 series courses serve as pathway into program modules? *Embedded in recommendation #2*
- Changes at the graduate level has meant more core faculty have been drawn into teaching at the graduate level. This is a concern from a teaching equity perspective. *Embedded in recommendation #3*
- The overall faculty complement is small given a) the size of Western compared to other universities with much larger Political Science Departments, b) the stated strategic priority of the university to expand its student base, and c) the number of programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels that political science offers.
- Greater clarity regarding achievement of the learning outcome about *Working effectively with others, demonstrating the skills of giving feedback to peers, responding to feedback, and resolving conflict* (LO19).
- Need for greater data collection on the career paths of recent and previous graduates.
  - Students are concerned about career prospects and preparation. Perhaps data collection could help inform more support in this area.
- In addition to end of year feedback, the program could think about having focus groups or a yearly town hall with students to get feedback on the functioning of the program more broadly.

While the areas of improvement noted in the last several bullet points were not explicitly mentioned as part of the formal recommendations made by the external reviewers, they remain suggestions for consideration by the program.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

Reviewers' Recommendations	Program/Faculty Response
Recommendation #1 Rethink Political Science 1020E as a full-year course. Strengthen writing requirement. Rethink 1000 level tutorials.	**Program:** The department agrees that 1020E should not exist as a full year course (beginning in Fall 2025) and intends to offer 1.0 worth of essay courses at the first-year level. Further examination of various models is needed to decide the format of 1020E. For instance, whether: • it will be two halves, condensed into a 0.5 course with another 0.5 course to be created; • first-year essay entrance requirements for the minor, major, and honours program will be the same; and • this change impacts 1030A/B and assess if it should be kept or should a non-essay 0.5 course need to be added. The program will rethink the use of tutorials at the first-year level, consider innovative ways of dealing with limited resources and increasing enrollments, and ensure the loss of tutorials does not detract from the student experience. Smaller tutorials offered every week were not deemed optimal; students benefitted more from extra time with the course instructors in some other format. Tutorials in the second year will continue. The success of the PhD program has led to increased high-quality applications and larger PhD cohorts; this creates a bigger pool of TAs for undergraduate classes. The growth in the intro class – doubling over 5 years – puts too much pressure on tutorials. **Faculty:** This is an important question that the department indicates it will be considering and taking action on in Fall 2025. Subsequent modifications submitted to the Faculty's EPC in 2024-2025, and then onto to Senate level decision making, are expected.
Recommendation #2 Reduce the number of 2100 series courses per year and reflect on whether there is any pathway from a 2100 series course into the Minor (or beyond) in Political Science.	**Program:** Departmental discussions have begun to explore options of creating pathways from these courses into program enrollments in the minor and major. In terms of the size of the classes, the Program is awaiting the Faculty's response regarding the provision of additional TA support that makes these huge sections possible; the schedule for 2024-25 has fewer of these courses. The program continues to consider options like modifying the current minor and/or major programs and creating a new minor program. **Faculty:** The Dean's office supports this recommendation. Reducing barriers that students must overcome while ensuring an appropriate level of learning can lead to increased enrollments and efficiencies of scale.

Recommendation #3 Consider and address the consequences of the department's specialization in research methods (particular at the graduate level) for undergraduate teaching and programming.	**Program:** The program's ability to teach undergraduates data science is a huge benefit. The reviewers encouraged the program to think of ways to further extend this into the undergraduate offerings, carefully monitoring whether data science scares away any students. Consideration will be given to whether: 1) the HSP, Major and Minor have different expectations; 2) students in the minors need to take the 1020E course; 3) there are possible pathways for capturing students who take 2100s; and 4) it is worth developing the minor program. The reviewers noted some tension in terms of what courses the program wants to offer, and which should be required were noted. Perhaps making 3325F/G Data Science required for HSPs and not the Majors could explain program enrollment shift from the former to the latter; however, this needs further investigation. When the program changed the PhD program from one to two years of coursework it meant only adding about two new classes per year to the overall graduate schedule. The new PhD program format is not putting resource constraints on the undergraduate program, it is the loss of tenure-stream faculty without reinvestment in new tenure-stream faculty members. In addition, three full-time faculty members contribute to the MPA and GDPA programs and this draws from the undergraduate pool of instructors. Being able to hire new faculty would increase the program's ability to offer new undergraduate classes and spread-out graduate courses more. **Faculty:** Considering the use of instructional resources within and between graduate and undergraduate programs is becoming increasingly important in the face of Provincial Budget constraints, changing budget models within Western, and increasing pressures to rebalance effectiveness of student learning with efficiencies of delivery. This is a fundamental aspect of the budgeting process and the Dean's Office will continue to work with all Departments within the Faculty to acquire resources provided by senior administration. The department's consideration of the current requirement of Data Science in its HSP module and the introduction of additional undergraduate courses is a first step in that process.

* It should be noted that one recommendation concerning the joint International Relations Program has not been included in the table above as a dedicated review of the joint International Relations, with all associated members and partners, is forthcoming.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Program Chair, and the Dean of the Faculty are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in the Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1 Rethink Political Science 1020E as a full-year course. Strengthen writing requirement. Rethink 1000 level tutorials.	Examine various models to decide on a revised format for 1020E. Consider if: • the course will be two halves, or condensed into a 0.5 course with another 0.5 course to be created; • first-year essay entrance requirements for the minor, major, and honours program will be the same; and • this change impacts 1030A/B and assess if it should be kept or should a non-essay 0.5 course need to be added. Devise optimal approaches for tutorial sessions in first-year courses.	Undergraduate Chair Department Chair Undergraduate Committee	By December 2025
Recommendation #2 Reduce the number of 2100 series courses per year and reflect on whether there is any pathway from a 2100 series course into the Minor (or beyond) in Political Science.	Explore options for the creation of pathways from 2100 series courses into program enrolments in the minor and major. • Consider possible modifications to the current minor and/or major modules and creating a new minor program.	Undergraduate Chair Department Chair Undergraduate Committee	By December 2025
Recommendation #3 Consider and address the consequences of the department's specialization in research methods (particular at the graduate level) for undergraduate teaching and programming.	Monitor whether data science requirements impact program enrolments. Consider whether: • the HSP, Major and Minor have different expectations; • students enrolled in the minor modules need to take 1020E • there are possible pathways for capturing students who take 2100s • it is worth developing the minor program Continue to monitor the use of instructional resources within and between graduate and undergraduate programs.	Undergraduate Chair Department Chair Undergraduate Committee	By December 2025