

Final Assessment Report
Submitted by SUPR-G to SCAPA

Program:	Political Science	
Degrees Offered:	Master of Arts - Thesis option, Major Research Paper (MRP) Option Doctor of Philosophy	
Approved Fields:	Canadian Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Local Government, Political Theory	
External Consultants:	Brenda O’Neill, Associate Professor and Chair University of Calgary	Richard Stubbs Professor McMaster University
Internal Reviewers:	Ruth Martin Associate Dean- Graduate Faculty of Health Sciences	Chantel Lemire PhD Candidate Faculty of Music
Date of Site Visit:	January 14 th and 15 th , 2016	
Evaluation:	<i>Conditionally Approved</i> <i>Report on plan and progress September 2017</i> <i>Report on progress and evidence September 2018</i>	
Approved by:	<i>SUPR-G on September 19, 2016</i> <i>SCAPA on October 5, 2016</i>	

Executive Summary

Background

The MA is a one-year program (i.e., 3 terms). It includes a thesis option and a major research paper (MRP) option, the latter being the more popular. The MA thesis option requires the student to complete 4 half-course credits. The MRP option requires 6 half-course credits and a 50-page research paper. MA students in both the thesis and MRP streams may complete a general MA Political Science, or pursue one of four specializations (i.e., Canadian Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Theory). The PhD requires completion of 6 graduate half-course credits, 2 Comprehensive Exams, a Cognate Skill (i.e., a second language course or an additional methodology course), and the PhD dissertation.

Overview

The Graduate Degree Level Expectations, Learning Outcomes, Mode of Delivery and Evaluation Methods for both the MA and PhD are entirely appropriate and consistent with expectations for a graduate program in political science. However, the reviewers had concerns regarding the degree to which the Learning Outcomes are being achieved in the context of the current implementation of the Graduate Program and resource constraints. The Review Committee noted the significant unhappiness and frustration expressed by the graduate students, particularly the doctoral students, related to concerns regarding several aspects of the Graduate Program. Relatively few PhD students said they would recommend the program to others.

The Department, which has enjoyed a very strong reputation in multi-level governance and political theory, has had a net loss of 5 faculty positions since 2008, with two further retirements on the horizon. As such, maintaining the reputation of the Department over the next 5-7 years will fall to faculty currently at the Associate Professor rank. Among this group, there is an uneven depth of external

funding and peer-reviewed publication activity. While some workshops have been provided to offer advice to faculty regarding promotion and tenure requirements and strategy, this could be substantially augmented. MA supervisory roles have been distributed more uniformly across faculty members over the past few years. However, at the PhD level, the bulk of student supervision continues to be carried out by a particular set of faculty members who have strong scholarly reputations. Student supervision will be more uniformly distributed when more faculty members gain strong scholarly reputations. The Program is encouraged to hold regular workshops for faculty to promote best practices in graduate student supervision.

Given the current and anticipated faculty complement and the uneven scholarly record of faculty members, the External Consultants felt that maintaining five graduate program fields is not sustainable. They thought that the number of fields offered to PhD students should be reduced, and encouraged the Program to consider how their graduate program fields intersect with the three research clusters identified by the Department (i.e., Multi-level Governance, Global Justice, Democratic Engagement).

PhD – The changes undertaken by the Program to increase standardization of the PhD program, including adoption of standardized reading lists, common exams and common exam dates, are positive changes. However, having comprehensive examination questions randomly selected from among those submitted by faculty in the field for the exam may not be the best mechanism for ensuring optimal comprehensive examinations. The dissertation proposal process is less standardized. Determination of language proficiency is also fairly informal and can lead to inconsistency. The recently instituted bi-annual PhD progress report is an important mechanism for ensuring consistent progress through the program.

MA – The MA specialization option, in which students take 3 of 4 courses and write a thesis in a single field, may put at risk the breadth of knowledge required for subsequent PhD studies, particularly given that PhD programs, including Western's, require a depth of knowledge in 2 fields. The Program should advise MA students who are interested in pursuing PhD studies to take their 4 courses from 2 fields of study.

PhD and MA – The Scope and Methods course is central to the learning outcome of being able to “demonstrate and apply more in-depth knowledge of qualitative and/or quantitative methods” and to “conduct a research project involving appropriate data collection, ethics and analytical strategies”. However, given that only one week is devoted to each of quantitative and qualitative methods, it is questionable whether the Scope and Methods course actually achieves these learning outcomes. While a more advanced course is offered bi-annually, this is unavailable to MA students and falls outside the schedule to complete course work within one year for some PhD students. The bi-annual availability also is a challenge for students who wish to complete their Cognate Skill in Methods. The need for separate MA and PhD Scope and Methods courses is questioned.

Two core courses in each of the 5 fields are offered annually to PhD students, in addition to the Scope and Methods course. While MA students taking these courses may make them viable every year, guaranteeing 10 graduate courses every year, plus the Scope and Methods course, may be a burden on the faculty complement. Ensuring rigor and graduate level standards in the elective courses, which are often cross-listed courses with upper-level undergraduate students, is a challenge. The standards for the graduate students in these courses, in terms of additional readings and workloads, vary widely. The fact that these classes are capped at 25 students, with a maximum of 5 graduate students, restricts the opportunity for graduate students to participate to the extent expected of a graduate course. The inconsistencies across courses are creating unhappiness among the graduate students. The opportunity to access courses in three Collaborative Programs (i.e., Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Migration and Ethnic Relations, and Environment and Sustainability) as an innovative feature of the Political Science Graduate Program.

Professional capacity/autonomy is developed through coursework, as well as professional development seminars and workshops that are offered on an ad hoc basis. Given the broad range of career paths pursued by graduates of the Political Science Graduate Program, the Program should identify a more specific set of professional skills to be developed through special seminars and workshops that are formalized and offered every year.

The quality of the theses is good to excellent. While some students have published with their supervisors or other faculty members since the last periodic review, enhanced opportunities to publish with faculty members would contribute to the professional development of the graduate students.

Some students expressed concerns about the way PhD students are integrated into the Program. It was not clear whether supervisors are assigned to students from the beginning of their time as graduate students. It is suggested that students be assigned a temporary/initial supervisor from the beginning of their program, and that exit surveys be performed to obtain student feedback about the MA and PhD programs. Resources to support the mental health aspects of graduate student life are valuable, particularly for PhD students who tend to write their theses in relative isolation.

Significant Strengths of Program:

- **Graduate Degree Level Expectations, Learning Outcomes, Mode of Delivery and Evaluation Methods are appropriate**
- **MA and PhD funding packages are highly competitive**
- **MA program includes thesis and MRP options**
- **Opportunities exist in aligning the Graduate Program with Departmental research clusters**
- **Students have access to courses through three Collaborative Programs**
- **History of consistent enrolments and appropriate times-to-completion**
- **Theses and dissertations are of high quality**
- **Recent history of enhanced standardization of the PhD program**
- **Study/office space is available to graduate students**
- **Experienced Graduate Program Assistant facilitates graduate matters**

Suggestions for improvement & Enhancement:

- Consider reducing the number of fields and associated core courses and aligning the fields with Department research clusters; reduce the number of cross-listed courses
- Continue to standardize and optimize graduate student requirements and resources, including the dissertation proposal defence, reading lists for field comprehensive exams, and requirements for graduate students in cross-listed courses
- Offer a single graduate Scope and Methods course, with additional courses in quantitative and qualitative methods skills
- Provide PhD students a range of dissertation proposal templates
- Expand opportunities for professional development through formalized seminars, workshops, co-authorship with faculty and course instruction
- Encourage a culture of student engagement through, for example, a regular speaker series
- Enhance communication regarding tuition deadlines, and funding installments, to graduate students
- Develop a strategy for working with the Dean on faculty renewal and recruitment
- Ensure that the Department has sufficient faculty resources to build on its strengths

Recommendations required for Program sustainability:	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline
1. Consider appropriateness	Graduate Chair		Commence

of the number of fields offered in light of resources	Graduate Committee Department Chair Faculty members		discussions Fall 2016
2. Articulate how the Departmental research clusters align with the graduate program fields	Graduate Chair, Graduate Committee, Department Chair Faculty members		Commence discussions Fall 2016
3. Link core course readings to the standardized reading lists for field comprehensive exams	Graduate Chair core courses instructors		Commence work Fall 2016, ongoing
4. Offer a common Scope and Methods course for MA and PhD students; offer additional courses in qualitative and quantitative methods as resources allow	Graduate Chair Department Chair Dean	Tier Two CRC in Political Methodology has been advertised which could provide additional graduate program capacity in Methods	Commence discussions Fall 2016
5. Reorient courses to ensure all meet graduate learning outcomes and adhere to SGPS policies regarding cross listed courses.	Graduate Chair Department Chair		Fall 2016, ongoing
6. Regularly review and refine the PhD standardized comprehensive examination reading lists	Graduate Chair, faculty who contribute to comprehensive exam reading lists		Five fields are currently standardizing their comp exam reading lists; lists to be reviewed each Winter term
7. Provide students a range of dissertation proposal templates	Graduate Chair		Fall 2016 and ongoing
8. Consider standardizing the dissertation proposal defence	Graduate Chair Graduate Committee	SGPS	Standardized process to be in place by Dec 2016
9. Develop, enhance and formalize professional development including grant writing, co-authorship and publication skills	Graduate Chair Graduate Committee	SGPS Associate Dean - Grad	2016-17 academic year, ongoing
10. Encourage a culture of student engagement and community within the Department	Graduate Chair Graduate Committee		2016-17 academic year, ongoing
11. Continue to develop course teaching	Graduate Chair Appointments		Commence work Fall 2016,

opportunities for PhD students	Committee Department Chair		ongoing
12. Enhance communication regarding funding package and tuition timelines	Graduate Chair Graduate Administrator	SGPS	Commence Fall 2016
13. Establish a regular speaker series	Graduate Chair Graduate Committee Department Chair		2016-17 academic year, ongoing