December 8, 2016

To the External Review Committee:

First, let us express our sincere appreciation for your service as external reviewers for the Georgia State University Department of Political Science. We understand the demand on your time and very much appreciate your willingness to help. Your expertise and insights into the state of the department and its future directions will be very critical to our effort in formulating a strategy to move forward.

We have enclosed the department’s self-study report, which provides a comprehensive summary of the state of the department consistent with the strategic directions specified in Georgia State’s current 10-year strategic plan. We appreciate the evident hard work of the self-study committee (Michael Evans, Sarah Gershon, Michael Herb, Sean Richey, Amy Steigerwalt, and Jelena Subotic) and its chair (John Duffield). We believe the report clearly demonstrates how the Department of Political Science has made important contributions to the university’s strategic planning goals, and it helps shape a pathway for future sustainability and accomplishment.

We applaud the Political Science Department’s progress over the course of the review period and since its most recent self-study. The department has developed into a vibrant and mature unit with 7 full professors, 14 associate professors, 4 assistant professors, and 4 lecturers of various ranks. Over the past 10 years, 10 faculty were tenured and promoted to the rank of associate professor, 3 were promoted to the rank of professor, and 3 lecturer-track faculty were promoted, including 1 to the rank of principal senior lecturer. The department is currently in the process of recruiting a new assistant professor. The department’s faculty have been successful in securing external funding for research and in the quantity and quality of scholarly output. The self-study report notes with pride its US News and World Report and National Research Council rankings. The department also has actively contributed to Georgia State’s strategic global initiatives through international research and active involvement in field schools and study abroad programs.

The Dean’s Office agrees with the goals outlined in the Political Science Department’s self-study report. We do, however, have further questions about how to proceed in the most effective way to achieve these objectives. In the context of Georgia State University’s revenue-neutral budgetary climate, we essentially have 3 options for developing the strengths of our programs: (1) redirection of resources within existing departmental budgets to maximize programmatic impact, (2) lateral redirection of resources from other units within the college where we are convinced that the value added in a particular unit is an effective way of achieving the goals of
the university’s strategic plan, and (3) entrepreneurial pursuit of opportunities for external funding. In accordance with those contextual parameters, we would like the external review team members to consider the following items:

- Goal 1 is to improve retention and progression to graduation of the department’s diverse undergraduate major addresses while increasing and strengthening college-peer pathways with 3 objectives to achieve the goal: (1) increase the frequency and consistency of offering of courses for majors to promote progression; (2) strengthen and expand active learning opportunities; and (3) increase research training and experiences, especially from underrepresented groups. Are these reasonable objectives to achieve undergraduate success? Are there other strategies or approaches that the department should consider? Are there additional innovations that the department should consider?

- Goal 2 is to restructure existing M.A. programs to better serve contemporary graduate students with 2 objectives: (1) restructure M.A. course offerings and (2) provide adequate administrative support. Are these reasonable objectives for the M.A. program? Are there other strategies or approaches that the department should consider to increase enrollment in the M.A. program? Are there additional innovations that the department should consider?

- Goal 3 is to further strengthen the Ph.D. program by attracting and retaining more qualified students, shortening completion times, and better preparing doctoral candidates of careers with 3 objectives: (1) admit more doctoral students of higher quality and retain them; (2) reduce time to doctoral degree completion by offering more graduate classes, reducing teaching demands, and eliminating program obstacles; and (3) better advisement for doctoral students for the academic job market and non-academic careers. Are these reasonable objectives for the Ph.D. program and what is the right size for the doctoral program? Are there other strategies or approaches that the department should consider? Are there additional innovations that the department should consider?

- Goal 4 is to build on previous progress toward creating world-class research faculty that reflects Georgia State’s diversity with 3 objectives: (1) retain research active faculty; (2) exploit opportunities to add new faculty, especially those that increase the Department’s diversity; and (3) maximize faculty progression through the ranks. Is the quantity and quality of faculty research and the level of external funding appropriate for the aspirations of the department? Are there other strategies or approaches that the department should consider? Are there additional innovations that the department should consider?

- Of the first four goals, should some goals be given a higher priority than the others?

- Goal 5 is to expand interdisciplinary research and scholarship focusing on global issues and problems faced by cities with 3 objectives: (1) expand expertise in the politics of cities and the context in which they exist, such as state government; (2) increase interdisciplinary research activity with other units in the College of Arts and Sciences and beyond; and (3) increase the number of interdisciplinary grant applications and
sponsored research proposals. Are these reasonable objectives for addressing the university’s urban/cities and global strategies goals? They are the least fully developed in Georgia State’s current strategic plan. Do you have more specific and concrete suggestions for departmental programs and initiatives to address these goals? Are there additional innovations that the department should consider?

We look forward to your analysis and insights on the state of the department and its future directions.

Sara Rosen, Dean
College of Arts and Sciences

Donald C. Reitzes, Associate Dean
Social and Behavioral Sciences