

External Reviewer's Report for the Department of Political Science, New Jersey City Univers

Submitted to Dr. Joao Sedycias, Dean of the William J. Maxwell College of Arts & Science and
to Dr. Louise Stanton, Chairperson, Department of Political Science, April 10, 2017

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Overview of the Department

The Department of Political Science at New Jersey City University is comprised of four full-time tenured faculty members. The department does utilize an extensive list of part-time faculty, which adds to the number and diversity of course offerings available to the students. The tenured faculty represent the breadth of the discipline in terms of education and research interests. Their fields of expertise range from law to political philosophy to international relations. This small contingent of faculty manages to offer a large number of courses on a regular basis and to support the major in political science and three minors. Based upon the figure provided by the department, since fall, 2014, they have offered 97 sections of political science courses for a total enrollment of 1,793 students. The department appears to successfully meet its mission in contributing to the general education component of the university while meeting the needs of students majoring or minoring in political science.

Overall both the faculty and the student body is reflective of the incredible diversity present at New Jersey City University. While the faculty is experienced in their individual disciplines, it does appear that the limited number of faculty and the higher class size requirements require the faculty to offer courses outside their personal field of expertise thereby limiting advanced level seminars and in-depth student research courses.

One last area in regard to faculty involves the ability to attend and present at professional conferences and to engage in research which leads to publication or even pedagogical uses. Given the four course teaching load per semester and the limited funds for travel or release time, the faculty have done remarkably well in maintaining some type of research agenda.

Recommendations for Action

- Average overall student numbers to more accurately reflect teaching loads.
- Provide administrative support for advanced level courses which may enroll a smaller number of students but which contribute to the number of upper level, in-depth courses.
- Increase funding for travel and research including release time during the semester or funding for summer research outside the regular academic year.
- Fund joint student-faculty projects beyond the Model UN.

Relationship of Curriculum to Departmental Goals

The self-study report lists five departmental goals: development of skills, cultivation of interest in politics, preparation for graduate study and connections with alumni. The first two goals reference more of the general education mission of the department and the latter two focus on the majors and minors in the discipline. The last goal is related to program evaluation and support and development of networks for job placement, internships, and recruitment.

It appears from the self-study report and the syllabuses provided, that the variety of courses offered does meet the needs of the general education program. For example, U.S. Politics (POLI 102) focuses upon critical thinking and writing skills as evidenced by the four required reaction papers submitted throughout the semester. Likewise, Comparative Politics (POLI 109) develops data analysis and critical thinking skills through the assigned readings and short discussion papers. Many of the other course offerings fall into the category of increasing student involvement in the political arena including but not limited to Global Challenges (POLI 120) and Debating Current Controversies (POLI 130).

In regard to preparing students for graduate study, the overall design of the majors and minors fall within the guidelines of the American Political Science Association on graduate

education which could include careers in academia as well as preparation for professional careers in law, research and policy analysis. The major is broad based across the discipline including foundational coursework in theory and methodology, introductory courses in American and Comparative Politics followed by in-depth upper level courses in International Relations and a capstone seminar experience. The Pre-Law minor lends itself to the traditional law school path and the International Studies minor leads to graduate studies in policy or business.

The department does not offer much evidence of ongoing connections with alumni beyond the letters of support in the self-study packet. The department does plan to enhance its social media presence as well as to create a database for tracking alumni.

Recommendations for Action

- Continue to offer the variety of introductory level courses in the general education program *but* lower the section cap to ensure demand.
- Make the following changes to the major which will strengthen student opportunities for graduate study and employment:
 - Add an upper level theory course.
 - Add a statistical component either as a separate methodology course or as part of the Research Methods requirement.
 - Develop student internships and perhaps consider making this a requirement for graduation with an option for counting service learning or current professional experience.
 - Develop student-faculty research by funding participation in state or regional conferences.
 - Continue to provide resources to the Model UN program.

- Develop the public administration component of the major or consider offering a minor in public administration.
- Partner with nearby universities which offer GRE and LSAT prep courses.
- Partner with students in the university's technical and business school to develop a social media presence.

Enrollment Trends and Curricular Changes

The departmental report on enrollment trends reflects a nationwide decline in the number of students studying liberal arts as opposed to STEM based majors. As was pointed out in the study, the national average for political science graduates is just over two percent of total degrees conferred. NJCU's political science majors reached the two percent mark this past academic year. As noted, the number of majors has declined slightly since 2014 but overall enrollment in classes remains at 79% of capacity. What is striking is the lack of minors in Political Science and Pre-Law as well as the decline in International Studies minors. Given the school's proximity to New York City and the large number of job opportunities in international business and international affairs, it is curious why the International Studies minor is not heavily enrolled?

The department has instituted some curricular changes, most notably the introduction of the newly revised thirty-nine credit major in Political Science. The major now addresses the need for both breadth and depth in the study of the discipline as well as begins to address the need for an expanded methodological approach to the study of political science. The capstone seminar approach in the final year of study is a standard practice in the discipline and offers the students the opportunity to complete an in-depth research project. The department noted some dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the capstone seminar. When the revised major has been in

effect for at least two years, the department can reevaluate the seminar. In general, a more directed seminar experience with specific milestones for the final project may positively impact the final research product.

The department acknowledges that no changes have been made to the Political Science minor aside from the overall course revisions to the major. The International Studies minor, as previously noted, is the orphan of the college, having been “inherited” by the department. As such it is a bit of a mash up of courses from various disciplines with no real focus. The department will be revisiting this minor in the near future. Dr. Liao’s proposed revised minor does address the need to develop regional expertise and rudimentary foreign language skills. Some suggestions for the revision include more emphasis on foreign language competency beyond the two course level and continued emphasis on a study abroad or internship component with a government foreign relations agency or nonprofit in the New York City region.

Lastly the Pre-Law minor should be revisited. In lieu of a minor, the department might want to consider offering a paralegal certificate program, accredited by the American Bar Association. The staffing needs for a paralegal program can be met using local attorneys as adjunct faculty. Existing legal theory courses can be incorporated into a certificate program. The certificate (usually 18 credits) can be marketed beyond the department and even beyond the college. Additional resource requirements should be minimal although a certified paralegal may be needed to administer the program should demand exceed current departmental capacity.

Recommendations for Action

- Create a Bachelor of Science option for Political Science with an emphasis on statistical research and computer skills.
- Offer a Bachelor of Science or a minor in Public Administration.

- Develop certificate programs such as paralegal studies.
- Revise the International Studies minor to include a study abroad component or an internship with a foreign relations government agency or NGO here in the United States.
- Market the International Studies minor heavily both on campus and in university recruitment materials.
- Coordinate minor courses with other major programs to encourage students in business, criminal justice, psychology, social work to complete the minor in conjunction with their current major.
- Monitor the capstone seminars in the major for quality of final projects and make adjustments to the syllabus as needed including introduction of milestones and directed projects with specific guidelines.
- Encourage seminar students to present their final projects at a regional or state level conference.

Departmental Resources

The department appears to have the standard material resources at its discretion including computing and printing facilities, private office space and shared meeting space. It is an inconvenience to have to share a secretary with other departments but not an unusual circumstance in academia. Meeting space does appear to be at a premium which also may be an issue when scheduling student meetings, clubs or even small seminars.

In regard to the departmental budget, funding from the university has remained constant with the exception of moving the adjunct faculty line from the department. It is noted that the department does not currently have any outside sources of funding for research or travel. As

noted, the university has been without a dedicated grants and research office which is a vital component in seeking outside research and travel money.

The issue of library resources was addressed both in the report and during the on-site visit. The department feels strongly that the library does not offer sufficient print resources to meet research and teaching needs. In particular, the department cites the need for expanded access to discipline specific journals as well as the need for more timely access to current journals in the field. The Library Director, Frederick Smith, met with this consultant for an hour during which he demonstrated the various electronic databases available as well as gave a physical tour of the library and its holdings. The NCJU library does have access to the standard array of electronic databases including EBSCOHOST, JSTOR and PROQUEST. In addition, any book or journal article can be retrieved using interlibrary loan or very broad based internet search engines such as the Directory of Open Access journals or Hawthi Trust. The Social Explorer data application also is a particularly student friendly approach to using statistical data. However Social Explorer presents the data in an aggregated format. It does not allow the individual to perform individual analysis. Which brings up the issue of access to certain fee based social science databases. These databases provided access to raw data for research, analysis and eventual publication. The NCJU library does not currently have access to these large databases.

Recommendations for Action

- Seek outside grant funding for travel and research including the funding of student/faculty research.
- Provide adequate institutional support for the grant writing process through the grant office.

- Consider expanded university based funding for student/faculty projects and travel to local and regional conferences and events.
- Provide adequate access to specialized research journals and databases.
- Conduct a review of existing subscriptions to academic journals in the field of political science to obtain cost savings and eliminate duplication of resources.
- Target library and departmental funds to focus upon research and teaching needs of the faculty.

Departmental Plans

Based upon an in depth reading of the self-study report, the department appears to have limited long term goals or plans. In fairness, the lack of a long term plan is related to limited program resources as discussed in the previous section. It is also related to the relatively small numbers of majors and minors currently enrolled in the department. The department does have some goals related to their recent program revisions. The program revisions will go into effect in the fall of 2017. The revisions, which include course renumbering and a focus upon engagement in the political process and global affairs will require the department to track outcomes in a more systematic fashion. The department also plans to offer a greater variety of upper level courses, particularly in theory and to offer core classes on a more regular basis which should help to attract and retain majors and minors. The department also plans to revise and revitalize the International Studies minor in conjunction with the university's renewed focus on study abroad programs. Lastly, the department has expressed interest in developing more formal contacts with program alumni to assist with tracking career outcomes of their graduates.

Site Visit

The site visit to New Jersey City University was conducted on Thursday, March 1, 2017. This reviewer met with the department chairperson, Dr. Louise Stanton, the Director of Library Services, Frederick Smith, departmental majors and students, the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, Dr. Joao Sedycias and the department faculty. Observations and a summary of the relevant discussions with each stakeholder group are provided below.

Chairperson

Dr. Stanton expressed the usual joys and frustrations as chairperson of a small academic department. Her focus was upon resources, scheduling, marketing and staffing. In particular, she noted the lack of travel money for conference attendees. She also discussed at length the issue of using average class size as a decision rule for the cancellation of low enrolled classes. She recommended that flexibility should exist for upper level courses and that deadlines be adjusted so that students have the opportunity to enroll before cancellations are made. She related the cancellation of upper level courses to the increased need for independent studies which are just not cost effective and impact the breadth of upper level course offerings in the department. She also discussed the main goal of the department. Is the goal job preparation or is it preparation for graduate school? She acknowledged that better marketing of the major and minors would increase overall program enrollment. Increased majors would also bolster a request for an additional full-time, tenure track hire in prelaw, public policy or public administration.

Faculty

The faculty expressed the perennial concerns of academics as well, mainly balancing a four/four teaching load with service to the college and university, advisement of students and research. Because release time is rarely granted, the ability to engage in extensive research is extremely limited during the semester. When this is coupled with the lack of funding for travel to conferences to discuss and present research, the result is a truncated research agenda. The faculty concurred with their chairperson in that the early cancellation of low enrolled classes hinders the ability of the department to offer upper level courses as well as to ensure a diversity of offerings for majors and minors. Resources are the key issue. Lastly, the faculty expressed real interest in developing a minor in public administration in addition to the existing set of minors.

Students

This consultant met with a group of students in an informal setting which included lunch and refreshments for those participating. The meeting was conducted in a focus group style with a series of directed questions but plenty of time for follow up by the students. The students began with a discussion of the positive aspects of the department. Students were generally positive about the faculty and in particular gave high marks to the department for the manner in which they conduct their online courses. Students also liked the Model UN program in the department and felt that the experience of participating in Model UN enhanced the degree program.

However, students had a long list of issues that needed to be addressed as well as suggestions for improving the department as a whole. Students were particularly vocal about the

limited number of class offerings and the “odd times” when classes were offered. They complained that certain required upper level classes were simply not offered on a regular basis. Students also wanted to see more media related classes. They expressed the desire for more opportunities for internships especially at the state and county level. They described the need for a more formalized internship experience. They also stated that the department should do more outreach at the community college level, perhaps by creating a formal linkage between the departmental majors and courses currently offered in the community college system. This, along with a service learning component, would enable students to finish the degree more quickly. Lastly, they wanted to see additional major related clubs and activities such as a Pre-Law Club and a chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha which is the National Political Science Honor Society.

Administration

The consultant met with Dr. Joao Sedycias, Dean of the Maxwell College of Arts & Sciences. Dr. Sedycias explained the administration’s model for determining which departments were meeting university efficiency standards in regard to class size and teaching load. He also stated that he has engaged in hiring many full time faculty members rather than relying on part-time, adjunct faculty. He explicitly cited the need for continued scholarly research by the faculty in his college, pointing to the collective bargaining agreement. He stated that internships were in the process of being restructured and that the co-op model of education was being explored. Regarding the department, Dr. Sedycias emphasized that he supports housing the International Studies minor within the Political Science department. Dr. Sedycias was open to studying the demand for new programs within the Political Science department such as public policy or even paralegal studies. Dr. Sedycias was most interested in studying the demand for a major or minor

in public policy. He agreed that an extended timeline (3 years) would be needed to measure success of any new minors or program changes.

Conclusions

The following strength, weaknesses, threats and opportunities were identified for the department of Political Science at New Jersey City University:

Strengths

- Location in the New York City Metropolitan Area
- Experienced full time, tenured faculty with a variety of expertise in the subfields of the discipline
- Diverse student body
- Access to a large pool of adjunct faculty from neighboring graduate programs at major research universities
- Active Model UN program for undergraduates

Weaknesses

- Limited resources for travel and research
- Small faculty size which limits the number and diversity of course offerings
- Lack of administrative support for grant writing and research projects
- Lack of marketing plan for attracting new majors and minors
- No formal tracking of program graduates

Opportunities

- Administrative support for expanding programs and developing the International Studies minor

- Development of working relationships with state and local government officials to enhance both co-op and internships
- Dual enrollment with the state's robust community college system
- Enhanced social media presence for marketing and recruitment

Threats

- Declining state funding for public education
- Lack of a current contract (CBA)
- Continued decline in resources for research including release time and travel money
- Decline in the traditional college aged population
- Competition from online universities

Key Recommendations

A few key recommendations for action are highlighted in this section. These recommendations are based upon the self-study report, site visit interviews and national and regional trends in higher education. Several of the recommendations are also based on current practices in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Kutztown University.

1. **Hire one or more full time, tenure track faculty in the fields of public administration and public policy.** The new tenure track faculty could develop a new minor and also contribute to the International Studies minor.
2. **Develop a new minor in public administration or public policy.** Administrative support would be needed to study demand for these minors and to fund additional faculty to staff a new minor.

3. **Establish an American Bar Association accredited program in Paralegal Studies.**

Given the proximity of the university to the New York City metropolitan area, this program should attract both working professionals and students preparing for a career in law including law school. The program could be staffed with adjunct faculty drawn from practicing attorneys in the region.

4. **Hire a full-time contractual faculty member to administer and teach in the**

Paralegal Studies program. This individual could also assist with the Pre-Law Club and pre-law advising.

5. **Establish formal working relationships with local and state elected officials and**

administrative offices. The goal of these contacts would be to establish internships and co-ops for employment.

6. **Seek outside funding for faculty research.** Foundation or government grants would

allow faculty members to have paid release time to pursue large and long term research projects.

7. **Create additional student organizations.** Most notably, reactivate the NJCU chapter

of Pi Sigma Alpha.

8. **Reallocate a portion of departmental resources and library resources to obtain**

access to journals and data needed for research. This could be accomplished through discussion with the library director to better meet the needs of the faculty for current journals and access to large sets of social science data.

9. **Develop a social media presence.** This social media presence on Facebook or Twitter

could serve as a means of connecting to alumni as well as attracting new majors.

10. **Create dual enrollment with New Jersey's community college system.** This could be accomplished by having adjunct faculty offer NJCU courses at community college sites or by having students at community colleges take departmental courses via distance education or online. This would bring NJCU's department directly to the students, increase the number of majors and minors and increase overall class size.
11. **Support student research.** This could easily be accomplished by encouraging students to attend one of the state or regional conferences, all of which provide opportunities for students to attend and present on undergraduate panels. Faculty could also seek university support for joint faculty/student research.