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TO: Antonio Moreira, Vice Provost  
FROM: Scott E. Casper, Dean, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences  
RE: Academic Program Review, Department of Political Science

I have carefully reviewed the Self-Study for the Academic Program Review of the Department of Political Science (POLI) and the report of the External Reviewers. The Self-Study offers a strong description of the Department's current endeavors and its work over the past seven years, and the External Reviewers' report insightfully evaluates that work and identifies challenges ahead. Both are thoughtful, important documents about a department vital to UMBC's engaged scholarly community.

**Context: To provide some context for the Reviewers' Report, I offer some data on enrollment and teaching workload in the Department.**

Student numbers: Posted IRADS data for Fall 2015 indicate that the department had 322 total majors (primary and additional plans), 113 minors (across six minor tracks), and 8 students in the undergraduate certificate program. The number of majors represents a roughly 24% decrease since Fall 2012, a decrease that has been roughly steady over the past three years (F12=423, F13=381, F14=351). The number of minors has declined by roughly 21% over that period (F12=143).

Student-faculty ratios: In Fall 2015, the student-faculty ratio (SFR) for students in all plans was 25.6 for full-time faculty, as against 25.7 for CAHSS; it was 22.7 for FTE faculty, as against the CAHSS average of 21.3; and it was 31.5 for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty, as against the CAHSS average of 35.6. The SFR for FTE students was 13.9 for full-time faculty, as against 19.7 for CAHSS; it was 12.3 for FTE faculty, as against 16.3 for CAHSS; and it was 17.1 for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty, as against 27.3 for CAHSS.

The decline in number of majors may be due in part to the launch of the new Global Studies (GLBL) major in Fall 2013; indeed, the decline tracks roughly with the rapid increase in GLBL majors over that time. The student-faculty ratios for POLI majors and minors (“all plans”) are quite similar to College-wide figures, while the overall student-faculty ratio for all students in POLI courses (“FTE students”) falls somewhat below College averages. As the Department’s self-study and the External Reviewers’ report note, these numbers may underestimate faculty workload given the unusually large number of POLI faculty with administrative reassignments outside the Department and consequent reductions in teaching responsibilities (i.e., the effective number of T/TT faculty engaged in teaching is lower than IRADS numbers suggest).

**Reviewers’ Evaluation:** The Reviewers offer extensive and, in my view, much-deserved accolades for the work of POLI in every area of endeavor. Among their praises, the following are particularly worth highlighting:

- Students express great satisfaction with instruction and advising in the Department, including internship placements and undergraduate research; the Reviewers’ perusal of syllabi confirmed that “UMBC faculty are engaging students with the most pressing issues of the contemporary world” and that POLI courses “are innovative and challenging.” (The review team merits commendation for asking to read syllabi, not typically part of external reviewers’ work.)
- Faculty in POLI contribute to the University in myriad ways beyond the Department, through instruction (contributions to curricula in other departments and programs) and especially in service and leadership (POLI faculty serve currently as Chair of Africana Studies, Director of Global Studies, and Director of the Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars Program, and POLI faculty participate on numerous faculty committees on campus).
- Faculty members produce outstanding, prolific research, published by major university presses and highly ranked journals and presented at leading conferences in their fields.
- Many faculty members also serve as public intellectuals, lending their disciplinary expertise for the media and for think tanks and other organizations locally, nationally, and internationally. As the Reviewers write, they “provide a model of civic engagement.”

The Reviewers conclude with a numbered list of nine recommendations, most of which they describe earlier in their report. I will address these in several clusters: curriculum and assessment; resources; and other issues.

Curriculum and assessment. Alongside their praise for POLI’s innovative teaching, the Reviewers offer several specific suggestions (listed here and below by number on their list of recommendations):

- (6) “Begin discussions about the feasibility of developing an introductory course and a capstone course that integrate key themes that cut across subfields. ...”
- (7) “Develop a multi-pronged approach to assessment that facilitates articulation between community colleges and UMBC....”
- (not in list of recommendations but on p.10 of report) “...undertake discussions to streamline minors and consider cross-cutting themes”—as part of “a move away from a major organized largely by subfield.”

The Reviewers argue that “The Department organizes its curriculum in a thoroughly conventional manner,” by subfields of American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Politics, etc., with individual faculty members in each area largely autonomous “to shape course offerings.” Such an organization, they write, is typical of “large political science departments with doctoral degree programs.” For a smaller, non-PhD-granting department such as UMBC’s, this organization produces “unintended consequences with which the department is now grappling”: a proliferation of minors, “something of a silo effect” across the areas, and consequent challenges of creating department-wide assessment. There are also effects on faculty workload: “strenuous demands to teach a very wide array of courses regularly to enable students to complete major and minor requirements in timely fashion,” and “a particular advising burden, as some faculty are pressed to serve as coordinator of each minor.” Perhaps most significant, the traditional organization by subfield has meant that “some of the most exciting recent developments in political science are not yet reflected in the Department curriculum, notably “critical race theory, feminist theory, and the cutting-edge scholarship using intersectionality as an analytical tool” (p.10).

The Reviewers imply that the Department needs a sustained, rigorous discussion of its curriculum—both its organization and the gaps that might be addressed through rethinking and strategic deployment of resources. Their recommendation for integrative introductory and capstone courses is part of this larger suggestion. And their ideas about assessment go hand-in-hand with curricular redesign: for example, a new, integrative introductory course could serve as a site for “pre” assessment of majors across fields of specialization.

*I concur with the Reviewers’ suggestion that the Department review and, as appropriate, revise the curriculum as appropriate to “mitigate the silo effect” and to take account of recent developments in the field.* Such revision is within the Department’s purview, and I would not presume to indicate what form it ought to take, other than to recommend the following:

- Consider whether the traditional subfield organization remains most effective and desirable, given the current state of the discipline and the best use of faculty time and efforts.
- Consider the Reviewers’ ideas about integrative introductory and capstone courses.
- Consider streamlining the six minors and undergraduate certificate currently offered (a suggestion also of the external reviewers from the previous APR in 2007-08), particularly given the minuscule enrollment in several (Applied Politics and Political Thought minors, and the certificate in Public Administration and Policy) and the advising resources associated with these.

*It is also absolutely essential that the Department develop a robust plan for assessment of student learning outcomes in the major, based on direct measures of student learning.* As the self-study indicates, POLI’s current assessment is based entirely on indirect measures (e.g., grade performance and SCEQ scores), not the direct measures mandated by the College, University, and Middle States accreditation. Despite developing student learning outcome goals more than a dozen years ago, “the Department has not implemented its assessment protocols consistently, not in recent years systematically collected the necessary data for rigorous measurement of student learning outcomes” (self-study, p. 16). It is heartening that the Department voted in April 2015 “to overhaul its assessment methods to achieve more direct, frequent and reliable metrics for performance,” and I look forward to the fruits of those efforts. (The Reviewers also note the complexity of assessment for a department with many majors who do not take the introductory courses. As it develops its assessment plan, the Department might work with Enrollment Management to consider approaches to “pre” assessment

for such students, whether at community colleges or exempted from those courses through AP credit.)

Resources. The following Reviewers' recommendations concern resource allocation:

(1) "... A lab is essential both for faculty research and for student instruction," providing the software necessary for qualitative and quantitative research. *I agree, and I also concur with the Reviewers that this be a shared or "core" facility.* The Dean's Office can work with POLI and other social science departments, as well as with Facilities Management and the Division of Information Technology, to determine the space and information resources necessary for such a lab.

(2) "Additional office space ... to ensure that adjunct faculty can comply with privacy regulations...": *Until a full analysis of POLI's space utilization is conducted, this recommendation is premature.* Such analysis would examine current space use in conjunction with the University's Office Space Allocation Guidelines and would note, for example, the office space assigned to POLI faculty with administrative assignments outside the department. I will communicate with Facilities Management about conducting this assessment, ideally no later than Fall 2016.

(3) Add faculty to POLI, "to ensure equitable treatment" and "to equalize student-faculty ratios" across departments and to enhance UMBC's efforts in faculty diversity. The data presented above suggest that POLI is by no means among the most understaffed of CAHSS's departments, relative to student numbers. (This does not mean that POLI is by any means overstaffed, merely that it may be less "understaffed" than other departments in the College.) Indeed, with the two most recent hires, POLI now has more full-time faculty than it has had in recent years. I appreciate the significant contribution of POLI faculty to directing other departments and programs, and the consequent loss of teaching in POLI—and that contribution was a key argument for hiring two new faculty members last year.

The diversity argument is another matter, one worth serious consideration. If the Department conducts a searching review of its curriculum and develops a plan for potential hiring in areas likely to promote faculty diversity, I will consider such a plan within the College's normal process for prioritizing search requests. I encourage the Department to consider collaborative requests with other departments and programs, not unlike the recent processes that led to its collaborative hires with Global Studies and with Media and Communication Studies. But the curricular discussion must come first.

Other issues and ideas (some of which have resource implications):

(4) Capitalize on UMBC's location and faculty connections to create a "Visiting Scholars Program" to offer "courses that bring together practitioners' expertise, national and regional diversity, and timely topics" to supplement existing, faculty-taught courses. *This is an excellent idea, and the Department might consider deploying some of its adjunct faculty funding in this manner. Depending on the topic, there may be other sources of funding as well.*

(5) Retention of professional staff, reclassification, etc.: This falls outside the purview of Academic Program Review, although I am certainly mindful that outstanding staff members such as POLI's are invaluable to all of our efforts.

(8) Shady Grove—integration of program and faculty into UMBC community: Also outside the purview of APR. Voting rights are a departmental issue, which POLI may consider as it sees fit; different departments incorporate Shady Grove faculty into their ongoing work in a variety of ways. Rank of Shady Grove program directors is a University determination, which will not be revisited based on an individual program’s APR. The Reviewers’ statement that “Undergraduate majors on the satellite campus should have greater access to courses, advising, and mentoring offered by permanent faculty to ensure their degree experience is comparable to that of students on the main campus” represents a laudable ideal, but students at Shady Grove take courses there predominantly because their circumstances make it impossible to take courses on the main campus. Again, departments can make their own decisions about whether or how to deploy permanent faculty in their Shady Grove programs.

(9) Heighten the visibility of the Political Science Department, highlighting its teaching excellence, intellectual excitement, and importance for understanding current affairs: *A very good idea, and Political Science faculty members have been regularly featured in UMBC media outlets.* I look forward to working with the Department as we develop a coordinated, College-wide strategy for advancement, alumni relations, and fund-raising.

(p. 7 of Reviewers’ report): Revise departmental promotion and tenure documents, which currently “specify publication in discipline-specific journals,” to reflect the increasingly interdisciplinary work of POLI faculty as well as the University’s and College’s commitment to interdisciplinarity: *I agree, and recommend that the Department review and, as appropriate, revise these documents.* As the Reviewers note, the current documents “put the scholarship of these new faculty in jeopardy.”

(p. 7 of Reviewer’s report): Impact of Global Studies on POLI. As stated above, the rapid growth of the new GLBL major has undoubtedly taken a toll on the number of POLI majors, as well as the number of students in POLI’s International Affairs minor (from 49 in Fall 2012 to 22 in Fall 2015). But POLI contributes more than any other department to GLBL: many of the courses required for GLBL majors are in POLI and are taught by POLI faculty; three of GLBL’s dedicated faculty members (director, associate director, and new assistant professor) have primary appointments in POLI. *I agree with the Reviewers that we should think about “how best to give Political Science full recognition for its vital role in this program and for the centrality of the discipline to the content of the curriculum.”* In keeping with the recommendations of the UMBC Interdisciplinary Activities Task Force, this discussion may be part of a larger conversation about how departments and individual faculty members are credited for their contributions to extra-departmental, typically interdisciplinary programs.

**Conclusions.** The Department of Political Science has long demonstrated excellence in every arena of UMBC’s mission: superb undergraduate teaching, first-rate scholarship, and exceptional citizenship within the University and in the broader community. Its recently hired faculty members offer every indication of continuing in this fine tradition. As a discipline, Political Science provides methods and knowledge that are essential for understanding change at the local, national, and global levels.

The Department’s Academic Program Review can be a springboard to conversations essential for its future development, especially in the areas of curriculum and assessment. The Reviewers have identified key challenges and offered thoughtful suggestions; I encourage the Department to address

those ideas in the ways it thinks most appropriate for our students and for UMBC, and I look forward to working with POLI on the path forward.

Cc: Tom Schaller, Chair, Political Science