

Final Assessment Report

Academic Review

Political Science Program Cyclical Review 2014-15

A. Summary

- i. The Self Study was reviewed by the P-VPAR on March 10, 2015.
- ii. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Dr. Ingrid Makus, Brock University and Dr. Thomas Bateman, St. Thomas University and two internal reviewers, Dr. Richard Wenghofer and Dr. James Abbott.
- iii. The site visit occurred on March 30 and 31, 2015.
- iv. The Reviewers' Report was received on May 26, 2015.
- v. The Department's response was received on September 14, 2015.
- vi. The Faculty Dean's response was received on September 10, 2015.

The academic programs offered by the Department which were examined as part of the review included:

BA Honours Specialization
BA Specialization
BA Major
BA Minor

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by the Nipissing University Senate on May 17, 2013, and ratified by the Quality Council on June 28, 2013.

B. Strengths

The Review Team noted the following regarding the strengths of the program/academic unit: *"We found a relatively new, small, highly functional undergraduate Political Science Program that successfully offers a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Political Science. The main strength of the Program is that it consists of exceptionally devoted faculty who are passionate about teaching, committed to excellence in research and scholarship, and actively engaged in various capacities both inside and outside the University. Combining excellence in teaching and research is particularly challenging in small departments where faculty resources are limited. They have met this challenge head on by drawing on their shared expertise in a foundational area of Political Science – political theory - to ground their teaching, scholarship and service. This is highly commendable.*

Most striking is the collegiality and productive working relationship among the faculty in the department, which has benefitted the students."

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

The Review Team offered the following specific recommendations:

1. That the NU Political Science Program be maintained with at least three full-time positions.

In its response, the Department advised that *“this is required to maintain the expertise needed to teach effectively in all 5 sub-disciplines of Political Science so as to adequately prepare our students for graduate school, and to offer enough course credits for student to graduate.”*

The Faculty Dean noted that *“combined with Nipissing’s budgetary issues and the enrolment challenges in the Political Science program, it is not realistic to have a three full-time faculty complement immediately. The only way to address the challenges will be by taking a long-term view of the program, and start working on the other recommendations.”*

PPC response is as follows: **PPC notes according to Quality Assurance Framework Reviewers are asked to comment on the “Appropriateness and effectiveness of the academic unit’s use of existing human, physical and financial resources in delivering its program(s)”. In making this assessment, reviewers must recognize the institution’s autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space, and faculty allocation.” Accordingly, PPC refers this matter to the Dean for consideration as part of the normal budgetary process.**

2. That the Program consider the addition of new courses to give the Program greater breadth and appeal.

3. That the Program periodically review its list of cross-listed courses to ensure that courses taught in other programs advance the goals of the Political Science Program.

4. That the Program consider the introduction of a second first-year course to attract students to Political Science.

The Department and the Faculty Dean responded to the above recommendations (2 – 4) as follows:

The Department stated that *“in the short term, this observation will prompt a review of those cross-listings and discussions with other departments, but in the medium to long term, the point emphasizes the importance of academic autonomy in developing a rigorous and cohesive curriculum.”*

We welcome the reviewers’ advice to offer new courses of interest to Political Science students and as electives to students from outside of the discipline. For 2015/16 we have 2 new distance education courses on the books, with courses on peace and conflict studies speaking to pressing, real world issues. One of these courses, Conflict Resolution, is targeted to Nursing students, and the other, Negotiating International Agreements, is intended in part as an attractive elective for Business students. Thinking forward, the suggestion of a second 3-credit introductory course would boost numbers in the first year while drawing more students to the discipline, and will be taken up as a curriculum development initiative, as will the insistence (echoing our students) that a statistics and methods course fill in a gap in our curriculum, perhaps with an appropriate cross-listing included there.”

The Faculty Dean noted that “*recommendations 2-4 (above) are mainly suggestions about curriculum. I am in support of these suggestions. However, given the faculty complement, even assuming that there are three full-time faculty, recommendation 3 may not be realistic in the short term. Therefore, I strongly suggest that the faculty follow through recommendations 3 and 4 together with a plan of cycling of courses in the short term.*”

PPC response is as follows: **In terms of curriculum, PPC recommends that the Department reviews its current list of cross-listed courses as well as consider the addition of other relevant cross-listed courses in order to ensure greater opportunities for students. Moreover, PPC notes that the Department has already added a second first year course.**

5. That the Program make concerted efforts to bring the Political Science Program and its offerings to the attention of NU students.

The Department responded that “*it is interesting to reflect on the consideration of choice in course offerings. At present, there is little to no choice for our students; because so few Political Science courses are offered (36 credits worth in 2015/16) our students are obliged to take all the courses offered. This limited choice obviously makes the promotion of the degree challenging, especially within the rubric of a student-centered learning model. That said, and though we would like to offer at least some choices to our students, the reviewers’ comment concerning other, older models of curriculum development is interesting and may be applicable.*”

The Faculty Dean supports this recommendation.

PPC response is as follows: **PPC concurs with suggestion that the Department make concerted efforts to bring its offering to the attention of both students as well as other academic units for use as electives.**

6. That the Program consider ways in which participation in quality practical activities like Model NATO and Model UN exercises can garner academic credit.

The Department noted that “*the observation of the success of our students at model NATO and UN assemblies, and in internships at the American Consulate and the UN, along with the suggested development of experiential learning opportunities for our students, illustrates an obvious path for enriching our curriculum. We will engage in the new service learning courses within the Faculty of Arts and Science while cultivating relationships with external bodies where our students could be placed, while raising the profile of the program through increased promotion of these exciting options for students.*”

The Faculty Dean supports this recommendation.

PPC response is as follows: **PPC recommends that the Department evaluates how academic credit could be given for “quality practical activities” such as Model NATO and Model UN.**

7. Political Science faculty should be more proactive in bringing to the attention of students opportunities for student publication, attendance at student conference, scholarship opportunities, and other external events that will deepen their academic experience.

The Department noted that *“our faculty will continue to produce collaborative research at the cutting edge of Political Science, with this research informing the teaching we do. Not only do our publications and political analysis in the media raise the profile of Nipissing University, they are also the basis of a real bond of collegiality that exists between our 3 full time faculty members. Because there are so few of us, we must get along and work together! The fact that we have made a habit of writing together core to our scholarship (with a new collection as part of the Regimes series due for completion this fall between [names deleted] adds cohesiveness to our small program, with students exposed to innovative research based in political theory and directed towards understanding contemporary global politics.”*

The Faculty Dean supports this recommendation.

PPC response is as follows: **The University has organized an Undergraduate Student Conference for the past number of years. The Department should encourage the participation of students in these and other activities.**

D. PPC RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the recommendations that require specific action as a result of the Review, along with the identification of the position or unit responsible for the action in question. Notwithstanding the position or unit identified as the being responsible for specific recommendations, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the recommended actions are undertaken.

| PPC Recommendations | Responsible | Projected Completion Date |
|---|-------------------|---------------------------|
| (1)That the Department reviews its current list of cross-listed courses as well as consider the addition of other relevant cross-listed courses in order to ensure greater opportunities for students. | Department | June 2017 |
| (2)That the Department evaluates how academic credit could be given for “quality practical activities” such as Model NATO and Model UN. | Department | June 2017 |