ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT
OF THE
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GRADUATE PROGRAM

COMMITTEE PROCESS

The Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) Report is based on the following source material:

1. Department of International Relations Self Study Report: Spring 2008
2. External Reviewer’s Report on International Relations Graduate Program; June 2, 2008
3. The APRC Interview with Chair Sanjoy Banerjee, Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, and Dean Joel Kassiola; April 15, 2009
4. Guidelines for the Sixth Cycle of Academic Program Review
5. The APRC customary evaluative procedures.

These sources were employed to construct an integrated view of the International Relations Graduate Program's present strengths, aspirations, and possibilities for future development.

REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Department of International Relations has existed as an autonomous academic Department at San Francisco State University since the late 1940’s. Since its early days it has been nationally “visible” and its recent hires, six since 2003 and several faculty of diversity – indicate a level of scholarly and research potential that is truly outstanding. It has placed a number of its M.A. students in first rate Ph.D. programs, and in a variety of national and international governmental positions – as well as in a variety of NGO’s. In addition, the Department has responded well to its last program review. It has developed assessment procedures to evaluate the graduate program including the formation of a graduate assessment committee that reviews a selection of papers in different graduate courses, internship reports and theses, student involvement in professional conferences, publications and awards. The
Department has expanded the curriculum and hired faculty to cover the areas of post-structuralism and feminist theory, as well elective offerings such as Africa and Latin America. It has made efforts to improve the quality of student advising. The Department has reviewed admissions requirements to improve the quality of the student applicant pool and has engaged in several efforts to enhance the quality of the internship experience. It has developed a graduate student listserv to improve communication between the graduate program and students and has made significant efforts to improve the quality of graduate student advising. Finally, the Department has attempted to improve communication with alumni.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The External Reviewers tend to agree with a majority of the recommendations for program improvement in the self-study. A number of them (e.g., provide release time for the graduate coordinator, student assistants, giving credit to faculty for supervising culminating experiences, more money for faculty travel to conferences and research support, and additional funds for faculty awards) are recommendations we see frequently in the program review process but which are all dependent upon additional financial resources that are likely not available in the current crisis. These are all important suggestions for improvement, and APRC recommends the Department prioritize the suggestions and work with the Dean on implementation.

There are two areas in which both the Department and the External Reviewers agree that immediate change would be good for the program: the improvement of the Department’s website and strategies for enriching the pool of potential M.A. students. The External Reviewers believe that upgrading the website should be one of the department’s “highest priorities” because it would help in the areas of student recruitment, advising and progress towards graduation. The APRC agrees and urges the Department to prioritize the improvement of the website as quickly as possible, especially since this was also a recommendation of the Fifth Cycle of Program Review. However, the APRC recommends that the Department pay particular attention to how the website will be maintained.

CURRICULUM

In other areas the External Reviewers Report seems to be inconsistent. The report praises the program for academic excellence and rigor in relationship to the quality of its faculty and curriculum. On the other hand, every time the self study recommends any action that would make the program more rigorous, (e.g., raising admission standards and writing qualification, requiring a thesis, making assessment techniques more demanding), they urge “caution” because they fear that potential students will not apply if the program isn’t easier than the other places to which they are applying. The APRC supports the Department’s desire to raise its standards. The IR M.A. should not be a “fall-back” option.
There is an additional significant issue in the area of curriculum that should be dealt with. The self study (p. 14) highlights the Department as “being one of only three “pure” IR MA programs in the CSU,” rather than only a specialization within the broader field of Political Science.

According to a recent external review of the Political Science Department, this separation puts our Political Science students at a disadvantage with less than optimal exposure to the field of international relations. The external reviewers of the Political Science Department (p. 2) in calling attention to the separation of the two departments say the following “If Political Science had a conventional accreditation structure, we doubt that an M.A. degree which lacked an international relations component would pass muster.” In a similar vein, students in IR are at a disadvantage by this separation and would benefit with more exposure to a U.S. perspective provided by courses in Political Science. There are clearly ways to better integrate the two disciplines of International Relations and Political Science ranging from more curricular sharing to departmental merger. The external review recommended that the Dean work with the two departments to find an agreement which would allow students to earn an M.A. in Political Science with International Relations as one of their sub-fields and set up the option for Political Science M.A. students to “undertake a comprehensive exam in IR.” In this case the separation of departments causes problems for the Political Science students and the APRC believes the two departments should work synergistically to make it possible for the Political Science students to be able to offer International Relations as one of their M.A. sub-fields so that Ph.D. programs do not judge them to be less well prepared than students in more inclusive Political Science M.A. programs.

In other curricular issues, the APRC is not convinced that using the thesis as the sole culminating experience is necessarily in the best interests of the Department, particularly in regards to the utilization of faculty resources. Acknowledging that the thesis and dissertation comprise an idiosyncratic genre, many disciplines are moving to a publishable research manuscript for the culminating experience. The APRC surges the Department to give this option consideration. Similarly, according to the Grad Coordinator, a rubric for the thesis has not yet been established. The APRC strongly recommends that the rubric be developed.

FACULTY

The External Reviewers express concern about whether or not new faculty are being “mentored.” The APRC agrees that the Department should concern itself with this issue, especially during the current period of stress.
**STUDENTS**

Finally, there is a disparity between the External Reviewer’s support for strengthening the internship experience and the Dean’s argument that maintaining the internship program is resource demanding. Because of its value to students, the APRC recommends that the Department continue to offer internships, knowing that this offering may become increasingly difficult.

**CONCLUSION**

In summary, the APRC believes that the most important challenge for IR is to work more synergistically with the Political Science Department so that students in each department will reap the benefits of more exposure to their respective curricula. Political Science students should have more access to international relations and IR students should have more exposure to the US perspective as provided by the Political Science curriculum. The APRC believes the Dean should work with the two departments to explore a range of solutions, from curricular sharing to department merger. The APRC recommends that the department should prioritize the suggestions made by the external reviewer and work with the Dean to implement these in the most cost effective manner, given the current budget difficulties.

The APRC recommends that the department continue to work on a rubric for the thesis. Additional format options for the thesis, such as manuscript format are strongly recommended and supported by the Dean of Graduate Studies. We believe however, that making the thesis the sole culminating experience will place additional workloads on the faculty and that alternative culminating experiences should be explored. We recommend that the Department consult with the Dean of the Graduate Studies to address these concerns.