

Departmental Response and Action Plan Political Science Academic Program Review, June 2013

Acknowledgements

The members of the Political Science faculty wish to thank the external review team, Professors Rodney Hero (UC Berkeley), James Meernik (University of North Texas), and Sharon Erikson Nepstad (UNM, Dept. of Sociology). Following a two-day visit, the team succeeded in identifying a number of key issues with respect to resources, governance, policy, and planning, and provided constructive suggestions. We also thank the UNM faculty, staff, and administrators who took part in meetings related to the review, particularly Nancy Middlebrook and Tom Root, who provided detailed feedback on the department's self-study, and Bessie Gallegos who planned the site visit.

Summary Response

The APR external review team found that the department has been doing excellent work with limited resources, and argued that the department needs to grow to a faculty of twenty to be able to sustain and build upon its success to date. In proposing growth of the faculty, the team acknowledged that given budgetary constraints, such growth will take time, and places responsibility on the department to make wise choices about what positions to fill and in what sequence. We agree on all points.

The APR team members encountered divergent opinions about whether the department was a supportive working environment for faculty. Their report also showed that our own faculty members are unfamiliar with some departmental procedures, which need to be formalized and better documented. During a retreat held on August 15, 2013 to discuss the APR visiting team's report, we reached the conclusion that work climate and procedural issues are linked. That is, concerns about the fairness of faculty evaluation and other procedures derive in large part from a lack of formal documentation of the department's established practices, as well as a few unanticipated problems such as junior faculty fears triggered by the College's request that junior faculty submit identified written opinions on competitive counteroffers for higher ranking, tenured faculty. Building on progress made during the August retreat in clarifying the guiding principles for department procedures, we will draft over the next year a set of by-laws and procedures for governance. At our retreat, we also agreed to seek outside training on diversity issues.

The APR team noted, as did a previous team ten years earlier, that the department seldom holds discussions about long-term strategy. Our response is that strategic long-term discussions cannot be a priority for a department that is critically understaffed, that has experienced debilitating budget cuts affecting basic operations to the point of removing telephones, and that has been told repeatedly that there are few prospects for growing to the needed faculty size. We require a clear commitment from the administration to

support hiring sufficient faculty to do the work asked of us. Within existing constraints, the department can, however, do more to optimize our work through review of undergraduate and graduate curriculum, improve our outcomes assessment process, and communicate learning objectives more effectively to students. Our action plan incorporates such steps.

Detailed Comments

Size of the Faculty

We concur with the team's recommendation that the department grow to approximately twenty faculty members. While we in fact need more faculty than this (twenty five would be needed to provide the depth and breadth of faculty expertise our students need and deserve), we consider twenty a reasonable and appropriate goal given UNM's fiscal constraints. At our current 14 tenure-track faculty members on paper (excluding the dean), our department is by a wide margin the smallest among our HED peer group. We are just over half the size of the average department of 25 faculty members. In terms of research productivity and graduate student success, we outperform many larger departments, but there are limits to what a small number of faculty can accomplish or sustain. At 20 FTE we would still be five faculty members smaller than the mean for our peer group. At our current 11.25 FTE of tenure track faculty actually working for the department (2.75 faculty FTE, not counting the dean, are committed to appointments outside the department), our previous successes in establishing and maintaining a national reputation are in imminent jeopardy.

In that context, we are particularly concerned that, following a delayed and unsuccessful search in International Relations last year, we were not able to repeat that search this year. If the university continues to depend on our faculty members for extended duties outside the department, we must be allowed to hire replacements. Following a successful hire in comparative politics for fall 2014, our most urgent needs remain in International Relations, Comparative Politics, Public Policy, Health Policy, American Politics/Political Communication, and, unless RWJF Center Interim Director Gabriel Sanchez returns full time to the department soon, Latino Politics.

Mentorship

Helping junior faculty to succeed is a top priority for the department. The department established a formal mentorship policy in November 2012 following a detailed discussion and faculty review of multiple drafts. Although the APR report raised concerns about our mentorship mechanisms, we consider it premature to judge the new policy inadequate based on an APR site visit conducted only six months after it was put in place. The team mentioned with concern that junior faculty "not infrequently received different or conflicting advice from different faculty, or, occasionally from the same faculty person at different points in time." It is not surprising that faculty members give different advice; we are a pluralistic department, and senior faculty members have differing conceptions of the ideal career or research trajectory. Junior faculty deserve to know the range of opinion within the department regarding the best journals, best publishing strategies, and best approaches to teaching. We do not favor assigning a single mentor to junior faculty, a mentor whose views might or might not accurately reflect the aggregate views of tenured

faculty. As has always been the case, junior faculty receive definitive guidance from the tenured faculty each year by means of an annual review letter that is written by the chair following a detailed discussion among the tenured faculty. The department chair meets with each junior faculty member to discuss the letter, to answer any questions, and to ensure that each junior faculty member is receiving the guidance she or he needs. The November 2012 policy also calls for more regular teaching observation and evaluation, and that improvement is already underway.

Climate

The APR team encountered divergent opinions about working climate, with some faculty members describing the department as supportive and open, and others finding it “a decidedly difficult environment, of faculty with closed doors or ‘not around,’ and who seem dismissive of research questions and agendas that some of their colleagues are pursuing.” The team also expressed particular concerns about the climate for women and minority women. We discussed these issues in depth during our August 2013 retreat. Without going into inappropriate detail, we note that two faculty members resigned almost immediately following the APR committee’s site visit, and their views may have unduly shaped the visiting committee’s assessment. Our department is among the most diverse and gender balanced in the discipline, and we continue to hold a strong commitment to hiring and supporting the success of women and minorities. During the retreat, we discussed what steps would ensure a high degree of trust in the fairness of our decision making with respect to faculty hiring and retention. We decided that the best path forward would be to focus on documenting our procedures to ensure transparency, faculty awareness of procedures, and consistency. Although the review team’s report addressed the departmental climate issues under the rubric of “people, resources, and related issues,” we view climate concerns as in large part a function of policies that are either insufficiently documented, or insufficiently familiar to faculty members. In addition, however, at our retreat we agreed that we should seek some training on managing diversity issues in the workplace. We were surprised to learn that UNM does not offer such training internally. The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity offered to provide a workshop on civil rights in education, and we will arrange such a workshop during AY 2014-2015. In discussion with the UNM Office of Equity and Inclusion, we were advised to familiarize ourselves with research on “stereotype threat,” exemplified by the work of Claude Steele. These steps are incorporated below.

We concur with the observation that the department has not had as vibrant an “intellectual life” as it should. This reflects in part that faculty are individually and collectively overextended, with all effort going into maintaining the basics. We have taken steps beginning in fall 2013 to consolidate multiple lecture and symposia series within the department, avoiding scheduling conflicts and increasing the tempo of events. We have dedicated resources each semester to bringing out at least one outside speaker to present research on a topic of broad interest within the department.

Procedures

By tradition, the department does business in an informal manner that minimizes busy-work, is protective of faculty time, and provides fair and detailed evaluations of annual

performance of junior faculty. The department lacks written by-laws, and this appears to be generating some problems. The APR report and our retreat identified a number of issues on which faculty members expressed uncertainty regarding procedures. These included how faculty members are appointed to internal committees, the timing and announcement of committee meetings, and rules for graduate comprehensive examinations. To address both the areas of ambiguity, as well as a general need for somewhat greater formality in the way we conduct business, the department will draft, review, and approve by-laws and procedures during 2014.

Some of the issues raised by the APR report puzzled us, including the claim that we did not protect junior faculty from having to voice opinions that could affect more senior faculty. It has been our uniform practice for decades to avoid exposing junior faculty to such risks. Further discussion among the faculty before and during the retreat clarified that this occurred when the College asked junior faculty to complete questionnaires about potential competitive counteroffers to retain senior faculty members. In view of the concerns expressed by junior faculty on this point, we hope the College will reconsider this practice and allow junior faculty to recuse themselves from such questionnaires, the confidentiality of which cannot be fully guaranteed.

Regarding mid-probationary review, tenure and promotion, and promotion to full, we respectfully disagree with the APR committee's characterization. In fact, the department has had published promotion guidelines in place since 1993, recently updated to reflect changes in scholarly communication within the discipline. These guidelines, in combination with the UNM Faculty Handbook, provide clear standards and procedures for these processes. It became evident during the site visit that some faculty are insufficiently knowledgeable about UNM and department procedures. This was addressed during the August retreat and will be addressed periodically by means of communications from the chair.

There is clearly room for improvement in other aspects of our procedures. For example, our retreat uncovered the fact that a number of the concerns about faculty climate in fact involved breaches of confidentiality, particularly in the form of unguarded remarks by faculty members to graduate students regarding other faculty members. We agreed to redouble our efforts to protect confidentiality, and we also agreed to adopt a practice of declaring "executive session" during faculty meetings during the discussion of sensitive matters to emphasize confidentiality.

Our retreat led to a series of steps, responsive to the APR team's recommendations, that we enhance faculty participation in departmental decision-making. In fall semester 2013 we issued an open call for volunteers for all committees, completed appointment of the graduate and undergraduate committees early in the semester, and held a three-stage election for the Executive Committee with each rank electing their representative in sequence.

Graduate Program

Some of the issues mentioned by the APR committee with regarding graduate funding reflect factors outside the department's control, particularly the Office of Graduate Study's tendency to announce specialized awards late in the year, according to no published timetable, long past the point at which they are useful for recruitment or departmental planning purposes. Suffice it to say that the department graduate director has been very aggressive and successful in seeking graduate student funding, and we categorically reject any suggestion that the department is making anything less than maximum effort to support our students. The APR team reported that some students feel that continued funding is uncertain for advanced doctoral students. This is an unavoidable result of our need to commit some assistantship monies each year to recruiting new students. Given limited funds, doctoral students *should* face uncertainty about latter year funding, especially if their progress has been slow. We do not plan to make changes in our funding policies in this regard.

In response to the APR committee's remarks, the Graduate Committee completed a review of comprehensive examination procedures and, based on discussions during the retreat, completed a proposed redesign of graduate exit requirements that would streamline the steps to degree completion, add an oral examination for all doctoral students, and create a uniform process across subfields. This proposal was discussed in December 2013, the Graduate Committee is making further refinements, and we expect that revisions will be in place before the end of the 2013/2014 academic year. We will explore the committee's recommendations regarding "strategic recruitment."

Operating Budget

The APR report noted that our operating budget had declined sharply in recent years, after stagnating for at least two decades without inflation adjustments. The operating budget now falls well short of the department's needs. The primary impact is that we cannot adequately support faculty development. We guarantee only partial funding for one conference each year, and have very limited funding for additional training (such as summer methods workshops) that our faculty urgently need to stay up to date with developments in the discipline. Budget cuts delayed equipment replacement and software acquisition, and caused us to remove most faculty office telephones. Although faculty hiring is by far a higher priority, when the general fiscal situation does improve we need to get back to a level of operating support consistent with our level of professional activity. In the last few years, we have compensated for the lack of operating funds by using revenues from online courses, but this source of income ends this fiscal year, at which point we will face damaging constraints.

Planning

We agree with the APR committee's advice to the department to engage in more planning and internal review of our programs. We can, for example, get more value from outcomes assessment, and while we have a history of adjusting our graduate program design from time to time, our undergraduate curriculum may benefit from more active review. We are exploring opportunities for course-sharing with allied social sciences departments and we

may be able to take more advantage of local resources such as the concentration of retired diplomats in and around Santa Fe for some foreign policy related courses. Beyond such limited internal steps, however, a necessary condition for any strategic planning is a clear commitment from the College and higher administration regarding future faculty hiring. In 2012, we completed a detailed five-year hiring plan, laying out essentially the same needs we identified in our APR self-study. There is strong sentiment, however, that further discussions of how to shape the department are futile until there is something concrete to discuss. For more than a decade we have experienced critical losses to our faculty, and lent a disproportionate number of faculty to administrative roles outside the department, in the absence of reliable information on how many faculty positions we would be able to fill in subsequent years. At this writing, we have verbal commitments from the College to convert an existing visiting assistant professor position into a tenure-track one at the same rank, and to allow us to fill a critical faculty position in the international relations sub-field. We hope to replace one faculty member in Health Politics and Policy, with funding from the RWJF Center for Health Policy at UNM, but approval from RWJF is pending. Beyond that, we have no information on our hiring prospects. We are aware of the fiscal constraints facing the College. Plans by the central administration to cut colleges by one percent create additional uncertainties, because the decision rules for distributing “results” based funds to colleges remain unknown. In this climate, based on recent experience, we are unavoidably concerned about the future of our operating and graduate student support budget, not to mention our prospects for rebuilding our faculty. This is an unsupportive environment for long-term thinking.

Timetable

Hiring: We need to hire three faculty members for FY16 (in international relations, in health policy, and in American politics/political communications), and at least two more for FY17 and FY18 (in public policy, comparative politics, research methods, or minority politics). This rate of hiring, assuming no resignations or retirements, would bring us to the 20 faculty positions recommended by the APR committee. One of these positions (health policy, for FY 16) would be primarily funded by the RWJF Center for Health Policy at UNM.

Procedures: We have held a departmental retreat to identify areas of uncertainty and outline principles. We have already modified some practices with respect to committee appointments. The department chair will draft general by-laws in collaboration with the department Executive Committee. We will complete the drafting, revision, and approval of department bylaws by the end of calendar year 2014. We will ensure that procedures are published through our website, and that faculty are more frequently briefed on UNM and department procedures regarding faculty reviews.

Graduate Program: Graduate Committee has already drafted revised examination procedures and exit requirements for the MA and PhD programs. We expect to have the

updated graduate procedures finalized by May 2014. We will explore the committee's recommendations regarding "strategic recruitment."

- Climate:** During AY 2014-2015, we will arrange a workshop from the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity on civil rights in education, and we will hold discussions during either a retreat or in a faculty meeting about the concept of "stereotype threats" and how to minimize such challenges for faculty and students.¹ Beginning in AY 2013-2014, we will increase the tempo of research presentations and symposia, and will commit department funds to bringing in an outside speaker each semester, resources permitting.
- Planning:** By the end of AY 14/15, the department will conduct a review of its undergraduate curriculum with an eye to sequence, appropriateness of course level, and sustainability/staffing. We will continue to conduct an outcomes assessment discussion each year, considering changes to curriculum and pedagogy, and making adjustments to SLOs and measures to produce more valuable data. Annually, we will discuss programmatic priorities and implications for faculty hiring.
- Operating:** With the loss of EU/online revenue, the department needs to see restoration of at least the level of operating money we received prior to the 2008 / 2009 rescissions, with growth in subsequent years. We understand that this will not be possible through FY 2015 because of College fiscal constraints, but in the long run it will be essential to our success. A reasonable target is a 50% increase from our FY14 base by FY18.

¹ Claude Steele 2011, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We can Do*, Norton.