External Review Report
Graduate Program Review 2000-2006
Department of Political Science
College of Arts and Sciences
Graduate School
Texas Tech University

Memorandum
March 9, 2007

To: Clifford B. Fedler, Professor of Civil Engineering and Associate Dean, Graduate School
   (clifford.fedler@ttu.edu)
   D. Paul Johnson, Professor of Sociology
   (d.paul.johnson@ttu.edu)
   Paul Carlson, Professor of History
   (paul.carlson@ttu.edu)
   Eduardo Segarra, Professor and Department Chair, Agricultural and Applied Economics
   (eduardo.segarra@ttu.edu)

Fr: Gregory Gleason, Professor of Political Science
   (gleason@unm.edu)

Re: External Reviewer Report for the Graduate Program Review 2000-2006 of the Political Science Department

The Periodic Review

In the fall of 2006 and winter 2007 Texas Tech University conducted a periodic 6-year program review of the Political Science Department. The overall goal of the review is to provide a mechanism for maintaining and improving the quality of graduate programs at Texas Tech University. The major component of the program review was self-study carried out by the Department of Political Science. The departmental self-study was prepared in accordance with the Graduate School Program Review Guidelines that are uniformly followed by Texas Tech University graduate program reviews. The political science department self-study was prepared under the direction of Political Science Department Chairperson Philip Marshall with the assistance of Professor Brandon Prins, the doctoral program advisor and Professor Brian Collins, the Masters of Public Administration advisor in conjunction with the Director of the Center for Public Service and the advisor to the Interdisciplinary Master’s Specialization in International Affairs. Departmental faculty members were offered an opportunity to review and comment on the draft version of the self-study. An external review was conducted by three Texas Tech faculty members and one faculty member from a political science department at a peer academic institution.

The External Review

The goal of the external review committee is to provide a disinterested assessment of the department’s graduate program, including judgment regarding the program, curriculum,
resources and future directions of the academic unit. The external review is charged with weighing information regarding standard measures of the effectiveness of the department’s graduate program, including considerations regarding scope, curriculum content and mentoring effectiveness, academic productivity, workload, equity issues, retention and recruiting, and other concerns as appropriate to generally accepted standards of academic programs. Consultations and discussions took place in February and an on-site program evaluation took place on March 5, 2007. Meetings included the external review committee members as well as the department faculty members with administrative responsibilities (including Marshall, Prins and Collins) in the department. Department faculty members were invited to meet with the members of the external review committee. Thirteen faculty members were in attendance at this meeting and were given an opportunity to offer their assessments of the department’s strengths, weaknesses and strategic goals. Department graduate students were invited to meet with the members of the review committee. Nine graduate students were in attendance at this meeting and were given an opportunity to offer their assessments of the department’s strengths, weaknesses and strategic goals. The external review committee members met separately to discuss their collective assessment of the political science department program.

External Review Peer Institution Assessment

Considering the Graduate School Periodic Review goals, the departmentally prepared self-study materials, and the data and the discussion that emerged from the external review committee’s meetings, I would like to offer the following general observations, conclusions, and recommendations with respect to the political science department’s graduate program.

The political science department Ph.D. program has identified faculty excellence in teaching, research and service as a foundation for the department’s goal of producing capable and active research scholars in political science for faculty careers at major research-oriented academic institutions. The department’s MPA program is designed to produce trained public servants for applied careers. The department strives to increase national recognition as one of America’s most significant academic programs in the field.

The political science department has undertaken during the period reviewed (2000-2006) substantial curriculum and administrative improvements. In the period 2001-2003 a “new curriculum” was introduced that placed considerable emphasis on the improvement in the graduate curriculum with respect to research design, rigorous academic methodology, and disciplinary socialization. During this period of modernization, the political science department succeeded in attracting some of the country’s most promising scholars, particularly younger scholars. The department set clear goals for the achievement of the highest standards in the discipline, elevating the measures of productivity for faculty and graduate students while providing new financial and administrative resources commensurate with those high standards. The political science department during the review period has undertaken notable administrative improvements, creating a stable, effective and equitable administrative environment for faculty member and for graduate students in the program. Credit for these substantial improvements must be attributed to the Political Science Department Chairperson and the Dean College of Arts for establishing a smooth and effective administrative environment. Credit for the substantial improvements in disciplinary standards for the Ph.D. program may be largely attributed to the political science department faculty members for insisting on high standards of academic quality
and productivity. By national standards of departmental effectiveness, Texas Tech University’s political science department ranks clearly above the institution’s university-wide ranking in comparisons with other peer institutions.

The success of the political science department in administrative improvement and curriculum modernization in accordance with disciplinary standards during the 2000-2006 review period has created new expectations with respect to the future. One of the leading constraints on further department program improvement is clearly the problem of faculty retention. The department has experienced an unusually high level of turnover in faculty members, particularly younger faculty members. The retention problem has been a concern expressed by virtually all of the faculty members who were interviewed. In addition, the retention problem has been a concern expressed, for different reasons, by virtually all of the graduate students who were interviewed.

Faculty members are largely concerned that the high rate of turnover of faculty members in the department is a consequence of faculty salary compression and/or faculty governance conditions. Graduate students are largely concerned that a high rate of faculty turnover is disruptive to the department, weakening institutional continuity and mentorship.

The general proposition that the department’s faculty retention record is a result of national market forces cannot be supported by national data. Departments with comparable salary structures and other faculty benefits do not exhibit the same faculty turn-over rate that the political science department at Texas Tech University has experienced in the past six years.

The political science department’s retention problems have created constraints on further improvement in the Ph.D. program. In addition, the political science department’s MPA program also has been similarly disadvantaged by the retention problem. The MPA program is administratively situated in the political science department. MPA programs, at Texas Tech University as at most universities, are practical in orientation. The goals of the political science department are dominated by the disciplinary goals and objectives of the more theoretical orientation of the political science discipline. Consequently, the applied MPA program exists as an embedded academic unit in a theoretically-oriented administrative unit. This relationship can be sustained; but it can also be expected to endure at best as an uncomfortable compromise by both administrative units.

Recommendations

I recommend that the Graduate School consider ways to address the retention problem, capitalize on the improvements made in administrative efficiency in recent years, and consider ways of protecting the administrative autonomy of the MPA program as a very important academic unit at Texas Tech University.