Report of the External Committee for the
Academic Program Review of the
Department of Political Science,
College of Arts and Sciences,
Georgia State University

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Executive Summary
In the Fall, 2016 we were asked by the Office of the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness of Georgia State University (GSU) to serve as the external reviewers for the Academic Program Review of GSU’s Department of Political Science in the College of Arts and Sciences. On January 23, 2017, we were provided access to a comprehensive and well-documented Self-study Report with appendices by the Department of Political Science, a Chair’s letter providing an overview of the Self-study, and a Dean’s letter from the College of Arts and Sciences with items for us to consider. We conducted a site visit over February 26-28, 2017. During that time we met twice with the Provost, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and other administrators. We met with the Chair of the Department and with groups of department faculty over meals, and conducted interviews and held discussions with faculty regarding the undergraduate curriculum and programs, the graduate curriculum and programs, departmental strategic initiatives, and issues around faculty recruitment, retention and development. We also held meetings with MA and PhD students and with undergraduate students in the department. The Associate Provost and Department Chair quickly addressed our requests for additional information.

We find that the Department of Political Science is central to the research, instructional and service missions at GSU. It is a high achieving unit with an impressive research profile among its faculty and a strongly collegial environment. The Department makes significant contributions to the discipline, has a strong research culture, and national and international visibility. The Department also has impressive undergraduate and graduate programs, and is a leader in instructional innovation at both levels. It has the highest credit hour generation per full-time faculty ratio in the social sciences at GSU. Survey results show mostly above-average satisfaction among students, and its six-year undergraduate retention and graduation rates are typically above both the College and the University rates for the 2007-2009 years. It has innovative graduate programs, such as the 4+1 Master’s Program and the soon to be launched on-line MA program, and a PhD program with a strong placement record especially in one subfield. Many departmental faculty have assumed leadership and professional service roles in the Department, the College, the University and beyond. Despite significant resource constraints, notably in terms of faculty and graduate student support, the Department overall is doing well and fully deserves University and College support and further investment.

Throughout the report, we make recommendations for the University to consider regarding improved communication about university policies and initiatives, as well as regarding policy changes and modest resource reallocations that could bolster faculty recruitment, retention and development, graduate student support, undergraduate experiences, and improved integration of the Department further into GSU and interdisciplinary work. We also make recommendations to the Department in these areas, including encouraging their continued efforts to participate in GSU’s Next Generation initiative and other GSU interdisciplinary endeavors, and more focused suggestions on issues such as faculty mentoring, undergraduate advising, and ways to improve graduate student time to degree.
Introduction
In the Fall, 2016 we were asked by the Office of the Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness of Georgia State University (GSU) to serve as the external reviewers for the Academic Program Review of GSU’s Department of Political Science in the College of Arts and Sciences. On January 23, 2017, we were provided access to a comprehensive and well-documented Self-study Report with appendices by the Department of Political Science, a Chair’s letter providing an overview of the Self-study, and a Dean’s letter from the College of Arts and Sciences with items for us to consider. We conducted a site visit over February 26-28, 2017. During that time we met twice with the Provost, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and other administrators. We met with the Chair of the Department and with groups of department faculty over meals, and conducted interviews and held discussions with faculty regarding the undergraduate curriculum and programs, the graduate curriculum and programs, departmental strategic initiatives, and issues around faculty recruitment, retention and development. We also held meetings with MA and PhD students and with undergraduate students in the department. The Associate Provost and Department Chair quickly addressed our requests for additional information. This review generally follows the format of GSU’s report guide provided us, except that recommendations are provided in each section, rather than listed at the end.

Contributions to the Discipline
The Department of Political Science at Georgia State University is a high achieving unit with a significant research profile. The Department has a number of visible scholars and a significant level of national (and international) visibility. Members of the Department contribute to all the traditional responsibilities: research, teaching, and service. The teaching appears to be very strong across the board, and the members of the faculty assume a significant service burden for the Department, the College and the University. Despite perceived research resource deprivation and the loss of a couple of productive scholars (and to excellent places like Cambridge University, University of Exeter, and the University of Chicago), the Department is doing reasonably well.

There are several metrics that can be used to evaluate the relative strength of a department. The most familiar, by US News and World Report, is based on a reputational (peer assessment) survey among Political Science departments, and its most recent report (2013) ranks Georgia State’s Department of Political Science as 83rd. GSU is ranked slightly behind, right alongside, or just ahead of flagship state institutions such as the University of Kentucky, University of Connecticut, the University of Massachusetts, the University of Missouri, Louisiana State University, the University of Tennessee, and the University of Oklahoma. Other notable departments that are in the same neighborhood as GSU include the University of Illinois-Chicago, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, University of Houston, and American University. There is a notable lag in reputational measures, but given recent and sustained successes of the Department, this ranking deserves to be and could well be higher the next time it is completed.

The research profile of the Department is impressive. In the last three years, faculty members have had 64 peer-reviewed journal articles, including publications in two of the top three general journals in the field, and in many top subfield journals in the discipline. These are selective
outlets with publication rates that typically are below ten percent. Faculty members have also published over two dozen book chapters and a number of books, many in prestigious university presses over the last five years. They have also authored, co-authored or co-edited 11 books, many from leading university publishers such as Stanford University Press, University of Michigan Press, Johns Hopkins University Press, Cornell University Press, and University of Pennsylvania Press. This is bound to enhance the visibility of the Department and individual faculty members across the profession.

The Department has a history of success gathering external grants. The grant activity is down somewhat, but that is likely primarily a reflection of a key external factor, significant cuts in external money for the social sciences and humanities. Additional (low cost) support such as occasional course releases and a reward structure that recognizes attempts to procure external funds (proposals out the door), even when the efforts are unsuccessful, could generate more grant applications.

Research-wise, the Department has strength at all three faculty levels. Over-all the full professors are still impressively research active (reflected in their average citation counts), even as a number of them have been in demand for administrative positions both within and outside the Department. They model good behavior for their junior colleagues. The evolving strength of Political Science at GSU lies in the mid-level, the associate professors who also represent the future leadership of the Department. They are also the largest group of tenure/tenure-track faculty in the Department (14), compared to 7 full professors and only 4 assistant professors. Faculty across the ranks deserve the support of the College and the University, including particularly the highest achievers, those who are most marketable and potentially mobile.

One way to evaluate the contributions to the discipline is to assess the impact that the Department’s faculty research generates. The scholarship of individual faculty members has gained significant positive attention. The evidence of Google Scholar citations is compelling for a Department of Political Science (where faculty members publish both books and articles, with the emphasis depending on subfield). Five of the six full professors have over 1000 citations to their work, and the average is over 1150; their h-index ranges from 10 to 21 with an average of 15.4. It would appear that many if not most of these individuals were hired before GSU became an R1 institution, yet they have consistently performed at that level. Furthermore, the citation counts for many associate professors are also rather impressive, which speaks well for the Department’s future trajectory. At least three faculty members at this rank have over 700 citations (commonly found for Political Science faculty at the full professor level, depending on the subfield), and the average is around 470; their h-index ranges from 2 to 12, with an average of 8.6.

The Department has a number of subfield strengths, especially in American Politics (notably Public Law), in Comparative Politics, and in Political Behavior. The Department also has some depth in Political Theory at a time when most departments do not. Public Law is perhaps the most visible subarea, followed closely by Comparative Politics. The Public Law program has four faculty members and the support of a lecturer. It recently has been able to place all of its PhD graduates in tenure track positions. Attracting good students to study American politics has become difficult nationally. Comparative, overlapping with International Relations, has
prominent, active research scholars and public intellectuals who address pressing global
problems while also contributing to national and international debates on these issues. The
Political Behavior subfield overlaps geographical boundaries, with excellent work being done
both focused on the United States and elsewhere. The Department is also able to attract good
students in comparative politics, including international students. Their ability to maintain this
track record will be constrained going forward to the extent that their already limited stipends
potentially become even more uncompetitive.

One of the hallmarks of GSU is the incredible diversity of its student body. It is not surprising
that the composition of the faculty does not approach similar diversity. In our view, improving
faculty diversity could improve both the research and the educational missions of the department.
Thus, we believe it would be worthwhile to find ways to move the Department in this direction.
Since this also speaks to the Department goal (4) of retaining research active faculty and taking
advantage of the GSU incentive structure and opportunities to add new faculty via Next
Generation cluster hires, especially those that increase departmental diversity, we provide our
recommendation on this point in the final section.

**Recommendation:**
We believe it makes sense to maintain and sustain the excellence of the Public Law and
Comparative Politics areas and enhance the International Relations area, which has extensive
potential areas of overlap and collaboration with Comparative and can also deepen collaborative
links with other GSU institutes and schools.

**Quality of Research Culture**
There is a strong and visible research culture in the Department. It is manifested in the sheer
numbers of publications to be sure, but there is further evidence. The across the board strong
average citation levels are a positive manifestation of an active research culture. Faculty
members work with students on joint projects. There is a significant amount of faculty
collaboration within the various subareas. But what is even more notable is the range of
collaborative projects among the faculty that cut across traditional subfield boundaries. American
politics scholars publish with Comparative faculty. Work among Comparative scholars cuts
across different areas of the world and different governmental institutions, in collaboration also
with the small number of scholars of International Relations. There is a healthy mix of books and
articles. We do not see evidence of narrow research silos within the department.

As noted, the quality of the faculty is quite high, a reflection of impressive faculty pedigree. Ivy
League schools (Harvard and Princeton) are represented as are other top-ranked graduate
programs including Emory, UCLA, and University of California-Berkeley, University of North
Carolina, Chapel Hill, University of Texas at Austin and Stony Brook,. A plurality of the faculty
members are from top Political Science departments in Big Ten schools like Northwestern,
Wisconsin, Michigan State, Minnesota, and the Ohio State University. It is worth repeating that
the Department has some excellent mid-range faculty members who are potentially mobile.

Although unusual to include in a section on research and scholarship, we want to note the
impressive value provided by the Department’s lecturers. Our discussions with the students
underlined a true affection for the lecturers and their Herculean service efforts (i.e., study abroad,
pre-law advising) merit mention and gratitude. In addition, a closer examination shows that there is a research component to their individual and collective work. First, and most obvious, a number of these lecturers are actively engaged in research, publishing their scholarship, and seeking grants. Some of that research is substantive; some is on the pedagogy of teaching. Less evident, but potentially more important, a few of the lecturers (Brown and Evans) are developing large data sets that other faculty (at GSU and beyond) and graduate students at GSU may be able to leverage for numerous future projects.

The general support structure is not adequate to sustain long-term success. The department is constrained by inadequate staff support, and by space issues. A recurring complaint (and it was echoed at all levels) is the lack of resources manifested in relatively low faculty salaries, and uncompetitive departmental graduate student stipends. These may be unavoidable and certainly not solvable in the short-term. One consequence of the low salaries appears to be that many faculty teach in the summer to supplement their income. Their research success is even more notable given this fact.

The paucity of travel funds compounds the problems. Faculty need and want to go to conferences, but having access to $1,200 each year does not typically even cover one conference. Faculty members have to choose between foregoing a conference or dipping into their own pockets. Not being able to present their research and network effectively is psychologically debilitating and potentially a major structural problem. The frustration may encourage departures of quality junior and mid-level faculty. Paying to hire and fund new faculty for those who leave is always significantly more expensive than providing a little additional travel money, not to mention the costs in time and resources spent on the search processes themselves.

Recommendations:
Raising travel budgets is not resource neutral, to be sure, but there are ways to supplement the budget that would not be costly. There are some “pay as you go” alternatives. Many universities have models that allow departments to recover revenue from on-line courses or summer teaching. If the Department is willing to have some additional on-line summer classes, maybe some of the revenue could be reinvested in the departmental budget. The Political Science Department has been aggressive in developing and growing an on-line American Government class (with hundreds of students), is currently developing an on-line MA program, and appears to have robust summer enrollments. A budget model that would reward such entrepreneurial endeavors would benefit students, fill coffers, and if partially redirected, could enhance travel budgets, maybe even assist research travel, and boost morale. And this would be somewhat resource neutral side as it would be dependent on growing existing or soon to be launched programs. There could also be some redirection of resources. If every department, regardless of size, quality, or research output receives a similar amount of this type of research support, redistribution could be a place to start, with resources held back for high performing departments. The amount of money required to enhance the travel budgets to a reasonable level would not be overwhelming. It would engender a great deal of good will and show support for what we consider to be a very high functioning department in the College.

There are some additional suggestions that may bear some modest fruits. Although from what we learned, the Department is quite well-integrated and junior faculty members feel comfortable
approaching any of their colleagues, a more formal mentoring system may be a useful tool to continue the progress. Mentoring is typically associated with tenure-track faculty and the tenure process and we recommend it particularly at this level. Yet, we also believe it would be useful to implement a more formal departmentally-managed mentoring process to include associate professors, particularly those who are recently tenured. They are called upon to navigate heightened expectations for service with continuing their research momentum, playing a more significant role in the graduate program, and, when appropriate, mentoring tenure-track faculty. Related to this suggestion, we observed some confusion about tenure, promotion, and merit standards. As the institution moves farther along the research continuum, it is critical that faculty members at all levels and the Department as a whole understand the evolving standards. This issue could be incorporated into broader Department discussions and consultations as well as the mentoring process.

We commend the Department and its leadership for establishing an advisory board, which can enhance the unit’s visibility, ties to its alumni and other community members, and facilitate greater private support, and recommend it continue its efforts in this area.

We believe the Department could enhance its visibility through improvements in its website. In particular, websites of individual faculty members, noting their research, teaching and service contributions, should be made much easier to locate from the department website, as well as information regarding such departmental selling points as the extent of joint authorship across faculty and current and former graduate students. Other recommendations are included in the section on goals.

There are several university-wide changes which could strengthen the Department’s research culture. We suggest the university consider providing clear incentives to reward departments that seek to build a strong profile of research-active faculty. This could include making it clear that if a department decides on its own not to promote someone to associate professor with tenure, it will not lose that line permanently (though it may go to a different subfield in the department).

The university can also make clear that it supports both a strategy of hiring active tenure-track and newly tenured faculty who help raise the research profile of the department through their productivity, as well as seeking to bring in top stars with the hope and expectation that their trajectory will continue at GSU. This department’s strong cohort of associate professors suggests it has hired well at the junior level.

As explained to us, the university currently provides parental leave through a combination of FMLA and sick leave. Many R1 institutions of higher learning (including two of the ones where we currently work) provide their faculty members with paid semester-long parental leave, with the teaching load for that period of time managed by the respective department. As GSU seeks to enhance its research profile and be seen as a supportive environment, a move in this direction could enhance faculty recruitment and retention.
Quality of the Department’s Undergraduate and Graduate Programs
The Department offers both undergraduate and graduate programs, and we discuss them in that order.

Undergraduate Program. The Department’s undergraduate major in Political Science provides for concentrations in International Affairs, Pre-Law or a General Political Science focus. The curriculum includes a methods course and a capstone seminar capped at an enrollment of 25, and both these elements speak to the high quality of their curriculum. The focus on only two areas of emphasis (with a general political science option) should also be commended. The department has focused on areas where it has significant strength (public law and comparative politics/international relations). The degree requirements reflect disciplinary norms which typically expect students to be able to think critically about substantive issues and challenges facing society and to communicate effectively differing perspectives on potential solutions.

The students in the undergraduate curriculum have impressive credentials with average high school GPAs over the last three years between 3.33 and 3.38. The Department’s assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) also demonstrates that students are meeting or exceeding the five SLOs identified by the department and show impressive growth in the last assessment cycle. The undergraduate survey generally showed equal or higher than GSU average results across almost all questions; there was a modest (statistically insignificant) lower than average response with regard to the availability of research opportunities.

The Department of Political Sciences has the highest credit hour generation per full-time faculty ratio in the social sciences at GSU (appendix 2.a.3(3)). At the same time, the six-year retention and graduation rates for Political Science undergraduates are typically above both the College and the University rates for the 2007-2009 years. Because of the size of the Department’s undergraduate program, the success of its students is critical to achieving College and University goals. And, given the instructional role, scope and mission of the University, both the high number of students taught and the achievement rates of the Department should be commended.

In addition, the feedback from the students with whom we met confirmed the empirical evidence of the strength of the undergraduate program. We met with several students from the program, all of whom were students of color. The diversity among the undergraduate program is one of its greatest strengths. All of the students commended the dedication of the faculty. They also praised the accessibility of the faculty, their enthusiasm for the material, and their passion for student learning. Indeed, students were effusive in their praise of the faculty. In particular the students noted the array of experiential learning opportunities, or signature experiences, available to them. These include the award winning Model UN, Model Arab League, and Mock Trial programs. In addition, students cited the internship program, specifically the legislative internship program that links the academic enterprise with real world experience. Indeed, the Department oversees the legislative internship program for the entire state which is an impressive service that benefits students across all of Georgia’s institutions of higher education. The faculty has built pedagogically sound experiences that provide course credit allowing students to leverage these commitments. Given the large number of students working part-time, this is a considerable strength of the curriculum. It is also a significant commitment on the part of the faculty.
Similarly, the faculty’s commitment to study abroad experiences is admirable. Currently the Department provides approximately 10% of the College’s study abroad participants. Over the last several years, the department has run or sponsored programs in France, Turkey, India, Cuba and Brazil as well as numerous exchange programs. Moreover, the faculty has offered domestic field schools on immigration and judicial process. Both types of programs are critical to the strengths of the department in comparative politics and international relations as well as public law. The faculty also contributes substantively to the Honors College with some dozen courses that constitute the largest number of honors credit hours among the social and behavioral sciences.

The students had strong praise for pre-law advising across the board, and particularly for the role of the Department’s pre-law advisor, whose website is a model that other universities should look to as an exemplar.

Several of the students with whom we spoke were in the 4+1 Masters program and were effusive in their praise of the program. They acknowledged the challenges of tackling graduate courses in their senior year but were uniformly positive about their intellectual and professional growth as a result of their participation. Concomitantly, it should be noted, the faculty praised the 4+1 students as strong contributors to the classroom. Indeed, one of the 4+1 graduates was recently awarded an American Political Science Association Minority Fellowship, a very competitive and prestigious award, supporting the assertions of the participants and the faculty.

The faculty is to be commended for their innovative and pedagogically sound approach to online learning for POLS 1101, Introduction to American Government, which is required of every undergraduate. The faculty obtained funding to pilot an experimental section. The data from that experiment was utilized to strengthen the course as well as to publish from it. As a result of the faculty’s commitment, the number of students in the on-line section soared from 21 students in the fall of 2013 to 981 in the fall of 2015, a truly impressive expansion. More critically, the SLOs remain strong for those students, comparing well to students taught in other formats. The faculty also provide a tremendous service through POLS 2401 (Global Issues) that heavily serves the general education core.

**Recommendations:**
While we were uniformly impressed with the program, its students and its faculty, we provide several suggestions to strengthen the program.

It is clear that the signature experiences are important to the students and to the faculty. However, it seems that the administrative support for these programs is lacking, particularly for study abroad. As explained to us, faculty members running these programs have incurred expenses for student air fares on their personal credit cards for reimbursement and have been responsible for managing overseas logistical details. While this is admirable, and the faculty noted that the University reimbursed them appropriately, this is less than ideal, is likely to inhibit possibilities to expand study abroad programs, and raises potential liability issues for the University. We understand that there will be new leadership for study abroad whom we assume will be attentive to these issues.
While students praised the faculty for their mentorship, some expressed concerns about advising. Students noted that the central advising staff was slow to respond to requests, which presented challenges for scheduling and thus progression to graduation. Some of the students also noted that they would appreciate being assigned a specific faculty mentor. However, we later learned they are in fact assigned a specific faculty mentor, and they are notified via email; students apparently are not reading the email. The department might want to consider additional ways to inform students and about more uniformly approaching faculty advisement.

Students and faculty expressed concerns about course scheduling. Faculty could benefit from data on sections needed to meet student demand across varying times while students would similarly appreciate some sort of wait listing or other processes that could preserve seats for those who are in their final semester or year to ensure timely progression to degree. However, absent additional resources, including additional staffing, such challenges are likely to persist.

In addition to the existing 4+1 Master’s program, the Department could also explore the possibility of a 3+3 program with the GSU Law School. This would require some restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum so that all required courses are completed within 3 years with no more than 15 hours per semester. Then, the first year of law school would transfer back to complete the undergraduate degree with only two years of law school remaining. However, absent additional administrative and possibly teaching infrastructure, it would be difficult for the department to undertake this.

Students in the survey responses noted that there were insufficient opportunities for undergraduate research. While the faculty has been thoughtful in potential ways to resolve this concern, such as a research intensive track for undergraduate students, absent additional administrative or teaching resources we do not see this as realistic. The department is struggling to meet student demand as it is for both graduate and undergraduate students.

**Graduate Program.** Graduate students reflect positively in the survey about their experiences in the program. We also met with a number of graduate students, only one of whom was in the MA only program. These students were also quite diverse, and the overall statistics for the department indicate that approximately 27% of the department’s graduate enrollment is comprised of students of color. Again, this is a great strength for the program.

Every student praised the faculty as exceptionally strong mentors committed to their educational experience and to ensuring each felt at home. The students felt that they were receiving strong training, and noted the successful placements of a number of graduates, particularly in public law, into tenure-track positions. Several have also been placed in non-academic tracks such as the Central Intelligence Agency, marketing firms, and state government. The SLOs for the graduate program also reflect student achievement at or above expectations. Where minor weaknesses are noted, the faculty has been attentive and worked appropriately to strengthen the program.

The curriculum provides students with strong methodological and substantive training. Students are required to pass through a number of milestones to ensure progression. Students are also provided two pedagogy courses, training often missing in many doctoral programs and the faculty is to be applauded for this. Given the incredible number of undergraduates taught by
graduate students, this mentoring is impressive and the evaluative results suggest that students are achieving SLOs at levels comparable to other faculty.

Students noted the benefit of participating in the Graduate Student Conference sponsored by the Department which provides a soft platform for students to present their research before stepping onto the conference stages of the various political science associations. A number of students noted that they had already presented at regional or national conferences, a critical step in the development of a marketable record. Indeed, students praised the ability to co-author with faculty conference presentations and subsequently publications.

While students praised the program for preparing individuals to be competitive in the academic marketplace, the students also pointed to the Department’s highlighting career opportunities outside the academy. Graduates who have pursued professional careers outside of academia are invited to speak to students who appreciated the opportunity to widen their perspectives on potential career paths.

The Department should also be commended for being the first to develop a fully on-line masters degree program for the College. The program is designed to leverage the recent legislative change that requires middle-school and high-school teachers to obtain disciplinary degrees for advancement rather than masters degrees in education. The faculty has developed the initial courses and will continue to develop courses as the cohort(s) progress. This is an incredible and quite frankly visionary commitment on the part of the faculty. It is critically important that the College provide support for the program discussed more fully below.

At the same time, graduate students expressed concerns about time to degree, especially in light of the low (or in some cases minimal or no) stipends provided. We endorse the department’s five-year funding model for students directly admitted post baccalaureate.

Recommendations:

In order to enhance the likelihood of students completing their Ph.D. in five years, we offer several suggestions. First, we recommend eliminating the major area paper (MAP) now required between successful completion of the comprehensive examinations and writing the dissertation prospectus. While the intent is to have student work toward their prospectus with the MAP, instead it increases the workload for both the student and the faculty when the prospectus in and of itself accomplishes the same thing without a delay. Moreover, some students do not build on the MAP for their prospectus, which further delays progression to graduation and their inability to complete the program while on funding.

A second recommendation is that the faculty considers reducing the hours for the degree. Many programs, including those of their peer and aspirant institutions, require 60 hours with 48 hours of coursework. (Arizona State University appears to be an outlier with 84 credit hours required). Third, faculty could consider moving the comprehensive exams (and we applaud reducing these to the two major exams) earlier in the program of study. Students could take one comprehensive exam, typically in their major field, in the fall of the third year and the other in the spring of the third year of study. This provides leeway for some students to take or repeat one of these exams at the beginning of the fourth year. The expectation would then be that the prospectus would be
defended in the fall semester of the fourth year leaving a year and a half of funding for the dissertation and increasing the ability to graduate within the five-year funding model. Fourth, and this would require redirection of resources from the College, the teaching load of graduate students should be reduced. Currently, the average size of the graduate student course in POLS 1101 is 120, with some graduate students teaching up to 200 students. Moreover, because of the intense demand, graduate students are often drafted for a second course with some graduate students potentially teaching up to 800 students annually. There are multiple reasons this is disconcerting, and among them is the inevitable challenge for students to progress to graduation in a timely fashion.

Even for graduate students on departmental funding, their $14,000 stipends are simply not nationally competitive, even as we also note there is substantial variability in stipend levels across social science departments at GSU. We encourage the College to review stipend levels across the College to seek greater parity and greater competitiveness. We applaud the Department, and in particular the Graduate Director, for seeking nominal funding across GSU that allows departmental students to achieve a tuition waiver, but this is insufficient to realistically support a program of study. Consideration of more permanent sources of funding for strong students should be considered.

As we noted above, the on-line professional masters is a potential growth area for the program. However, it is critical that these courses are offered independently from those courses required of the doctoral students. These are two distinct curricula that prepare students for different career trajectories. Doctoral students who were in the on-line “minimesters” told us that even with an additional directed readings component with the instructor, these compressed courses were not equivalent to the experiences they have had in the full semester courses oriented to doctoral students. This will require supporting the on-line program for some number of years until sufficient cohorts are recruited. Moreover, additional faculty, potentially lecturers, could contribute to the professional on-line program. The College needs to consider redirecting resources to support the on-line if there is genuine support to build that program. We strongly recommend that this be seen as separate from the doctoral program to ensure that the rigor and quality of neither suffers.

The students also noted that the statistical software packages needed for coursework and research is centrally located and access to the lab is limited during certain times through the semester. Perhaps internal grants could provide the software to certain departmental computers or if the University has negotiated reduced rates for licenses available to students that should be communicated to them.

Other highlighted departmental goals
We found the department to be highly collegial, with a strong sense of community which carries over to the care they provide to both their undergraduate and graduate students. Within the current incentive structure of GSU as we understand it, we provide recommendations regarding how they can sustain and build on their efforts toward retaining research active faculty, adding new faculty, especially that increases the department’s diversity, and that can enable the department to expand interdisciplinary research and scholarship, including with GSU’s Global Studies Institute (GSI).
Recommendations
Department faculty members submitted proposals for the Next Generation cluster hiring opportunity without success to date. We recommend they continue trying, even as we also recommend the university clarify the rules regarding whether faculty and department champions of new ideas that are funded can be assured they will receive something for their efforts. In particular, we believe the department is a natural interdisciplinary locus for work on issues of race, ethnicity and urban migration (in some combination). This builds naturally on existing strengths in the department, takes advantage of GSU’s location in Atlanta while also having a global component, lends itself naturally to interdisciplinary, grants-supported research and publication, and could well lead to faculty hiring that increases diversity in the ranks. This could potentially enable links with the Global Studies Institute, the Urban Studies Institute, the Andrew Young Policy School, or all three.

Another potential related avenue for a research cluster is urban policy addressing the future of cities or hazards management, which again could overlap with issues of race, ethnicity and migration. An urban cities focus located in a major metropolitan area like Atlanta is a natural pairing. Programs that have an urban policy focus have relatively easy entries to expand existing or create new outreach programs in the community and develop partnerships between the University, government, and private industry with the potential for generating resources. This could suggest further connections between the Andrew Young Policy School and the department. In general, global issues, urban policy, and issues of race and ethnicity are areas for which the department is well-suited to contribute, including particularly in an inter-disciplinary fashion.

We believe there are ways to increase collaborative ties between the Department and the Global Studies Institute. To mitigate existing tensions, it would help to further clarify the mission of the GSI as an interdisciplinary unit. In this way, for example, its instructional purpose could be defined primarily as creating and sustaining new interdisciplinary courses that add to GSU’s global curriculum and enhance student interest overall in this area, rather than being perceived as competing with existing course offerings (without preventing the units from cooperating on occasion in providing courses for each other). In developing faculty affiliates for the GSI of faculty members whose tenure home or primary appointment is outside the GSI, MOUs across the individual faculty member and each of the units could help clarify expectations about teaching and service obligations and the role of each unit in annual and other evaluations. To increase trust, and advance on these issues, the department chairs of the key units might well need to work with the GSI director over a period of time, in tandem with or following any current strategic planning exercise. In this way, the natural links across Department faculty and those who work in the GSI could further develop, enabling more collaborative work, including grants-related research.

Summary
We find that the Department of Political Science is central to the research, instructional and service missions at GSU. It is a high achieving unit with an impressive research profile among its faculty and a strongly collegial environment. The Department makes significant contributions to the discipline, has a strong research culture, and national and international visibility. The Department also has impressive undergraduate and graduate programs, and is a leader in
instructional innovation at both levels. It has the highest credit hour generation per full-time faculty ratio in the social sciences at GSU. Survey results show mostly above-average satisfaction among students, and its six-year undergraduate retention and graduation rates are typically above both the College and the University rates for the 2007-2009 years. It has innovative graduate programs, such as the 4+1 Master’s Program and the soon to be launched on-line MA program, and a PhD program with a strong placement record especially in one subfield. Many departmental faculty have assumed leadership and professional service roles in the Department, the College, the University and beyond. Despite significant resource constraints, notably in terms of faculty and graduate student support, the Department overall is doing well and fully deserves University and College support and further investment.

Throughout this report, we make recommendations for the University to consider regarding improved communication about university policies and initiatives, as well as regarding policy changes and modest resource reallocations that could bolster faculty recruitment, retention and development, graduate student support, undergraduate experiences, and improved integration of the Department further into GSU and interdisciplinary work. We also have made recommendations to the Department in these areas, including encouraging continued efforts to participate in GSU’s Next Generation initiative and other GSU interdisciplinary endeavors, and more focused suggestions on issues such as faculty mentoring, undergraduate advising, and ways to improve graduate student time to degree.