

B. A. Political Science

Program Review Committee Report

2023 - 2024

(i) Program Goals, Objectives, and Activities:

The goals of the Political Science program are aligned with UAM and include the development and dissemination of knowledge to improve society and the intellectual and social development of individual students. The program's goals provide support courses to students in the fields that utilize Political Science knowledge and perspectives. These goals also provide up-to-date content knowledge through faculty research and development. Additionally, the goals for the program prepare students for careers and post-baccalaureate education as well as pre-law curriculum. These goals and objectives are assessed throughout the program. Students engage in undergraduate research projects, intensive independent studies, and capstone coursework.

Students are expected to accomplish program goals and objectives by engaging in American democratic experiences and associated responsibilities. Students also participate in research methods and statistics coursework to introduce them to research and analysis using qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods methodologies. Upper-division seminars are utilized to help students hone their critical thinking skills and evaluate political interpretations. The UAM Political Science department offers self-directed independent studies to allow students to examine topics of their choice. Finally, every UAM student is

encouraged to pursue an internship. Additionally, students have the opportunity to attend/present at conferences.

Faculty utilize the Socratic Method approach to teaching. Faculty encourage students to participate in conferences, field study trips, network with other professionals, attend public lectures, and participate in simulations. The Political Science faculty engages in peer-reviewed research. They are active participants in university service and governance committees such as UAM Faculty Equity and Grievance Committee, UAM Promotion and Tenure Committee, Search Committees, UAM Graduate Council, and UAM Faculty Assembly Committee just to name a few. Additionally, the Political Science faculty are members of numerous professional organizations and are active in community service.

A degree in Political Science prepares students for careers in business, law, education, government, think tanks, labor organizations and the non-profit sector; as well as any job desiring a workforce composed of graduates in the liberal arts. In specific, the following list presents the various fields and specific jobs that benefit from hiring graduates of Political Science: Government; Law, Advocacy, and Corrections; Military; Non-Profit Sector; Media; and Business.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics' "Occupational Outlook Handbook" for Political Science predicts that "employment of political scientists is projected to grow 7 percent from 2022 to 2032, faster than the average for all occupations." Additionally, approximately 15% of the US population serves as military or does public service at all levels of government. This degree is compatible with students intending to pursue a career in the military, especially military intelligence.

Additionally, Political Science graduates interested in impacting the political process would hold political office. Many work at interns within the different level of government. These interns advance through the employment ranks with this degree. Finally, other employment opportunities include Legal Occupations such as lawyers, legal assistants, and paralegals.

While the data indicates a decline in students declaring Political Science as a major, the shift from in-person to online instruction impacted recruitment. Currently, the program has 18 declared majors.

(ii) Program Curriculum

The Political Science program's incorporation of current thinking and trends within the field begins with faculty research. By continuing to research, publish, and present their work in public forums, UAM Political Science faculty ensure that their work is current and relevant to the students. In class, students are given a variety of different sources (ranging from current media through to original sources written by experts in the field) to help them understand that Political Science study is multidimensional.

Political Science also requires students to undertake extensive research projects. This approach is part of an overarching commitment to having students do undergraduate research culminating in final products that adhere to the standards of high-quality research. By pursuing research students develop their skills in argumentation/debate, writing, critical thought, and public speaking. Students are simultaneously challenged to understand the intersection of different academic disciplines and then challenged to make even more of what they learn in class by engaging in critical reflection. Students intern,

take-on large-scale, independent research projects, and attend national conferences in the subject.

The Political Science faculty continually reviews the curriculum to ensure that course offerings are reflective of the current knowledge base and interests of the students, all while maintaining a rigorous commitment to the teaching of core Political Science principles. This involves informal internal reviews and changes, which often lead to formal curriculum changes at the university level. Faculty include assignments that contain a variety of different sources to help students understand that Political Science study is multidimensional: it covers a wide range of political perspectives, diversity, and cultural impact. Currently, faculty are beginning to offer some courses with newer updated titles to attract the interest of the current student population and continue to meet best practices in the field.

(iii) Academic Support

The Political Science program is committed to providing students with a comprehensive education that extends beyond specific topical knowledge. Students majoring in political science not only acquire in-depth knowledge but also sharpen their critical thinking skills by evaluating diverse interpretations of current events. The program emphasizes the consequences of actions and the development of research, writing, public speaking, and debate skills, coupled with a focus on media literacy.

Undergraduate research plays a pivotal role in the program, engaging students in scholarship that makes original contributions to the discipline. This approach, aligned with the Characteristics of Excellence in Undergraduate Research, fosters skills in debate,

writing, critical thinking, and public speaking. Students are encouraged to present their research at various conferences, exposing them to peer and faculty presentations while enhancing their analytical skills in the context of national and international events. Over the last decade, UAM Political Science students have presented independent research at numerous conferences, both regionally and internationally.

The program actively facilitates student engagement with elected representatives, providing opportunities for face-to-face meetings with senators and representatives in Washington D.C. These interactions, both physical and virtual during the Covid-19 pandemic, allow students to advocate for higher education and discuss the value of undergraduate research with policymakers.

Political Science faculty at UAM contribute to student learning through peer-reviewed research, sharing insights and knowledge through lectures and academic texts. The faculty is actively involved in university service and governance, participating in committees at both the SSBS and university-wide levels. Additionally, faculty members are engaged in professional organizations, serving as panel discussants and participants in professional development seminars.

Students are encouraged to develop their research projects, incorporating class materials into their papers to ensure depth and relevance. Class activities, such as Discussion Notebook Entries, promote student ownership of the learning process by encouraging reflections and questions. The curriculum emphasizes extensive research projects, aligning with the program's commitment to high-quality research.

Internships are a key component of the Political Science program, providing students with practical experience in various settings, including local newspapers, the NAACP, law offices, and political offices. This hands-on experience enhances their understanding of real-world applications of political science concepts.

Faculty and Instructors maintain close interaction with students through online platforms, email, and phone calls. The SSBS supports faculty research and scholarly activities, providing financial support for attendance at professional meetings and encouraging publication. Faculty research grants, along with university and SSBS support, contribute to faculty engagement in conferences and research activities.

Recruitment efforts begin early, targeting potential students at high school recruitment days with informational flyers and eight-semester plans. The program has adapted its recruitment materials to appeal to current students, contributing to an increase in declared majors. Indirect recruitment occurs through news releases highlighting the activities of Political Science majors in high-profile events and conferences.

To further support student success, strategies are in place to assist graduates in gaining admission to and succeeding in graduate and law programs. Information sessions, mentorship for advanced majors, and a Pi Sigma Alpha LinkedIn page under construction aim to enhance students' preparedness for advanced academic pursuits.

The UAM Political Science program, despite its size, remains dynamic and adheres to ADHE standards for viability. The commitment to undergraduate research, experiential learning, and faculty engagement positions the program as a valuable and enriching academic experience for students.

(iv) Program Faculty

The program faculty have both earned their Ph.D. and have specialty areas of interest that include US, Arkansas, European, and World Politics. They participate in professional development provided both by UAM and accredited professional organizations in their fields of interest. Completion of annual self-evaluations are mandatory and course load for full-time faculty and instructors meet UAM requirements.

(v) Program Resources

The university provides support for the two full-time faculty members in development in teaching, research, and service that include encouragement for faculty to develop special topic courses and technical support in instructional software. All the faculty members have attended at least one conference every year in the past three years. The School of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SSBS) support of research and travel of the faculty members using faculty development funds, the UAM administration has been very supportive of the faculty in funding travel when costs exceed the SSBS resources and competitive faculty research grants are available through the university. In the past ten years, UAM Political Science faculty have secured two full \$1500 grants and two half (\$750) grants.

Finally, faculty members are encouraged to serve on university committees in addition to committees for the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Over the past three years, the Political Science faculty have served on Faculty Dismissal Board, Faculty Equity and Grievance Committee, Faculty Assembly Committee and various search committees to just name a few.

The Fred J. Taylor Library and Technology Center's collections includes printed books, e-books, journals, e-journals, and databases in addition to inter-library loans. Electronic databases are upgraded regularly giving faculty access to new publications that include ProQuest Centra, JSTOR, and EBSCO. The total budget for the Taylor Library for 2023-24 was \$22,597 for books (including e-books) and \$160,000 for online resources, including journals and databases.

All the classrooms in the Memorial Classroom Building are equipped with a computer that is connected to the internet, a projector, and an audio system that faculty utilize in their classroom instruction. In addition to the classrooms, students have access to computers in the library, a Tutor Center, printed and electronic resources in the library, and consultations with reference librarians.

The following chart is a list of equipment purchases over the last three years. Political Science is housed in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences so many items are used by additional areas.

Item Description
Classroom Computers, 13 Rooms
Classroom Furniture, Four Rooms
Classroom Laser Projectors, Four
Dell Computers for Faculty, Three
Dell Laptops, Two
Dell Monitors, Two
Flat Panel Monitors, 10

Projector Screen
Smart Board and Stand
Webcams for Four Classrooms

(vi) Program Effectiveness

Faculty members are the major strength of the Political Science program. The program is centered around student success in the political science curriculum. Two faculty members; Dr. Davis and Dr. Strong have published in leading peer-reviewed journals and authored notable academic monographs. They have participated in and led regional and national professional organizations; both have been active in the Monticello community, enriching the civic life of the region. Students are engaged in undergraduate research and political science courses, preparing them for graduate or professional programs in the political science field. Political Science can prepare students for a wide swath of graduate work. While law school is a top destination for many graduates, UAM has also sent students into Master of Public Administration programs; master's degrees in political science, Political Economy, Diplomacy, International Relations, and Health Care Administrations; and Master of Arts in Teaching programs.

The political science program needs great improvement in the area of faculty recruitment and retention. The serves the general education program, however in order to justify hiring another faculty member, the program must grow but to grow it requires multiple faculty members. It's a paradoxical bind. Developing new methods and pathways of recruiting will be a top priority in the next few years.

(vii) Instruction by Distance Technology

After a review of the Political Science Program Review report, **it seems as if Distance Technology was not addressed in a manner consistent with the Arkansas Department of Higher Education External Reviewer's Report Template.** The information obtained from the submitted report regarding Distance Learning is limited to a listing of the courses that are offered through UAM's online platform. Those courses are as follows:

PSCI 2213 American National Government

PSCI 2223 State Government of Arkansas

PSCI 2233 Comparative Politics

PSCI 2353 World Politics

PSCI 2283 Research Methods

PSCI 3313 Statistics for the Social Sciences

PSCI 4683 Western Political Theory

In addition, information was included in the report regarding interaction with students online. Instructors interact with students through online content delivery, assessment, discussion boards, and email. With the recent technological advances, however, online/hybrid classes have become more interactive. For one, the ability to stream recorded lectures and recorded PowerPoint lecture notes in ways that are easy for students to download means that online students can see and hear their professor discussing the topics covered in the online class. Students are also encouraged to attend office hours in person or

via Zoom for further interaction with faculty. Students can message professors through Blackboard, email professors through Outlook, or call professors by phone.

(viii) Program Research and Service

The Political Science program clearly outlines the outcome of research for both faculty and students. Six initiatives, archival and database retrieval, presentations, community projects, competitive research, and experiential research opportunities were identified as available for students to participate in research. These opportunities are cited as appropriate for students to develop their analytical skills of current events at both the national and international levels. Students also participate in independent studies that require writing more comprehensive research projects and presenting at conferences. Appropriate assessment of outcomes related to research and creativity is clearly outlined through the extensive publications in leading peer-reviewed journals and monographs as well as presentations given by faculty.

Additionally, the Political Science program has identified internships as a major initiative for students in the major. This is encouraged and cited as best practice. There are several internships identified in local law offices and local and state government to assist students to meet program outcomes.

IX. Local Reviewer Comments

The Political Science program prepares graduates to meet the needs of the state, regional, and national industry, graduate and/law programs. UAM Political Science graduates do well in the workforce, both regionally and nationally. Among recent graduates, Political Science can boast of a Dean of Students, a Field Representative for an Arkansas congressman,

academic program directors, several teachers, an US Army intelligence analyst, and a school district superintendent. For those students preparing for graduate school, information sessions are held that include informal informational talks by SSBS faculty on themes ranging from preparing for and taking the GRE, preparing graduate school applications, preparing for interviews, surviving your first year of graduate/law school, etc. Students are mentored to engage in advanced research methods techniques in order to write papers that are sophisticated enough to be presented in state, national and/or international conferences which helps to improve their research, critical thinking and public speaking skills.

The biggest need right now is additional full-time faculty member. One full-time faculty member remains to teach the general education courses in addition to the program courses. As with many programs right now, the other big modification needed is more students. To try increase the number of majors, the Political Science program plans to merge with History to give students skills from two different disciplines for them to take into the job market. A new class is being developed that will replace multiple research methods courses to teach students how research works in multiple disciplines to better prepare them for projects they will experience in the workforce. Due to the age of the building, the dean will continue to request money to replace the furniture in the classrooms so the students feel like they are in a college atmosphere versus elementary classroom. In addition, plans are being made to create a virtual teaching space for faculty and students to record audio and videos in addition to other online needs.

(x) Report Summary

A Political Science degree offers valuable skills and knowledge that are well-aligned with the current job market needs in the state of Arkansas. US Department of Labor predicts wages and job growth in categories that students with Political Science degrees typically enter will grow an average of 4-7% by 2030. Students with a Political Science degree will be highly employable over the next decade, especially given that their skills will also allow them to easily transfer between jobs and career fields.

The Political Science program does an excellent job of preparing their students for work in a variety of positions within industry, business, and educational institutions, or attend graduate programs. In addition to preparing their own students for graduation, the program provides courses for other majors and for the general education program. The Political Science faculty are continually searching for better methods to serve the students and modifying the program as needed.

Committee Recommendations

(1) Distance Technology (section (vii) Instruction by Distance Technology) was not addressed throughout the Program Review report of the Political Science Program.

Items to be addressed should include:

- A. Are the program distance technology courses offered/delivered in accordance with best practices?
- B. Does the institution have appropriate procedures in place to assure the security of personal information?

- C. Are technology support services appropriate for students enrolled in and faculty teaching courses/programs utilizing technology?
- D. Are policies for student/faculty ratio, and faculty course load in accordance with best practices?
- E. Are policies on intellectual property in accordance with best practices?

(2) One committee member questions if there are quantitative measures for objectives in goals regarding student research and retention (section (vi) Program Effectiveness). If so, these measures would help ascertain areas of improvement.