

Academic Program Review Report

Department of Government

California State University, Sacramento

Review Team

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Fall 2011

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS

The Department of Government underwent their scheduled program review as one among six programs in the 2009–2010 review cycle. This was the third cycle at our University to incorporate the Program Review Pilot Study. The Pilot Study offers programs three options for the design of the Self-study; the Department of Government chose Option C, titled “Focused Inquiry.” As explained in the *Pilot Study Manual of Procedures*, Option C calls for three main components:

- General information about the program, e.g., data on students, faculty, staff, facilities, etc. (most of which is supplied by Office of Institutional Research);
- A statement of intended student learning outcomes at the program level; methods for assessing them, including the use of direct measures; assessment results to date; and documentation of the use of assessment results in efforts to achieve program improvement (assistance with the preparation of which is available from the University Assessment Coordinator); and
- The results of a focused inquiry addressing issues of particular interest/concern to the program itself, in the context of what is currently important to the college and university.

For its focused inquiry, the Department of Government chose to examine faculty perceptions of levels of difficulty among the core courses in the undergraduate programs. This involved administration of a survey and analysis of the results it yielded. The focused inquiry was undertaken in hopes of enhancing the curricular structure and sequencing, and of improving effectiveness of advising by equipping advisors and students with clearer indication of the difficulty level of courses. In the words of the Department’s Self-study (p.4),

Findings from this study will allow us to better understand our curriculum as it currently stands, help us make informed decisions about future curriculum changes, and lay the broader groundwork for improving our department’s advising and mentoring.

This report, like the Self-study and the External Consultant’s report, is structured based primarily on the three sections prescribed by Option C. Therefore, once preliminary materials have been set forth, it begins with general information pertinent to the Department, then examines issues involving learning outcomes and assessment, and then proceeds to the review of the focused inquiry.

The June 24, 2009 WASC reaccreditation letter to President Gonzales specifically calls on our University “to tie program review to planning and budgeting, so that program review findings and recommendations are addressed in the campus-wide resource allocation process.” This Program Review report was prepared during a period of unprecedented budgetary challenges facing our University and the CSU system at large. The situation calls for an approach to topics involving resource allocation that is realistic and mindful of this budgetary situation. This review has been undertaken with such a perspective. Recommendations directly relating to resource allocation are limited to two, both of them addressed to the Dean and the Provost (#4 and #6)—and both of them addressing vital needs.

During the course of the review process, the Review Team consulted the following individuals, documents, and other resources.

Individuals Consulted

Dr. Bahman (Buzz) Fozouni, Professor and Chair, Department of Government

Dr. Jim Cox, Professor and Graduate Coordinator of Government M.A., Department of Government

Dr. David Andersen, Assistant Professor and Graduate Coordinator of International Affairs M.A., Department of Government

Professor Michael Wadlé, Coordinator of Internships & Sacramento Semester Program, Department of Government

Diane Kobely, Administrative Support Coordinator, Department of Government

Dr. Charles Gossett, Dean, College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies

Dr. Terry Underwood, University Faculty Assessment Coordinator

Dr. James C. Brent (External Consultant), Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, San Jose State University

Classes and Meetings Attended

Meeting with full-time faculty in the Department (6 present) (April 28, 2011)

GOVT 130 (April 28, 2011)

Meeting with graduate students (5 present) (April 28, 2011)

Meeting with part-time faculty (4 present) April 29, 2011)

Documents Consulted

Department of Government Documents

- Self-study Proposal (December 8, 2009)
 - <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/progReview/Proposals/Proposals%2009-10/Government%20Self%20Study%20Proposal.pdf>
- *Government Department Self Study Report* (Spring 2011)
 - <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/progReview/Self%20Studies/09-10%20Self%20Studies/GOVT-IA%20Self-Study.pdf>
- *Department of Government Assessment Plan* (April 2008)
 - <http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/plans/Government1.pdf>
- *Department of Government Assessment Report* (annually, 2004–2005 through 2008–2009, and 2010–2011)
 - <http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/Reports/>

- The Department of Government website
 - <http://www.csus.edu/govt/>
- Syllabi from Department of Government courses
- Faculty *curricula vitae*

Office of Institutional Research *Government Fact Book* (Fall 2011)

- <http://www.csus.edu/oir/Data%20Center/Department%20Fact%20Book/Government2011.pdf>

Written comments from Dr. Terry Underwood, University Faculty Assessment Coordinator, in review of Government Department 2008-2009 Assessment Report (June, 2009) and in review of *Government Department Self Study Report* (April, 2011)

External Consultant Report for the Department of Government, Dr. James C. Brent (May 26, 2011)

- http://www.csus.edu/acaf/progReview/Ext%20Consult%20Reports/Ext%20Consultant_09-10/GovntConsultRep.pdf

Previous Program Review report for the Department of Government (adopted Spring 2006) and the External Consultant's report

Program Review Pilot Study, 2007–2012: *Manual of Procedures for 2009-2010 Cycle*

Program Review at Sacramento State

- <http://www.csus.edu/acaf/progReview/>

Office of Academic Program Assessment at Sacramento State

- <http://webapps2.csus.edu/assessment/>

WASC assessment related documents

- WASC Rubrics for assessing undergraduate majors
 - <http://www.csus.edu/programassessment/WASC/RubricsforEvaluatingtheEffectivenessofAssessmentProcesses.9.07.pdf>
- WASC Rubric for assessing educational effectiveness
 - <http://www.wascsenior.org/node/211>

The Review Team wishes to thank all the above who contributed to the program review process.

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations to the Department:

Commendation 1: The Department provides a variety of undergraduate academic programs with curricular integrity and high quality, and provides courses that are vital to several other academic programs.

Commendation 2: The Department has introduced new, timely courses into the curriculum that serve to enhance the various B.A. programs.

Commendation 3: The Department provides many course offerings to the University's General Education program and the Graduation Requirements.

Commendation 4: The faculty of the Department of Government are diverse in their interests and in their wide range of service to the Department and to the University, and are dedicated professionals who clearly enjoy the admiration of their students and who have earned the respect of faculty colleagues across campus.

Commendation 5: The abilities and dedication of Dr. Bahman (Buzz) Fozouni, Chair, and of the departmental office staff, have ensured effective operations in the administration of the Department.

Commendation 6: The departmental website offers an inviting and informative overview of the Department's offerings.

Commendation 7: The Department continues to provide its students with a wide array of beneficial extracurricular opportunities and availability of scholarships.

Commendation 8: The Department has engaged in sound assessment practices over the past several years, and currently shows a clear commitment to effective assessment and to applying results toward improvement of student learning.

Commendation 9: The Department's 2010–2011 Assessment Report exhibits the sorts of sound activities that indicate a healthy assessment system.

Commendation 10: The intentions, design, and execution of the focused inquiry are highly apt in light of the overarching goal of improving student learning through programmatic enhancement.

Commendation 11: The "Lessons Learned" section of the focused inquiry reflects honestly and effectively on the outcomes of the project, and includes tangible steps now to be taken in order to enhance student learning.

Recommendations to the Department:

Recommendation 1: Strategize means of offering core requirements such as GOVT 100, GOVT 130, and GOVT 140 in a manner that makes them more easily accessible to students, and that affords some choice among faculty who offer the courses.

Recommendation 2: Strategize means of ensuring that GOVT 200 is available to students at the appropriate point in their graduate careers.

Recommendation 3: The Department should brace for the time when the (very effective) part-time faculty currently overseeing internships and the Model United Nations are no longer in a position to do this.

Recommendation 5: Make the departmental website and CSUS Catalog section more helpful by taking some simple steps toward improvement.

Recommendation 7: Continue to build upon the already sound approach to assessment by taking advantage of opportunities to improve through relatively simple steps. Suggestions for such can readily be attained through consultation with the University Assessment Coordinator.

Recommendation 8: Consider implementing a portfolio approach to assessment.

Recommendation 9: Carry through on goals for improving student learning that are derived from the Department's assessment activities.

Recommendation 10: To take advantage fully of the focused inquiry's strengths, follow up now with a survey of *student* opinion regarding difficulty, designing the survey so that its results correlate in as helpful manner as possible with the valuable results of the faculty survey.

Recommendation 11: Analyze grade distribution of individual faculty or of individual courses using information accessible via SacVault (Cognos) in order to understand more clearly the correlation of grades to perceived levels of difficulty.

Recommendation 12: Make the most of the focused inquiry study by thinking creatively how to overcome some of the acknowledged challenges and shortcomings, and by considering carefully the assumptions behind some of its assertions.

Recommendations to the Dean and the College:

Recommendation 4 (to College and Provost): At this time of transition in staff personnel, provide adequate resources to ensure that the Department maintains its effective administration and workplace.

Recommendation 6 (to College, and Provost): Ensure support for the various extramural programs (Odyssey Mentor, Model United Nations, Sacramento Semester, and internship programs) overseen by the Department of Government.

Recommendations to the Provost and the University:

Recommendation 4 (to College and Provost): At this time of transition in staff personnel, provide adequate resources to ensure that the Department maintains its effective administration and workplace.

Recommendation 6 (to College, and Provost): Ensure support for the various extramural programs (Odyssey Mentor, Model United Nations, Sacramento Semester, and internship programs) overseen by the Department of Government.

Recommendation to the Faculty Senate:

Based on this program review and the Self-study report prepared by the Department of Government, the Review Team recommends that all of the Department's degree programs be approved for six years or until the next scheduled program review.

GENERAL INFORMATION (Option C, Part 1)

Overview of the Department

The Department of Government is housed in the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies along with Anthropology, Asian Studies, Economics, Environmental Studies, Ethnic Studies, Family & Consumer Sciences, Gerontology, Liberal Studies, Psychology, Public Policy & Administration, Social Science, Sociology, and Women's Studies.

The Department serves six main constituencies of students:

- Undergraduates who major (39 units) or minor (21 units) in Government
- Undergraduates who major (42 units) in Government with International Relations concentration
- Undergraduates who major (51 units) in Government and Journalism (a joint degree program)
- Undergraduates in degree programs that incorporate Government courses, including the Social Science B.A. (3 core requirements), the Liberal Studies B.A. (GOVT 180 required for the California Studies concentration), the History/Social Science Subject Matter Program (3 courses required for the Government area), the African Studies minor (GOVT 142 required), the Hellenic Studies Minor (1 elective course), and the M.A. in Public Policy and Administration (1 elective course)
- Students fulfilling various General Education requirements and Graduation Requirements (see detailed list below)
- Graduate students in the M.A. program in Government (and, although it is in process of being eliminated, in International Affairs)

Undergraduate Programs

The Department offers three options leading to the B.A.:

- B.A. in Government
- B.A. in Government with International Relations concentration
- B.A. in Government and Journalism (joint degree program)

This chart identifies core requirements in the three options:

<u>GOVT course</u>	<u>B.A. option</u>	
• 1, Essentials of Government	Standard	Journ.
• 100, Introduction to Research Methods in Political Science	Standard	I.R.
• 130, International Politics	Standard	I.R.
• 136, International Political Economy		I.R.
• 140, The Study of Comparative Government and Politics		I.R.
• 170, Public Policy Development	Standard	I.R.
• 180, California State and Local Government		Journ.

Commendation 1: The Department provides a variety of undergraduate academic programs with curricular integrity and high quality, and provides courses that are vital to several other academic programs.

Since the previous Program Review, four new upper-division courses have been developed: GOVT 118, “Just Wars, Natural Rights, and the Law of Nations”; GOVT 143, “Causes of Wars and Causes of Peace”; GOVT 145, “Government and Politics in Asia”; and GOVT 168, “Gay and Lesbian Politics.” As the Self-study makes clear, each one of these courses is a timely addition in terms of subject matter and with regard to the various programs offered by the Department. Plans also are in the works for revising and updating GOVT 125, “Politics of Justice,” and GOVT 162, currently titled “American Film and Culture in the Nuclear Age.”

Commendation 2: The Department has introduced new, timely courses into the curriculum that serve to enhance the various B.A. programs.

GOVT 100 is a required course for the standard Government major and for the major with International Relations concentration. Over the course of the past three semesters, a total of nine sections of this course have been offered; all but two of them enrolled over capacity. The nine sections were taught by only three different members of the faculty, four of the sections by one individual. The Self-study (p.40) notes that GOVT 130 “is required of all government majors making it a difficult course to enroll in... The same dynamic exists for Government 140..., which currently only has one section offered per academic year.” External Consultant James Brent in his report (p.6), while not specifying course numbers, observes: “Students strongly expressed the wish that teaching assignments in all required courses be rotated at least occasionally, to give students who wish to avoid enrolling in a particular faculty members’ courses the opportunity to do so. To the extent this suggestion is feasible, I endorse it, particularly as it concerns lecturers.”

Recommendation 1: Strategize means of offering core requirements such as GOVT 100, GOVT 130, and GOVT 140 in a manner that makes them more easily accessible to students, and that affords them some choice among faculty who teach the courses.

Service to General Education and Graduation Requirements

The Department is a vital contributor to the University’s General Education program, offering a wide array of courses across four GE areas; it also offers two courses that fulfill Graduation Requirements:

- GE Area C3: Introduction to the Humanities
 - GOVT 10, The Meaning of Government: An Intro to Political Ideas
- GE Area D1B: World Cultures
 - GOVT 35, World Politics
 - GOVT 142, Government and Politics in Africa
 - GOVT 143, Causes of War, Causes of Peace
 - GOVT 144, Government and Politics in Europe
 - GOVT 147, Latin American Government and Politics
- GE Area D2: Major Social Issues of the Contemporary Era
 - GOVT/JOUR 134, War, Peace, and Mass Media
 - GOVT 163, Introduction to Black Politics in U.S.
 - GOVT 165, Politics of the Underrepresented
 - GOVT 169A, Science, Technology, and Politics
- GE Area D3: American Institutions

- GOVT 1, Essentials of Government
- GOVT 113, American Political Thought
- GOVT 150, American Governments
- GOVT 180, California State and Local Government (fulfills state and local government requirement, but not U.S. Constitution requirement)
- GR: Race & Ethnicity in American Society
 - GOVT 163, Introduction to Black Politics in the U.S.
 - GOVT 165, Politics of the Underrepresented
- GR: Writing Intensive
 - GOVT 165, Politics of the Underrepresented

Commendation 3: The Department provides many course offerings to the University's General Education program and the Graduation Requirements.

Graduate Program

The M.A. in Government requires completion of 30 units, at least 24 of which must be graduate-level. Each student chooses two from among four areas of specialization:

- Political Theory
- American Government/Public Law/Public Policy
- International Relations/Comparative Government
- California State and Local Government

The 30 units include the 3-unit Culminating Requirement (GOVT 500), which can be a thesis, a project, or comprehensive exams in the student's two fields of specialization. In addition to GOVT 500, there is one common core requirement: GOVT 200, Method and Scope in Political Science.

The Department recently decided to eliminate the M.A. in International Affairs. This likely will facilitate more flexibility with regard to offering courses catering to the M.A. in Government. External James Brent in his report (p.7) acknowledges this with regard to GOVT 200, but nevertheless recommends that the Department "continue to monitor" the current shortage, according to graduate students, of opportunities to take GOVT 200.

Recommendation 2: Strategize means of ensuring that GOVT 200 is available to students at the appropriate point in their graduate careers.

Faculty and Staff

The departmental website lists 15 tenured/tenure-track faculty and 6 lecturers. The Office of Institutional Research *Government / International Affairs Fact Book* (Fall 2011) lists 24 faculty as of 2010; 10 tenured, 5 on tenure track, and 9 not on tenure track. A survey of faculty *curricula vitae* (some of which are available via the website) reveals a wide range of academic interests and accomplishments. Various opportunities to converse with departmental faculty and with students make clear that the Department benefits from a strong group of dedicated professors.

Commendation 4: The faculty of the Department of Government are diverse in their interests and in their wide range of service to the Department and to the University, and are dedicated

professionals who clearly enjoy the admiration of their students and who have earned the respect of faculty colleagues across campus.

When praising the Department for its internship and Model United Nations programs (more on this below), Dr. Brent expresses concern over the fact that

they are both currently run by part-time faculty members. This does not appear to be a major issue in the short term, because both of these “temporary” faculty members seem highly competent and dedicated to continuing these programs (partially because they mean continued employment). But these programs could become immediately imperiled if either one of these lecturers were to retire or otherwise leave the university...

The department should continue to employ these part-time faculty members as long as they are willing to stick around, but it should also be taking steps to prepare for their departure. The department’s next tenure track hires in IR/comparative and American politics should explicitly incorporate responsibility for these programs into the job descriptions. If it has not already done so, the department should begin collecting assessment data on these programs in order to effectively demonstrate their utility to university decision-makers. This may make any future hiring requests more compelling in a time of diminished resources. (pp.6-7)

Recommendation 3: The Department should brace for the time when the (very effective) part-time faculty currently overseeing internships and the Model United Nations are no longer in a position to do this.

With 15 tenured/tenure-track faculty and approximately 9 lecturers, over 400 undergraduate majors, and a sizeable number of graduate students, the Department of Government is faced with significant administrative challenges. Its extensive involvement in General Education and Graduation Requirements and its various contributions to other degree programs further complicate things; in Fall 2011, for example, the Department processed over 700 adds and drops. The number of staff positions has been reduced from 2 to 1½, and the Department now braces for transition in staff personnel. Still, one cannot help but be impressed by the effectiveness with which the Department is being administered. A visit to the office reveals a neat, well organized physical space, and inquiry into administrative goings-on suggests impressive ambition and attention to needs. Departmental Chair Bahman (Buzz) Fozouni, for example, has recently completed a draft revision of the Catalog copy. All indications from faculty, staff, and students support the notion that the Chair and the administrative staff are well liked, and that social relations are sound and conducive to providing a good situation in which to work and to study.

Commendation 5: The abilities and dedication of Dr. Bahman (Buzz) Fozouni, Chair, and of the departmental office staff, have maintained effective operations in the administration of the Department in spite of a reduction from 2 to 1½ staff positions.

Recommendation 4 (to College and Provost): At this time of transition in staff personnel, provide adequate resources to ensure that the Department maintains its effective administration and workplace.

Facilities and Technology

The departmental office is located in Tahoe Hall 3104; the faculty offices are also on the third floor of Tahoe Hall. The Department shares with the History Department a conference room, located in Tahoe Hall 3109. Government courses are taught in a variety of buildings, most typically Tahoe Hall, Alpine Hall, and Amador Hall.

The departmental website offers a wealth of information, including concise and intelligently crafted statements on the Department's offerings, and an eloquent mission statement. The opening paragraph, presumably the first thing most interested students and other first-time visitors read, deserves special attention for its engaging and inviting style:

Government, elsewhere known as political science, is part of the larger liberal arts learning experience and, in company with the General Education program, has for its goal the development of "students' general intellectual abilities—curiosity, powers of critical analysis, aesthetic appreciation, and creativity." The goal for study in a Government major is to maximize students' capacity to analyze and interpret the dynamics of political events and governmental processes and their significance.

The "Government Department Faculty Information" page (accessed via the "Office hour" link on the homepage) makes very clear the office locations, office hours, and contact information for all faculty. Faculty in the Department identify their "areas of research and interest" in their departmental pages (and some provide *curricula vitae* or the like at individual websites, accessible via links on these departmental pages). The departmental homepage also features a link to "Forms and Additional Information" for both undergraduates and graduates. From the "Program Information" link, very helpful information is available for those interested in the undergraduate major or the graduate program.

Commendation 6: The departmental website offers an inviting and informative overview of the Department's offerings.

The website can be made even more helpful for students, faculty, and other visitors by means of some simple improvements:

- Include office staff contact's name on the site, presumably on the homepage
- Note the master's program on the homepage (currently only the undergraduate options are noted)
- Establish URL links to the CSUS Catalog section for the standard major and the minor (currently there are links to the Catalog section for International Relations and for Government-Journalism, but not to the others)
- Adjust the URL links to the Catalog section for International Relations and for Government-Journalism so that the reader is taken directly to those degree listings
- Note that the URL link "Other Sites of Interest" currently goes nowhere; this would be a useful means of sharing information about the Department's wide array of interesting opportunities

Similar sorts of slight revision to the CSUS Catalog's entry for the Department should also be made. The paragraph description of the graduate program does not mention teaching at community college as a career option, and yet, all of our area community colleges have political science

departments. The M.A. in International Affairs is still listed as if an active graduate program (perhaps this is appropriate for now, but soon will need to be changed). The International Relations concentration requirement has “offer” where it should have “take.”

Recommendation 5: Make the departmental website and CSUS Catalog section more helpful by taking some simple steps toward improvement.

Student Affairs and Advising

According to the OIR *Fact Book*, the number of undergraduates in the Department has ranged from 399 to 445 from 2006 to 2010, of whom from 25 to 38 have been freshmen and from 55 to 84 have been new transfer students. Graduate student enrollment over this same period has ranged from 45 to 65.

The Department offers a variety of opportunities for students to participate in activities related to the study of government. Pi Sigma Alpha is the national political science honor society; juniors, seniors, and graduate students with sufficient unit count and (for undergraduates) at least a 3.0 GPA are eligible to apply for membership. The Association for Political Studies is the student club for Government majors and minors. Phi Alpha Delta is the national pre-law organization.

The Department offers three scholarships for Government students, awarded on an annual basis: the Pat and Bill Dorman Scholarship in Government / Journalism; the Jack Livingston Fellow in Political Theory and American Institutions Scholarship; and the Douglas McDaniel Memorial Scholarship.

Along with these opportunities for students to participate in organizations and to secure scholarships, the Department provides signature programs that deserve special attention and commendation: the Odyssey Mentor Program; the Model United Nations class/program; the Sacramento Semester program; and two additional internship programs, the Government Department Internship Program and the Washington, D.C., Internship. The departmental website provides easily accessible information on each of these:

- Odyssey Mentor Program: <http://www.csus.edu/govt/Mentor/index.html>
- Model United Nations class/program: <http://www.csus.edu/govt/MUN.html>
- Sacramento Semester program: <http://www.csus.edu/govt/SacramentoSemester.html>
- Internship programs: <http://www.csus.edu/govt/Internships.html#Department%20Internship>
- Washington, D.C., Internship: <http://www.csus.edu/govt/Internships.html#Washington%20D.C.%20Internship>

Dr. Brent in his External Consultant report notes that the Odyssey Mentor and Model United Nations programs are “very successful and known throughout the state” (p.1). Over the course of the past five years (including AY 2011-2012), the Department has sent 160 delegates to the two Model United Nations conferences (the American Model U.N. is held in the fall; the National Model U.N. is held in the spring, in New York). Our University’s delegates have won significant awards, at both conferences. The Odyssey Mentor Program is highly regarded on our campus, such that several other departments are adopting their own versions. The Program provides freshmen and transfer students with a mentor who is an upper-division major or a graduate student. Among

other things, the Program should, over time, enable the Department to attract a more ethnically diverse group of majors, better reflecting the student population of the University at large.

Prior to setting forth Recommendation 3 (above), this report notes Dr. Brent's concern that currently the internship and Model United Nations programs are run by part-time faculty. Earlier (p.4) in his report, Dr. Brent expresses a related concern involving the internship programs: "Unfortunately, the university has recently reclassified the job of the internship coordinator, resulting in a reduction of his salary and the elimination of paid vacation days. Considering what a valuable asset the internship program is to the university, this seems penny wise and pound foolish" (p.4). The Review Team reiterates and emphasizes Dr. Brent's opinion regarding the value of the Department's efforts to provide students internship experiences. This is entirely in keeping with our self-image and role as the "Capital University." The Review Team also shares Dr. Brent's concerns over resource allocation for these important programs.

Commendation 7: The Department continues to provide its students with a wide array of beneficial extracurricular opportunities and availability of scholarships.

Recommendation 6 (to College and Provost): Ensure support for the various extramural programs (Odyssey Mentor, Model United Nations, Sacramento Semester, and internship programs) overseen by the Department of Government.

ASSESSMENT (Option C, Part 2)

The Review Team finds that the Department of Government has over the past several years engaged in sound assessment practices relative to the average extent of our University's achievements in this area. With its focused inquiry undertaken with this Program Review cycle (discussed in the next section) and with its impressive 2010–2011 Assessment Report, the Department shows a clear commitment to effective assessment, both in planning and in executing. The Review Team also is encouraged by signs indicating that the Department intends to apply the results of assessment to making real improvements in student learning.

University Faculty Assessment Coordinator Terry Underwood generally gave high marks to the Department for its assessment efforts. For example, in his comments pertaining to the 2008–2009 Assessment Report, Dr. Underwood writes: "This report in itself is an exemplar of how assessment can be carried out to stimulate faculty thinking about not just curriculum but also instruction." And in his review of the Self-study (p.26), Dr. Underwood remarks with regard to the Department's analysis via the rubric of student papers: "The following section is a great example of good assessment. This department collected some data and really analyzed it and came to some solid insights." External Consultant James Brent comments in his report approvingly regarding the Department's past assessment efforts: "In 2002, the department developed student learning objectives and an assessment plan designed to measure student mastery of those objectives. The learning objectives are thoughtful, comprehensive, and uncontroversial." (p.2) Dr. Brent goes on to compliment as sound assessment instruments the exam given in GOVT 1 and the analysis of student papers using the departmental grading rubric.

Commendation 8: The Department has engaged in sound assessment practices over the past several years, and currently shows a clear commitment to effective assessment and to applying results toward improvement of student learning.

In part because it is the latest piece of evidence regarding the Department's assessment efforts (and too late to have been considered by Dr. Brent in his report), the Review Team wishes to note that the 2010–2011 Assessment Report exhibits characteristics of an approach to assessment that is based on wisdom acquired from past efforts, integrated with the current activities and issues involving the Department as a whole, and clearly practical and forward-looking with regard to design, execution, and application of results. The 2010–2011 efforts focused on the assessment of information acquisition because (quoting from p.2 of the Report) "we found this goal to be difficult to evaluate in previous assessments." It is admirable that the Department has responded to previous challenges in this assertive manner. The Report goes on to cite as another reason the desire "to update our rubric and refocus our goal on the use of outside sources" (p.2). This shows helpful interconnection among various aspects of the Department's assessment system.

Commendation 9: The Department's 2010–2011 Assessment Report exhibits the sorts of sound activities that indicate a healthy assessment system.

While the Department's assessment activities have in general rightly earned accolades (from Dr. Terry Underwood and Dr. James Brent), naturally there are still opportunities for improvement. The Review Team suggests considering some simple steps:

- Be consistent with terminology; a sound approach is to refer to the five main departmental goals as Learning Goals, to measurable aspects of each as Learning Outcomes, and to the standards used for measurement (e.g., rubric categories) as Indicators
 - On a related note, consider adopting the means of classifying learning goals/outcomes as proposed by Dr. Terry Underwood on pp. 29–30 of his review of the Self-study (Cognition, Communication, Learning, Civic Engagement—each with its sub-goals or outcomes)
- The Department's 2008–2009 Assessment Report notes (p.3) a problem with insufficiently large sample group; increase the size of such groups as needed
- The 2008–2009 Assessment Report also notes (p.5) the inability “to control for credits taken in our analysis of papers written for either Government 130 or Government 111”; this problem can be easily remedied by checking students' records and grouping the papers accordingly
- The 2008–2009 Assessment Report also notes (p.5) that the “number of hours it would take to apply a rubric to a large enough sample size to compare scores takes too much time for an already overworked faculty”; the solution might be to combine as much as possible these assessment activities with the actual grading activity that needs to be done anyway
- As suggested by Dr. Terry Underwood in his review of the Self-study (p.10), the Department should strive to align lower-division course learning goals with the programmatic goals
 - For that matter, a full mapping between “core” courses and the program, with one eye on the University's Baccalaureate Learning Goals, would be helpful; as Dr. Underwood asks later on in his review of the Self-study (p.12), “What are the connections between GOVT 1 and Civic Engagement, Intercultural Competence, Communication, and Critical Thinking?”
- Note that the departmental learning goals are never actually identified in the Self-study (Dr. Terry Underwood also noted this in his review [p.26]); apparently in the past (2008–2009 Assessment Report) these learning goals were identified as “writing” outcomes—and so there is some confusion here; compare the 2010–2011 Assessment Report, which helpfully sets forth the five learning goals on p.1
- The 2010–2011 Assessment Report (p.3) lists the various papers surveyed “to determine the quality and types of sources that were being used in assigned research papers”; while in general this approach is laudable, it seems problematic that only one paper was selected from two of the classes (GOVT 165 and GOVT 180), and that perhaps it would be well worth the extra effort to ensure a suitable amount of papers whenever undertaking such a survey

Recommendation 7: Continue to build upon the already sound approach to assessment by taking advantage of opportunities to improve through relatively simple steps. Suggestions for such can readily be attained through consultation with the University Assessment Coordinator.

In his review of the Self-study (p.4, and again later, on p.30), Dr. Terry Underwood remarks:

That the department provides “...each student with the opportunity to construct the major around their personal academic and future professional goals” suggests a range of opportunities for undergraduate research, particularly given our location. I'm wondering if the department has considered a portfolio plan tied in to advising and perhaps two or three identified courses? If there were just a few “anchor” courses (a gateway course and a capstone at minimum), and if faculty could find ways to use an electronic portfolio as a part

of course assignments in the meantime, my bet is a capstone folio conference would be powerful!

Dr. James Brent in his External Consultant report (p.4) also recommends a portfolio, suggesting that “Once this has been done, much of the onus for collecting assessment materials suddenly falls upon students.”

The General Education Honors Program has recently (commencing Fall 2011) implemented an efolio. The Department of Government might be able to draw usefully from this.

Recommendation 8: Consider implementing a portfolio approach to assessment.

The Self-study (p.26) lists four “Future goals based on the current conclusions”:

1. Develop means for students to determine which classes are appropriate to begin study and which develop more advanced challenges
2. Establish means for instructors offering sections of the same class to work collaboratively and coordinate expectations
3. Consider means with limited resources to allow students to engage in longer research projects and writing assignments
4. Consider further ways to establish clear assessments for major level requirements

All four of these goals are worthwhile, but notably only one (#4) is obviously and directly related to “assessment.” This is precisely as it should be. Rather than being some self-contained set of activities and objectives, assessment should be a touchstone to a variety of means toward programmatic improvement, some of which might seem far removed from the assessment activities themselves. And needless to say (but demonstrably difficult to do, based on the evidence to date at our University, and presumably at many other institutions as well), actually carrying through on such goals derived from a sound approach to assessment is absolutely essential.

Recommendation 9: Carry through on goals for improving student learning that are derived from the Department’s assessment activities.

FOCUSED INQUIRY (Option C, Part 3)

The departmental Self-study sets forth in the opening paragraph of the “Focused Inquiry” section the intention to undertake “a survey of our undergraduate curriculum to help guide our program into the future” (p.27). The need for such was based on a variety of factors, the most significant of which involved “limited information about the level of expectations that professors had for students enrolled in their courses” (p.27), a situation that naturally accompanies a programmatic curriculum devoid of a clear pyramidal structure. The Government B.A. includes only one formal prerequisite: GOVT 1 is required in order to enroll in most upper-division courses. (In addition to this formal requirement, GOVT 170 is recommended only for students in their final semester of the major.) The Department also identified several related questions that could better be answered by way of such a focused inquiry, all of them clearly relating to interest in improving curriculum at both the course and the program level, and advising.

The survey, consisting of 25 questions and conducted using the online tool *SurveyMonkey*, focused attention on faculty perception of levels of difficulty among the undergraduate core courses. Along with acquiring the name and status (full-time or part-time) of the faculty person, the survey acquired a variety of information about the particular course in question, including information regarding reading and writing assignments and the aforementioned faculty perception of difficulty. (The survey is included as Appendix C of the Self-study and is also accessible at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LTMWNYC>.) The Self-study (pp.28–41) provides a detailed presentation and analysis of the results.

Commendation 10: The intentions, design, and execution of the focused inquiry are highly apt in light of the overarching goal of improving student learning through programmatic enhancement.

The Self-study concludes with a brief summary section titled “Lessons Learned” (pp.42–3). While not technically part of the focused inquiry section, these lessons are drawn primarily from the survey results and considerations of their implications, and so it is appropriately addressed here. The section opens by noting that the process has provided the Department with “a framework for further developing its curriculum,” and includes, along with a list of accomplishments, notice of several tasks to be undertaken or practices to be adopted in light of the Self-study’s findings. These include:

- Consideration of “areas in our curriculum where gaps might exist”
- Evaluating “required and elective courses and determining if the distribution between intermediate and advanced courses is reasonable”
- Applying the results of the focused inquiry to faculty “for their use in student advising”
- Encouraging “faculty members to explicitly state in their syllabi the expectations for the course and the level of expected preparation the student should have in order to comfortably engage the material”
- Making “available on our webpage a table that lists the course difficulty for all the surveyed courses in the major”

Commendation 11: The “Lessons Learned” section of the focused inquiry reflects honestly and effectively on the outcomes of the project, and includes tangible steps now to be taken in order to enhance student learning.

The Review Team’s response to the focused inquiry is, in sum, So far, so good—indeed, very good. But the current survey has the rather obvious disadvantage of representing faculty opinion only; potentially there is a significant disconnect vis-à-vis student opinion. This basic shortcoming is apparent at some points in the Self-study; for example, when it asserts (on p.37):

Survey results demonstrate that, overall, Government faculty members do an excellent job designing courses appropriate for the skill level that they are pitched at. Courses that are seen as advanced are indeed more advanced, incorporating higher expectations for writing and expectations to engage with more complex ideas.

All of this is based on faculty opinion only, thus involving a “closed circle” of analysis. Courses “are indeed more advanced” according to faculty opinion, and so it’s to be expected that they are designed appropriately “for the skill level that they are pitched at”—because said skill level, too, is determined by the faculty.

External Consultant James Brent in his report (p.3) concurs on this point, and suggests steps toward remedying:

The focused inquiry is a very useful starting point for additional conversations and evaluations to come. In the short term, the department should attempt to validate some of its findings by surveying *students* on their perceptions of course difficulty and correlating that with faculty-reported perceptions of course difficulty. It would also be an interesting exercise to compare faculty-reported difficulty levels with average student grades.

University Assessment Coordinator Terry Underwood, in his review of the Self-study (p.31), puts it this way: “A missed opportunity! The department should have surveyed a sample of students, too. It would have been so easy to do with FlashLight!”

The Review Team regards this not as a “missed” opportunity, but rather (with Dr. Brent) as a sound next step. A student survey would clearly supplement—and probably challenge in interesting and productive ways—the results of this valuable faculty survey. The survey could likely be fashioned by way of revising the faculty survey, and perhaps it could be embedded in the course evaluation process, or else distributed as an independent survey.

One advantage of a student survey over a faculty survey involves the fact that each Government major eventually enrolls in the full slate of courses required to earn the B.A., while any given faculty person teaches only some of them. This means that the same person is evaluating “difficulty” of the entire range, and so to some extent the problem of relativistic judgment is alleviated. Even courses not taught by The Government Department but nonetheless part of the major curriculum could be included in such a survey. On p.38, the Self-study admits: “The present analysis is unable to make a judgment on the difficulty level of those courses since they are offered by other departments.” A student survey *could* yield such a judgment.

On p.42, the Self-study advocates that the results of the focused inquiry make their way into syllabi and onto the departmental website as means of clarifying course expectations. Here, too, the Review Team commends the idea, but also recommends that student input be incorporated in order

further to validate the information; or, at the very least, if this information is to be provided sooner than later, that it be accompanied by clarification regarding the source (i.e., faculty opinion) of the information.

Recommendation 10: To take advantage fully of the focused inquiry's strengths, follow up now with a survey of *student* opinion regarding difficulty, designing the survey so that its results correlate in as helpful manner as possible with the valuable results of the faculty survey.

A student survey would involve its own challenges; for example, students might be prone to gauge "difficulty" based on the grades they've received. Careful consideration of grades (suggested in Dr. Brent's comments cited above) would assist in alleviating such grade-related challenges.

Issues involving grading surface at places in the Self-study. Tables 12, 13, and 14 (pp.12–13) chart grade distribution for lower-division, upper-division, and graduate courses, respectively. On p.16, the Self-study states: "To the extent that grade distribution can be viewed as proxy for how demanding and difficult the courses are, one may infer that Government courses in general appear to be more demanding and difficult than average comparable courses in both the College and CSUS." Analysis of grade distribution and correlation of grading to perceived levels of difficulty could transform the need for inference here to concrete data that would prove helpful in sorting out these various grade-related challenges. Especially with the information now readily available via SacVault (Cognos), such analysis can be undertaken fairly easily.

Recommendation 11: Analyze grade distribution of individual faculty or of individual courses using information accessible via SacVault (Cognos) in order to understand more clearly the correlation of grades to perceived levels of difficulty.

Table 1 of the Focused Inquiry section of the Self-study (on p.29), "Undergraduate Government Course Classifications," categorizes courses as Basic, Intermediate, or Advanced, per the faculty's perceived level of difficulty. The Table confirms in more detail what is stated earlier (p.24) in the Self-study: "a few courses were being taught at different levels by different instructors (at least as the instructors perceived it)." This gives rise to a rather obvious question regarding the focused inquiry study: What is the standard for judging difficulty? This is of course a thorny issue, and one that the Department has not ignored. One partial solution might involve agreeing on a standard targeted workload defined by amount of time required for a student to meet course expectations. A reasonable standard is a 9-hour time commitment (including time in class) per week for a 3-unit course. With this fixed and one variable thereby removed, the equation is simpler: if a course is manageable in 9 hours per week by students with little or no specific preparation, it is "Basic," and so forth.

The results of the faculty survey already are being used to good effect, but it's not too late to reflect critically on the assumptions that seem to lie behind its design and the ideas now being based on its results. For example, in the section "*Assessing Course Difficulty by Content Indicators*" (p.31), might there be too much emphasis on writing? For example, should some classes require more time spent on *reading*? Ongoing consideration by the faculty regarding the design and results of the survey will help make it as valuable as possible. Such consideration would naturally be part of the designing of an accompanying student survey.

Recommendation 12: Make the most of the focused inquiry study by thinking creatively how to overcome some of the acknowledged challenges and shortcomings, and by considering carefully the assumptions behind some of its assertions.

Recommendation to the Faculty Senate:

Based on this program review and the Self-study report prepared by the Department of Government, the Review Team recommends that all of the Department's degree programs be approved for six years or until the next scheduled program review.