

Department of Political Science

**Undergraduate Degree in Political Science and Joint Major Degrees
in Political Science and Anthropology, Economics, English,
Environmental and Sustainability Studies, Geography, Global and
International Studies, History, Women's Studies**

**Political Science Minor (undergraduate)
Philosophy Minor (undergraduate)
Graduate Degree in Political Science (MA)
Local Government Administration Certificate**

Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities

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PART 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Department of Political Science

Programs Under Review:

Undergraduate Degree in Political Science and Joint Major Degrees in Political Science and Anthropology, Economics, English, Environmental and Sustainability Studies, Geography, Global and International Studies, History, Women's Studies.

Political Science Minor (undergraduate), Philosophy Minor (undergraduate), Graduate Degree in Political Science (MA), Local Government Administration Certificate.

Chair: Dr. Gary Wilson

Date of Review: July 2024

Date of last external review: November 2005

UNBC member of review team: Dr. Neil Hanlon, Geography, UNBC

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

Dr. Allison McCulloch
Professor
Department of Political Science
Brandon University
Brandon, MB

Dr. Gerald Baier
Associate Professor
Department of Political Science
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC

I. SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) PROCESS

Reviewers were provided with the Department's comprehensive self-study document (which included the report for the last external review of the Department) as well as Strategic Plan documents from the University. We conducted our site visit on May 7-8 with full days of meetings. The reviewers met with the Dean of the Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities (FISSSH) Dr. Kriston Rennie, with Interim VP Academic Bill Owen as well as the Vice President Research and Innovation Dr. Paula Wood-Adams. The reviewers met with two of the four full-time research faculty, Dr. Gary Wilson and Dr. Fiona MacDonald. We were unable to meet with Dr. Michael Murphy or Dr. Boris DeWiel. We met with the two senior lecturers appointed in the Department Dr. Jason Lacharite and Mr. Jason Morris. We also met with Sessional Instructors and Limited Term appointees Tom Kadla, Stephanie Powell-Hellyer and Dr. Douglas Jarvis. The reviewers met with Chairs of all of the joint majors with the exception of Global and International Studies. We also met with administrative assistant Tanya Work, student advisor April Tod, and librarian Keilan McCabe. We had a lunch meeting with students from both

the BA and MA programs. Our report is based on these meetings and access to considerable materials in the self-study and those provided by the University.

All meetings were collegial and we were very well supported in our logistics and requests by Selina Ross, the Administrative Coordinator for FISSSH and by Dr. Neil Hanlon from UNBC’s Geography department who sat in on all of our meetings with the exception of those with individual faculty and acted as an internal resource.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Major Strengths of the Degree Program

- We have a very positive assessment of the degree program. It is characterized by good leadership and its members are good academic citizens both at UNBC and in the discipline. The department has a strong pedagogical focus (e.g., willingness to try new teaching strategies or introduction of new courses; positive student engagements) that aligns with the university’s mandate and strategic plan.

Significant Areas of Weakness or In Need of Further Development

- The department should take this opportunity to re-envision and re-invigorate its MA program, beginning with recruitment strategies.

Comments of the Future Direction of the Degree Program(s)

- To maintain current momentum and program delivery needs, the Political Theory tenure-track position needs to be replaced immediately. There is a strong case to be made that a second additional line should be secured. An additional placement would reward the Department’s long service and contributions to the University and smooth the generational transition on the Department’s near horizon.

III. SUMMARY OF THE REVIEWERS’ RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS	DESCRIPTION OF THE RECOMMENDATION
One	Immediate replacement of Political Theory tenure track position
Two	Undertake an internal review of the MA program

Three	Review of undergraduate curriculum and calendar (delete courses no longer offered; further integration of Indigenous content and learning outcomes)
Four	Cultivate student and alumni relations

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Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities

Chair: Dr. Gary Wilson

Dean: Dr. Kriston Rennie

Provost and Vice President, Academic: Dr. William Owen

Date UNBC Received the External

Review of Degree Programs Report: 07/30/2024

Please Note: The Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s)
Report, Action Plan and the 36 Month Action Plan Progress Report are made
publically available on the Provost's website.

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PART 1 – ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT’S RESPONSE TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DEGREE PROGRAM(S) REPORT

(September 10, 2024)

I. Overall Impression of the Summary of Findings and Recommendations from the External Review of Degree Program Report

The External Review identified a number of strengths and challenges related to the Department and its programs of study. In general, the Department agrees with the findings and looks forward to working with the Faculty of Indigenous Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities (FISSSH) and the University to respond to the recommendations in the report. We felt that the report reflected positively on the Department and its members and contained some relevant and insightful recommendations that can help us to move forward.

In this Action Plan, we outline the recommendations that we intend to respond to and the ways in which we intend to respond to them. We would like to note that there are several recommendations that we have already acted on (or are in the process of taking action).

- **MA Program Review.** In the January semester of 2024, we conducted a review of our graduate (MA) program and made some changes to the program of study. We will submit these changes to the Senate for approval in the September semester of 2024.
- **Model UN/Model Parliament.** In the January semester of 2024, we hosted an inaugural high school Model United Nations. We are planning to host this event again in November 2024 as well as organizing and hosting a high school Model Parliament (possibly integrated with POLS 200 – Canadian Government and Politics) in the January semester of 2025.
- **Collaboration with Global and International Studies.** Over the past couple of years, we have cross-listed several 300-level “area studies” courses (Politics and Society in China, Russia, Europe and the United States) with INTS courses. We also continue to cross-list 400/600 level Global and International courses with courses in Political Science.
- **Political Science Students Association (PSSA).** After several years of dormancy, the PSSA has been re-established and its members are planning to hold a series of events in the September semester. The Department will provide funding to support these events, as needed.

We feel that some of the recommendations require on-going attention by individual faculty, rather than a comprehensive plan.

- Indigenous Content and Perspectives in Courses. We have included Indigenous content and perspectives into courses where appropriate and will continue to do so on a course-by-course basis.
- Learning Outcomes in Course Outlines. We will encourage all of our instructors to identify clear learning outcomes in their course outlines and acknowledge which assignments or assessments help to achieve these outcomes.
- Student Representation: The Chair of the Department will be responsible for liaising with the Political Science Students Association on a regular basis.

One of the recommendations of the report discussed developing a plan for future recruitment. While this is something that we need to think about, our current faculty cohort is sufficient to offer our programs of study (subject, of course, to the replacement of the tenure track position outlined in the Action Plan below).

Lastly, there were some recommendations that were beyond our control or authority, such as exploring different models for temporary or sessional teaching. We feel that the University in consultation with the Faculty Association should take action on this issue.

II. Correction of Factual Errors or Areas of Misunderstanding in the Report

There were no factual errors in the report. We do feel that there were two areas of misunderstanding:

- Communication issues with units offering joint majors. The Chair is unaware of any communication issues but they will keep this in mind in discussions with the chairs of other departments.
- Transparency of teaching loads. No one in the Department was aware of any lack of transparency involving faculty teaching loads. We openly discuss teaching loads every year when we schedule our courses.

PART 2 - ACTION PLAN

What steps does the Academic Administrative Unit intend or propose to take in response to the recommendations from the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Report*?

UNBC Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s) Report			
1	Recommendation	New Hire: Tenure Track Position in Political Theory/Philosophy	
	Action	One of the key recommendations of the external reviewers was to hire a tenure track faculty member in Political Theory/Philosophy to replace a retiring member. Ideally, this hire should happen in the 2024-25 academic year so that the new faculty member can start in July 2025.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Gary Wilson (Chair) and Appointment Selection Committee	
	Target Implementation Date	July 2025	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
2	Recommendation	Review Master of Arts (MA) in Political Science Program	
	Action	Another key recommendation was to conduct a thorough review the Department's MA program and develop a strategy for recruiting new students. As noted in the summary statement, we have just revised the MA program, and those changes will be going through the Senate approval process in the September semester of 2024. We will, however, develop a strategy for attracting new students to the program and reconsider the requirement for a theory/methods course.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Michael Murphy (Graduate Coordinator), Gary Wilson and Department Members	
	Target Implementation Date	July 2026	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
3	Recommendation	Develop Undergraduate Honours Thesis	

	Action	The Report suggested that the Department could develop an Undergraduate Honours Thesis program to complement the existing programs of study and offer a more research-intensive and focused experience for some students. We will explore existing Honours Thesis programs at UNBC and at similar institutions in Canada and put together a proposal for such a course. We currently have no plans to offer a required capstone course as part of our undergraduate degree program.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Gary Wilson and Department Members	
	Target Implementation Date	July 2026	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	

UNBC Responses to the External Review of Degree Program(s) Report			
4	Recommendation	Skills Inventory	
	Action	The Report recommended that the Department develop a list of relevant, career-oriented skills that students acquire in a Political Science degree program. We will develop a list and post it on our Department website.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Gary Wilson and Department Members	
	Target Implementation Date	July 2025	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	
5	Recommendation	Alumni Relations	

	Action	The Report recommended that the Department reach out to recent graduates of the program and alumni and engage them in Department activities. We will contact selected alumni and highlight their achievements and career paths in profiles on the Department website. When possible, we will ask them to give short presentations on their careers and career paths to our students as part of an annual Careers in Political Science workshop.	
	Person(s) Responsible	Gary Wilson and Department Members	
	Target Implementation Date	July 2026 and on-going	
	Implementation Details	12 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		24 month Action Plan Progress Report	
		36 month Action Plan Progress Report	

FOLLOW UP DATES

As per the *External Review of Degree Program(s) Procedures*, the Academic Administrative Units are responsible for submitting Action Plan Progress Reports to the Dean on the following dates:

- 12 month Action Plan Progress Report: ___ 30 September 2025 _____
- 24 month Action Plan Progress Report: ___ 30 September 2026 _____
- 36 month Action Plan Progress Report: ___ 30 September 2027 _____

PART 3 – DEAN’S AND PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC’S RESPONSES

I. Summary of the Degree Program Review Process

Professors Allison McCulloch (Brandon University), Gerald Baier (UBC), and Neil Hanlon (UNBC) conducted their on-site review of the Political Science program on May 7-8, 2024. Their final report, submitted in July 2024, identified a number of major program and departmental strengths ‘characterized by good leadership’, strong academic citizenship in the discipline, and a robust pedagogical focus. One significant area of weakness was also identified, in addition to comments on the future direction of the degree program, which together have shaped the above action plan and my additional comments/recommendations below.

II. Dean’s Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan

October 10, 2024

The external reviewers made four key recommendations. Their comments reflect many quality indicators at both departmental/program and individual faculty levels, which include research and teaching innovations. As mentioned in the program response above, an internal review of the POLS MA program (**Action #2**) is already underway with a developing strategy around admissions and English language requirements progressing through the Senate approval process in Fall 2024. The recommendation to recruit a political theorist (**Action #1**) as part of succession planning is also being implemented for July 2025. The other two recommendations speak to ongoing curriculum revisions, and cultivating student and alumni relations.

Action #2 concentrates on quality enhancement of the MA program. The reviewers’ recommendations on this subject focused primarily on improving recruitment and enrolment strategies. There are good reasons for developing a program-specific strategy that maps on to existing faculty complement and disciplinary expertise. They are particularly relevant in terms of reaching the longer-term goal of increasing the POLS MA’s rigour and reputation, as well as trying to ensure a fulsome graduate cohort experience with a sustainable number of students year over year.

The department is also proposing to consider developing an undergraduate Honours thesis program (**Action #3**). The reviewers noted the ‘considerable’ student appetite for such a program, which would ‘allow for guided research and writing at a high level’. POLS is proposing a two-year runway to investigate current and comparator models as a deliberate means to strengthening the major and undergraduate-graduate study pathway.

The reviewers further suggested the department ‘could place greater emphasis on addressing Indigenous issues across the curriculum.’ Plans to address decolonization and reconciliation were labelled a ‘state of the art’, suggesting that the department/discipline of Political Science is well-

positioned within UNBC to lead on these important inclusion and curriculum revisions. Framed in the ‘long-range planning challenges’ as an area for exploration – that is, identifying opportunities for greater integration – there is great potential for the program to unpack more explicitly the intended actions and measurable goals in this recommendation over the course of the next two years (2024-26).

In terms of curriculum planning, I agree with the reviewers’ suggestion for taking a close look at course rotation in order to focus on those which can be well-served by the current faculty contingent, and to establish a realistic breadth of courses. Such an investigation will likely lead to necessary calendar changes that reflect a leaner and more streamlined curriculum and suite of course offerings, which – as the reviewers commented – will also inform students’ expectations. I would anticipate this work to unfold over the course of the 2024/25 academic year.

Related to this ongoing work, I agree and support the reviewers’ recommendation on being more explicit about learning outcomes across all POLS courses, assignments, and assessments. I consider this recommendation as a high priority for the program and the institution, aspiring to present a wholesale incorporation of skills, competencies, and learning objectives that translate clearly throughout the degree, are clear to students, who in turn can communicate their learnings to prospective employers.

And finally, **Actions #4-5** relate to strengthening alumni connections with a view to better communicating and presenting graduate successes, program and discipline learning outcomes, and overall skills and competency development. These actions in particular will require support from the Faculty in terms of website development, social media and communications, outreach initiatives and activities, in addition to support from the central alumni office to inform program-specific discussions and strategy that aim to meet the determined goals.

III. Provost and Vice President, Academic’s Response to the Recommendations and Action Plan December 16th, 2024

Regular and comprehensive degree program reviews support the commitment of the university and its faculty and staff to the quality, accountability, sustainability, and continuous improvement of UNBC’s degree programs and academic service units. Thank you to the review committee, the department faculty, staff, and students, central administration, and the Faculty Dean for their participation in the program review for the Department of Political Science.

I have carefully read the reviewers' report, the departmental response, and the decanal response. A meeting with the dean and chair on December 10, 2024, provided important additional context. I want to underscore the authority and responsibility of the dean and department for a large majority of the recommendations.

I broadly agree with the recommendations of the external review committee and how these recommendations have been incorporated into the departmental action plan. I also appreciate that the Department has already taken steps that align with the key recommendations. From our discussions, I note that:

- **Curriculum Refresh:** Simply eliminating courses that are no longer offered is insufficient for revitalizing the curriculum. A meaningful curriculum refresh involves identifying a core set of essential learning outcomes and key courses that span all academic levels. This approach should allow for flexibility, enabling faculty to teach within their areas of expertise while ensuring that the curriculum remains comprehensive, relevant, and responsive to emerging needs in the field.
- **Indigenization and Learning Outcomes:** The process of integrating indigenization and defining learning outcomes should be approached at the departmental level, with clear facilitation and support from the university. This ensures a coherent, collective effort across courses and avoids a fragmented, course-by-course approach. Such an inclusive process fosters alignment with broader academic goals and UNBC's Strategic Plan. Finally, this process allows students to more readily articulate the value of their learning when they apply for any career.
- The CTLT and/or Office of the Vice President Academic and Provost can support the Department in actioning these two initiatives.

As is usually the case, the external review committee has made recommendations that have some degree of resource implications. Whereas I broadly support suggestions to cultivating alumni relations, recommendations and actions that necessitate acquiring new resources or reallocation of resources will take some time to achieve and must align with the strategic direction and goals of the department and faculty. Collaboration with the UNBC Alumni Relations can help facilitate this goal.

I look forward to seeing the department's work on the action plan and to hearing about the positive impact on the program.