

**External Review
of the
Department of Government,
College of William & Mary**

Ann Marie Clark
Associate Professor of Political Science, Purdue University

Maureen Moakley
Professor of Political Science, University of Rhode Island

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What are the marks of excellence of an undergraduate program in Government? Which of these are found at William & Mary?

The marks of excellence of an any undergraduate program in Government are: committed and effective teaching and a strong record of scholarship by the faculty; the resources available to pursue these objectives; an engaged and capable undergraduate student body –especially government majors; a collegial departmental culture; and administrative support for and recognition of the efforts and successes of the department. In our very short visit, all of these seemed evident in the Government Department at William & Mary. While we have some suggestions on the margins, our overall evaluation of the department is that it represents one of the outstanding programs among top tier small Liberal Arts colleges.

Curriculum and preparation of students:

Does the undergraduate curriculum in the department reflect the best thinking in the discipline? How does it compare with the best liberal arts institutions?

Generally speaking, yes. All institutions struggle to meet changing demands and are forced to make difficult choices to meet the best thinking in the discipline, and given limited resources cannot do it all. However, the Government Department has done very well in this regard. The department's course offerings are of high quality across the board – in American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political philosophy, and public policy. The department has retained a strong emphasis on Political Theory, which is one of the hallmarks of an excellent liberal arts program. In view of the ongoing debate about methods and quantitative requirements in the context of a liberal arts curriculum, the department seems to have struck a satisfactory balance of methods offerings, quantitative components of existing courses, and the recommendation that students also take economics, which increasingly is recognized as a critical component of a solid government/political science degree. Certainly there are ways to improve the curriculum, some of which we address in detail below.

The curriculum more than adequately serves majors from other disciplines. It is, in fact, integral to serving the needs of the Policy and International Studies programs and offers a range of introductory and 300 level courses that should be of interest across the spectrum of departments in the college. The problem is, of course, that given their service to the larger student community, to what extent this precludes the faculty from offering more specialized courses to their own majors.

The student writing portfolios we reviewed indicated a good level of writing and communication skills. The writing requirements incorporated into the 400-level courses, as well as the obvious time and energy the faculty extend with writing and rewriting research designs and papers suggest that majors are well served when it comes to writing and communication skills. Moreover, in individual instances, especially when it comes to student and faculty/student research projects, there are some outstanding examples of advanced and quality research efforts, in several subfields, that are particularly notable in small liberal arts setting. Some of the faculty have engaged in imaginative and advanced projects with the students that go far beyond their own research agendas and interests.

What is the overall quality of the undergraduate concentrators in the Government program?

The students we met and interviewed were first-rate: engaged, enthusiastic, and accomplished. They certainly spoke well of the faculty and their learning experiences at William & Mary. Moreover, the government students we encountered at and around the department, in the halls and around the campus, exhibited a rapport and engagement with the faculty that was most impressive. Beyond that we can only judge from the demanding level of requirements for majors, the course requirements from the syllabi we reviewed and the conversations with faculty in terms of the level of performance they required. Government departments are not usually a haven for slackers, and at William and Mary our impression was that they attract some of the brightest students in the college.

Quality of the faculty

The most obvious strength of the government department is the quality of the faculty. We were given, in advance, detailed vitae of the members of the department and we had the opportunity to interact with each of them in a number of different settings. We got the distinct impression that they are a truly collegial group of dedicated teachers and scholars who bring different, but apparently complementary, strengths to the government department. Perhaps this evaluation was heightened by the fact that we both work at large research universities, but it certainly underscored for us the benefits of small liberal arts college departments.

Are the faculty dedicated and skilled teachers?

Unquestionably. In terms of dedication, to a person, the care and concern they exhibited for their teaching mission was striking. To us it spoke volumes that they collectively "gave up" one course to go to a three-two load only after it became apparent that a heavier teaching load would not only dissuade bright young talent from joining the department but also limit the quality of their

research. This suggests unusual dedication. In terms of skill, while we can not be specific, we have the impression that the students thrive in the department's teaching environment. While each member of the faculty probably has different strengths, they all exhibit a high level of energy, engagement and concern for the program. Most of the faculty's concerns expressed to us related to how they could continue to cover the essentials and address the evolving demands of a well-rounded curriculum.

In terms of suggestions for improvements, aside from the staffing, resources and library issues that we discuss below, technical improvements and renovations in more of the classrooms that could service the Blackboard software might improve teaching capacity especially for the larger classes.

Are the faculty sufficiently active in scholarly work to maintain a high quality undergraduate program?

Absolutely. Indeed the level of activity and output, given their teaching responsibilities is striking. While there is always some unevenness among members of any department, the overall output and continuing engagement of your faculty in current scholarship is outstanding.

Learning climate:

Are undergraduates advised and mentored with insight and compassion?

As best we could tell undergraduates are mentored with care and insight. While we did not have the opportunity to interact with many students, the ones we did meet spoke highly of the program. Clearly, the critical dimension in all of their comments was the dedication and commitment of the faculty. As we note below, there was a mismatch between these impressions and the survey results, which we consider below. But in more general terms, the students we encountered were clearly connected to and engaged by the faculty. There was also evidence of very real concern for the students and respect for the well being of their charges that was obvious from various conversations with the faculty over the course of our visit. In one telling anecdote, one of us, because of travel arrangements, did not leave the department until late on Friday afternoon. We were amazed to see how many faculty were still in their offices advising, as well as just chatting and socializing with the students. Most unusual.

Have the faculty created an environment in which the students are encouraged to accomplish their best work?

As far as we could tell, yes. In looking over the course outlines, in most cases there was clear evidence that students were being pushed to stretch their intellectual and conceptual capacities, ask new questions and try new methodologies. Moreover, in these course outlines as well as in general

comments from both the faculty and the students numerous references were made to the fact that the students were encouraged to present outlines, frameworks and drafts that would then be critiqued, amended and improved.

Is the climate for women, minorities, and students with different ethnic backgrounds welcoming?

Certainly in spirit this is the case. We spoke to several people about this issue and we got the clear impression that every attempt was being made to improve diversity and nurture and encourage the various minorities in the department. Moreover, particularly in the case of women, the department, especially given the new hires, is making considerable strides in this regard. Still, students mentioned the small number of women faculty as a concern – not because the current faculty fail to welcome women students, but because women and, by extension, ethnically diverse faculty offer role models for a diverse student body. Even allowing for the difficulty of attracting people of color to the campus – in terms of faculty and students, the fact is that for William and Mary (as well as most other institutions of higher learning, including our own) the lack of diverse role models, especially in a small college environment, remains a critical concern.

Library, technology, and staff support

Library holdings in areas relevant to the field of government and politics, as well as staff support and availability, compare favorably with those of other institutions. We note that the building renovations underway seem to be going a long way to address some of the shortcomings mentioned in the strategic plan ("Item E. The Libraries," in *Strategic Plan: Into the Fourth Century*, <<http://www.wm.edu/administration/provost/stplan/ap/libs.php>>, accessed 9 May 2002.)

The following comments, then, are offered in the spirit of constructive suggestions for development of a relationship between the library and the Government department that would further the preparation and education of undergraduate Government majors. Our recommendation, in a nutshell, is that the college and the Government Department should consider initiating more intentional library instruction for undergraduates. We develop this point in the paragraphs below.

A strong library only impacts undergraduate scholarship if students go there and are well trained to use it. We noted that library staff seems very willing to meet with classes to train and advise students how best to use library facilities for research. Although it appears that some library instruction takes place in the context of Freshman Seminars, we were not provided with evidence that this happens in a systematic way for Government majors at higher levels. In Government Department courses, it seems, such training does happen

occasionally. The librarians we met with observed anecdotally that library staff members are invited to classes, and classes are sometimes sent to the library, mainly by instructors and faculty members new to the Government Department, and less frequently by more senior faculty members.

Given the college and Government Department's commitment to strong concentration writing preparation, library education should not be overlooked as an integral component of preparing students at all levels. A common observation in our meetings was that "students are better at using the web" than most faculty, which may be true. Success in information access depends in part on technical facility, but also on critical capacities. Students often need better developed working knowledge of electronic information sources -- and time-honored paper sources, for that matter -- pertinent to research in a given academic field, and they need to be acquainted and reminded of proper citation practices and evaluation of electronic sources. Some of this is addressed in Freshman Seminars. More in-depth library instruction on politics-related resources could, and probably should, be built into classes for Government majors.

Already, the Swem Library web site provides an excellent on-line research guide and set of links for Government students, "Government/Public Policy Resources: A Guide to Research," including a printable version (see <<http://www.swem.wm.edu/Resources/Subject/gov.htm>>, accessed 5/13/02). A stronger emphasis on class-based library instruction for Government students could also make a foundational contribution to the concentration writing requirement that would not necessarily require more material resources from the Department itself. However, development of Government-library course collaboration might be an attractive focus for external grant applications incorporating both technology and curriculum development.¹

Student outcomes:

Are graduates well prepared for employment or the next stage in their professional development?

Does the advising program adequately support students in making curricular decisions or post-graduate plans?

¹Colleges that are leaders in this area offer both course-related library instruction and specialized web pages on library resources tailored for particular courses. (See, for example, Earlham College Libraries, "Course Resources," <<http://www.earlham.edu/~libr/courses/>>, accessed 5/13/02.) Such resources could be incorporated routinely into the "Blackboard" program of the Government department.

Student outcomes

Based on the information in the student survey, students coming out of the government department seem to be getting good placements in the workplace and in graduate school. The undergraduates we met with did not raise concerns in this area. Students we met with in person seemed exceptionally well prepared for job searches and graduate education.

There may be some concerns related to provisions for advising undergraduates on campus. Faculty members advise undergraduates in addition to their other teaching- and research-related responsibilities. Students who enter William & Mary are assigned an advisor, which they can change voluntarily in the course of their college career. The student survey contained a number of negative comments about how useful their advising relationships have been to them, and the external review team made some effort to follow up on the tenor of these comments. Our assessment, elaborated below, is that informal advising is alive and well in the Government Department. On the formal side, however, some improvements could be made.

The students from Government with whom we met raved about the quality of their relationships with professors. Those students did not indicate any problems with the advisors they chose themselves. When we pointed out that students in the faculty survey raised concerns about how well advisors met their needs, some of those same students used words like "worthless" to describe their experience with their freshman advisor. Their sense seemed to be that the most important advising came from the advisors they chose, in the context of the general commitment to undergraduate education that exists among Government department professors. They were not so positive about their first assigned advisors, who did not necessarily share their interests or follow up on that advisory the relationship.

On the faculty side, faculty responsibility for formal advising raises three concerns. First, the fact that a student chooses his or her own faculty advisor, while potentially enriching for the student, means that faculty may "attract" advisees in uneven numbers, depending on the number of student contact hours and the popularity of their courses. Second, faculty connected with various interdisciplinary centers that offer their own majors are responsible for advising two kinds of students: both Government majors and students affiliated with majors administered by the centers. These two observations suggest that the brunt of advising falls unevenly on different faculty members; indeed, the burden is probably heaviest for the most active faculty. Finally, to monitor whether students are meeting university and major requirements is an administrative task that might be just as competently managed by competent professional academic counselors. For those reasons, a partial transition to professional advisors might be considered, especially at the college-entry stage where students are mapping out a plan of study in the early course of their education. Professional advisors might take some of the burden off of faculty and be more competent

at helping students negotiate the red tape involved with meeting distribution requirements for graduation and the major. However, faculty members are probably better informal sounding boards in helping students think about how the substance of their course of study can form a whole, and one would not want to lose that strength. It would be important to consult with faculty and students in more depth as part of any study of the issue.

Opportunities for future development:

What do you see for the Department of Government within the next 5 years? For the next 10?

Are the existing interactions between Government and the International Relations and Public Policy programs appropriate and optimal?

Opportunities for future development

The next five or ten years

Those involved in higher education in many states are familiar with the cycle in which, at regular intervals, public universities are asked to do more with less. During periods of relative plenty the cutbacks made during the lean years are sometimes, but not always, restored to some degree. We seem to be entering a lean period.

A major challenge for the Department of Government over the next decade will be to maintain its strong base of high quality faculty members. In the next five years, recruitment and retention of high-quality junior faculty members will be particularly important in maintaining that base. Although the Government Department made several strong hires last year, continuing concerns were reflected in our meetings with students and faculty alike. The concern was brought home in this year's loss of a junior faculty member in the Department of Government to an Ivy League institution. The loss seems to have demonstrated both the ability of William & Mary to attract excellent faculty and the stiff competition the college faces in retaining young faculty.

The Government department enjoys an impressive level of faculty loyalty and shared commitment to undergraduate education. In addition, the students are of high quality. These are intangible assets of the department. Despite the complaints we heard about the physical infrastructure of its Morton Hall home, the department strikes visitors as an unusually nice place to work, primarily because of the commitment and congeniality of the faculty and staff. It should be recognized that changes in the profile of new potential faculty members may make it more difficult to nurture that same sense of loyalty and common enterprise. For this to continue, there is probably no substitute for material resources and expanded social support services for new faculty.

It is well known that the number of two-career couples in the marketplace, whether they are both academics or not, means that newer faculty members

often are negotiating the personal and professional requirements of two potential professional wage earners. People we spoke with perceived the size and nature of the economy in Williamsburg and environs to pose a fairly serious challenge to the accomplishment of other social and personal goals -- either their own or those of their untenured or single colleagues. In such a context, competitive pay is a sine qua non. Financial support and leave time for research and professional activities are essential. Given William & Mary's emphasis on active, full-time teaching when school is in session, research support in summers and/or a built-in junior faculty leave are options that should be continued and enhanced in this regard. Initiatives to develop the professional and social quality of life for two-career families and single people should be pursued at the level of the college, to the extent possible. Faculty and instructors that we met with had almost unrelentingly positive things to say about the collegiality of their immediate work environment. Still, from an outsider's perspective, to retain a strong faculty the department will need to work hard to develop the perception among junior faculty that William & Mary is a good place to carry on a career, rather than just a good place to start a career.

The existing sense of common professional endeavor extends even to the non-tenure-track instructors that we met with, which is something that the department should be proud of. The quality and commitment of non-tenure-track instructors seems exceptional. However, we strongly caution against the college or the department as an institution relying on such positions. Students mention concern about lack of continuity – an instructor with whom students work may not be available two or three years later to write a letter of recommendation, or the letter may not be taken as seriously by the recipient. Additionally, instructors may work part-time or carry heavier teaching loads than full-time faculty, and do not fall under the same research expectations as full-fledged faculty members. For this reason, their instruction over the long run cannot be expected to be enriched and informed to the same degree by the original research and professional collaboration expected of faculty members.

The ability to hire and retain faculty in a competitive environment will be a strong determinant of the department's lot both in terms of overall faculty quality, and also in terms of the development of gender and ethnic diversity among the faculty. If there is a weakness in the faculty profile, it may be the lack of diversity. We understand that the department has made efforts to recruit minorities and women, but not always successfully. This should be part of William & Mary's mission as a public university.

Department - to - Public Policy and Department - to - International Relations Relationships

Department – Public Policy

The existing interactions between the Public Policy programs and the government Department appear somewhat problematic. As is the case with

the International Relations program, the teaching and advising responsibilities in the Public Policy undergraduate program performed by members of the government department put an additional strain on the capacity of the government faculty to deliver its own program. Moreover, given that resources are scarce and all colleges and universities have to make choices in a changing educational environment, the development and maintenance of a separate undergraduate concentration in Public Policy does not appear to be an optimal use of resources. As we understand it, this concentration has been offered for over 10 years and has very few majors. Moreover, we learned from some students that one reason they take this concentration option is that it gets them "Out " of the theory requirement in the government department. In light of the fact that most government departments are refining undergraduate offerings to incorporate undergraduate courses in public policy as part of general major, the maintenance of a separate undergraduate program in a small college like William and Mary is curious. It may be, however, that its retention is more related to administrative issues than optimal program design.

Putting resources into a graduate program is certainly consistent with best practices in the field and the program at William & Mary is a strong one. There is an increasing demand for a public policy MA programs, as many students see this as an ideal option for graduate work that opens up numerous job opportunities in the public and private sectors.

Department – International Relations

The question of relationships between the Government department and the Reves Center is an area in which there seems to be a range of opinion among the faculty we spoke with. On the positive side, the Reves Center offers important resources for faculty researchers. It coordinates area studies offerings in different disciplines, which undoubtedly enriches student opportunities to specialize in their studies. On the other hand, staffing and advising demands for the Reves Center are high. The Government department's commitments to the Center are substantial. Members of the Government faculty provide the lion's share of advising for International Studies and International Relations majors, in addition to advising Government majors. Anecdotally, the administrative role currently played by one faculty member pulls him away from teaching that would supplement the department's current offerings in the area of theory and methods, one of his other specialties. The trade-off is that no faculty member has taught advanced international relations theory or methods with specific application to international politics. The latter is important for meaningful implementation of the new computer literacy requirement for Government majors. It appears that the Reves Center now stretches the capacity of the Government department without being fully and immediately balanced by bringing added resources back to the department.

What should be the hiring priorities when new positions become available due to retirements?

The department is currently making do with a temporary instructor position in the field of political theory. Given the value the department places on well rounded philosophical and practical education of its undergraduates, it would seem that this situation is less than satisfactory, even with the strong hire as a replacement for a retiring political theorist that has been accomplished this year.

In addition, the international relations and comparative politics curriculum is weighted somewhat heavily in the direction of area studies and government-centered foreign policy. Currently, there are several scholars of country or area studies in the department, but only two on tenure-track who cover international relations as a field. A third instructor focuses on international organization. Heavy enrollments in general international relations courses seem to be stretching the international relations faculty in such a way that the variety of advanced courses is limited. A scholar with competence in theories of non-state actors at the global level, theories of international cooperation, transnational activity, or globalization issues, for example, would be a welcome addition that would reflect changes in the scholarly field and supplement the Government department's already strong broader theoretical orientation.

Did the Department of Government give you sufficient data to make your evaluation, and what more, if any, do you need?

Yes, we appreciated the help of the department in this regard.

Summary and overview:

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the undergraduate programs in the Department of Government?

If no further financial resources are available, what recommendations do you have for improvement of these programs?

If some additional financial resources are available:

Where should they be focused in order to have maximum benefit?

How can the program be improved with these resources?

Are new faculty positions needed, and if so, in what fields?

Summary and Overview

The strengths of the undergraduate programs are many and the weaknesses are few. Devotion to teaching stands out in the Government department. Faculty members are committed to engaging with students in many ways, both in and out of the classroom, through course work and collaborative research. The department has a strong commitment to teaching students the

tools of critical engagement in the world, including writing and the qualitative and quantitative research skills necessary for critical inquiry.

If resources are limited, we would recommend focusing on the following goals: (1) increase faculty gender and racial diversity in upcoming hires; (2) explore ways to increase retention of excellent new faculty; (3) exploit potential links between the concentration writing and computer literacy requirements and full use of the Swem library resources; (4) ensure that the computer competency requirement in the concentration can be fulfilled either through a range of courses within the field of Government or through a separate teaching module that is routinely available to students.

New resources should be devoted to: (1) and (2), above; (3) increased support for faculty-student collaborative research projects; (4) replace the current adjunct position in Political Philosophy with a tenure-track appointment; (5) a possible new tenure-track appointment in international relations.

We would like to conclude by noting that it was a privilege to be invited to serve our colleagues by participating as external visitors in this evaluation. Both of the reviewers are impressed with the overall quality of the department, and are hopeful that these comments and observations will be of use. Please feel free to contact us with any additional questions or requests for elaboration or explanation of any of the points above.