

UMBC'S DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW 2015/16
UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL REPORT

The Political Science Department offers a B.A. degree in Political Science on UMBC's main and Shady Grove campuses, as well as six minors: General Political Science, International Politics, Political Thought, American Politics, Legal Policy, Public Administration and Policy, that last of which also offers a certificate. The department also offers a BA/MPP with UMBC's School of Public Policy. In addition, the department supports other programs across campus, including Global Studies, Emergency Health Services, Health Administration and Policy, Gender and Women's Studies, Media and Communications, and Interdisciplinary Studies. The Political Science Department also offers key support to pre-law advising, the Sondheim and McNair Scholars programs, the Shriver Center, the Honor's College, and other programs to support students at UMBC. At the time of the review, there were 12 tenured/tenure track faculty, 2 emeritus professors, and 2 senior lecturers, as well as a pool of adjunct instructors. The department served an average of 411 majors annually during the review period, but as the Dean's response points out, these numbers have been declining steadily over the past few years.

A. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Political Science Department is committed to ensuring students develop "critical and analytical thinking skills." Central to this is the department's focus on methods and writing, as well as a range of other teaching approaches and service learning opportunities aimed at getting student to engage in the analytical techniques they are learning about. The department reports that it has developed learning goals and a rubric for assessing them in alignment with the university's mission and goals. Its assessment has focused on particular courses at critical points in a student's career. However, according to the self-study, these and other assessment plans have not been implemented consistently. Therefore, the department voted in April 2015 to overhaul its assessment procedures, something that the reviewers' and the Dean's reports supported.

B. STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE; PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS; PROGRAM CHANGES

The reviewers praised the quality of the scholarship and teaching in UMBC's Political Science Department. They were particularly impressed the breadth of the curriculum and its engagement with contemporary developments in the field. However, they were also concerned that the way the curriculum had developed into sub-disciplinary specialty areas may not be as helpful for undergraduates, who may benefit from the identification of cross-cutting themes and issues.

In the self-study, the department indicated that they had recently streamlined the minor requirements, so that they worked better together. They also indicated that they are

regularly introducing new courses, leading to a number of no-longer-taught courses in the catalog that may need to be culled, although it did not seem pressing. These new courses and the streamlining of the minors seem to have been effective, though further changes may be needed as the review suggests.

C. UNDERGRADUATE CURRIULUM

Majors in Political Science are required to complete 36 hours of course work, and 18 hours are required for each of the minors and the certificate. For the major, students are required to take an Introduction to American government course (POLI 100) and one of two 300-level methods courses. In addition, they must take four 200-level courses and six upper-level courses, including two at the 400-level. Minors in particular areas of specialty may be undertaken by Political Science majors or non-majors, with up to 9 credits overlapping between two minors or between the major and minor. Those 5 focused minors are International Politics, Political Thought, American Politics, Legal Policy, Public Administration and Policy, which roughly parallel the 6 subfield specialties of the department in U.S. government, political philosophy, comparative/area politics, international relations, public law, and public policy. In addition to these focused minors, the department offers a general minor in Political Science available only to non-majors. Students are limited to two minors within the department.

D. RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERGRADUATES

The department offers a number of "capstone" experiences to students. Among these is the opportunity to undertake an independent project either preparing a thesis as part of the department's honor's program, in which a few student each year participate, or as part of an independent study course, which many more participate in. McNair Scholars also undertake the writing of a publishable paper with the guidance of a faculty mentor. Students may obtain funding through an Undergraduate Research Award for their projects (as 20 of them did during the 6 year review period), they may present the results of their projects at URCAD (as 38 did), or they may submit them to the UMBC Review (were 4 were published). In addition, the department supports other kinds of opportunities to get first-hand experience applying what students are learning, for instance by participating in a legal or policy-focused internship, taking part in the Model UN or Mock Trials, or being one of two students each year to attend the Student Conference on U.S. Affairs.

E. UNDERGRADUATE ADVISEMENT

Each regular faculty member advises 29-50 students, according to the reviewers report. Although this load seems heavy, the students that the reviewers interviewed "were unanimous in their praise for the advising system in the Department, which enabled them to develop intensive relationships with particular faculty outside of class." However, the department considers the heavy burden of advising, particularly for pre-law students, to be one of the areas in which they need additional resources and support.

F. COUNCIL OF MAJORS; UNDERGRADUATE HONORS; AWARDS; RECOGNITION

Political Science students are featured regularly among UMBC students to win national and international awards for excellence, as well as awards within UMBC. According to their self-study, 46 of their majors graduated with honors during the review period. The department itself offers 5 awards each spring: the outstanding senior award, the outstanding scholar award, the outstanding scholar-leader award, and two awards with stipends.

The Political Science Department regularly includes students in departmental events and decision making. It encourages students to participate in organizations in and out of the department, including the department's Council of Majors, the UMBC chapter of the Political Science Honors Society, and the Pre-Law Society, along with other opportunities.

G. FACULTY DEVELOPMENT; TEACHING QUALITY

The department faculty and adjunct carry a heavy teaching load, particularly because of their emphasis on student writing. In their self-study, the department attributes their higher than average SECQ scores on key questions (G9, L1, L4) to their instructors' commitment to high quality, innovative teaching and to the work of the department's "Adjunct Oversight Committee" that supervises and reviews adjunct instructors. The students that the reviewers interviewed also had high praise for the teaching quality in the department. The Political Science Council of Majors offers two awards each year for teaching excellence, one to a full time instructor and one to a part time instructor. Department merit policy also takes teaching quality into account for tenured/tenure track faculty.

H. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS; SUMMARY EVALUATION

The external reviewers' and the Dean's reports agree that the Political Science program is doing excellent work in all areas, teaching, research, and service. The Dean's report concurred with the reviewers' recommendation to review the curriculum in order to find cross cutting lines connections that would mitigate the "silos" that the internal areas of specialization may be creating. They were also in agreement that the department needed to revisit its assessment plan, something that the department said it intended to return to in its self-study. The Dean agreed with the reviewers about the need to reconsider tenure guidelines to allow for greater interdisciplinarity in scholarship and to find ways to work more effectively with Global Studies. The Dean's report also responded to the reviewer's recommendations for more faculty, more space, and adequate computer support, as well as other recommendations including the challenges at Shady Grove that fall "outside of the purview of APR."