

**Program Progress Report**  
**Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review**  
**Political Science**

**Date of Site Visit: March 21-22, 2023**

**Progress Report Prepared by: Peter Graefe**

**Please outline below how recommendations from the initial program review have been addressed.**  
**[Please fill in one table for each recommendation from the original Final Assessment Report]**

<p><b>1. Restructure the graduate programs to improve enrollment and student satisfaction</b>  (a) Consider adding a course-only stream to the MA program, to make it more attractive to students who do not desire a core research experience as part of their graduate education.</p>
<p>Responsibility for Implementation:  Graduate Chair and Graduate Committee</p>
<p>Anticipated Timeline for Completion:  Completed April 2024</p>
<p>Additional Notes/Commentary:</p>
<p>Progress (check one)  XCompleted  <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress  <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain)</p>
<p>Department's Comments:  The graduate committee considered this possibility during the 2023-24 academic year, and decided not to proceed at this time. On the demand side, we have not observed interest in a course-based MA either among our applicants, or among our 4<sup>th</sup> year students for whom we write reference letters to other programs. On the supply side, such a change would require offering more graduate courses, which is inconsistent with the directions that the Department has received from the Faculty about the deployment of its teaching resources across its programs. Such a change would also not appeal in terms of shortening time-to-completion, given that virtually all students currently complete the degree in 12 months.</p> <p>We recognize that this recommendation was offered in the context of the difficulty of drawing high quality students to disciplinary MAs in political science given the explosion of more specialized or labour market focused offerings in public policy and global affairs. The graduate Chair and committee are continuing to explore possibilities to highlight the professional value of our programs, including</p>

exploring the possibility of offering cooperative education options in our MA or of adding microcredentials. We expect these explorations to continue.

Dean's Comments:

The department already offers a 12-month Political Science MA with an MRP. As the department notes, it is not clear that adding a 12-month course-based Political Science MA would meaningfully address the underlying challenge, and doing so comes with real costs to the department and Faculty. The challenge posed by an increasing number of competing, interdisciplinary, professional MA programs calls for a better articulation of the distinguishing strengths of the 12-month MRP-based MA vis-à-vis those programs and integration of new elements, such as a co-op option, that meet expectations of today's more career-focused students.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

QAC reviewed this report and had no further comments or concerns

**1. Restructure the graduate programs to improve enrollment and student satisfaction**

(b) Revisit the organization of the MA Colloquium so that it actually meets the objectives set for it by the Department and experienced by students (this should involve consultation with current graduate students); consider advancing the assignment of MRP supervisors to students so that they can begin to make progress on their research as early in their program as possible.

Responsibility for Implementation:

Course director and Graduate Committee

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

Fall 2023 and Spring 2024

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☒ **Completed**

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The course was offered by a different faculty member in 2023/24, who reconfigured assignments and class procedures to favour earlier progress on the MRP. This included the earlier assignment of supervisors, and engagement of supervisors in the students' MRP assignments. The student experience of these changes was positive, and the changes have been carried over by the faculty member who has taken on the role in 2024-25.

Dean's Comments:  
No further comment.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

**1. Restructure the graduate programs to improve enrollment and student satisfaction**

(c) Consider making professional development a stronger component of the program, active throughout its duration; consult with current PhD students to establish how best to provide an orientation to what they consider to be the key facets of their program.

Responsibility for Implementation:

Department Chair, Graduate Chair, Graduate Committee, Speaker Series Coordinator

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

Fall-Winter 2023-2024

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☒ Completed

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The department consulted with PhD students as to the types of professional development they are looking for and the best options for providing them. We also examined the feasibility of funding external providers for professional development and bringing in speakers to assist faculty incorporate non-academic professional development into courses. The consultation led by the graduate committee did not find indications of professional development wants/needs beyond existing programming, or requests for new types of training.

Two additional points:

1. The Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) of the Faculty of Social Sciences has taken the initiative in 2024-25 to increase professional development opportunities through faculty-wide programming. We have encouraged our students to participate.
2. While we consider this as completed, completion involves sustaining efforts in this area. A current example involves working with the Department's graduate students' association to support their identified need for a session on developing professional websites.

Dean's Comments:

The Faculty of Social Science believes that enhanced graduate professionalization and careers programming is essential. From the Faculty's perspective, it does not make sense to have each graduate program undertake its own professional development training in an uncoordinated manner. As noted, the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies has been increasing

professionalization training offered by the Faculty to students in all Social Science graduate programs (and for some events has also been working collaboratively with other Faculties at McMaster). This approach reduces unnecessary duplication, enables programming not possible for a single graduate program, and creates the benefits of greater interaction of graduate students across Social Science graduate programs. This Faculty-based programming can then be supplemented by program-specific programming that reflects considerations unique to a field. It is important that Political Science continue to support its students in this way.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

**1. Restructure the graduate programs to improve enrollment and student satisfaction**

d) Consider increasing the number of TA-ships offered to graduate students to enhance and make more competitive McMaster's financial offers (this should result in a reduced need for undergraduate TAs to be used)

Responsibility for Implementation:

Department Chair, Graduate Chair, TA Coordinator

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

Late Fall 2023/Early Winter 2024

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☒ **Completed**

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The number of TA-ships is controlled by the Faculty office following a formula based on our graduate enrollment.

The department has historically made sparing use of undergraduate TAs, and has hired zero undergraduate TAs in the current academic year. Given the current TA allocation, it is unlikely that undergraduate TAs will be hired in coming years.

Dean's Comments:

As noted, the TA-budget for Political Science is set by the Faculty using a need-based approach agreed to by all graduate programs in the Social Sciences. The Faculty of Social Science TA budget has increased in recent years, providing more funding than the historical norm, in part for reasons identified in the recommendation. The budget for Political Science is set in a manner identical to other graduate programs. Having set a department's TA budget, the Faculty leaves it entirely up to a department to use that funding to best address the teaching needs of its undergraduate program (i.e., the allocation of TAs to courses) and the need to recruit and support graduate students. The department has no scope to increase TA funding of its own accord.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

**Restructure the graduate programs to improve enrollment and student satisfaction**

(e) Consider reversing or at least reducing the clawback of scholarships which the Department levies on successful PhD scholarship applicants, as this creates unneeded animosity among students towards the program.

**Recommendation is outside the scope of the IQAP review.**

Responsibility for Implementation:  
Department Chair and Graduate Chair

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:  
Completed Fall 2023

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☒ **Completed**

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

While out of scope, it is worth noting that the clawback is now governed by a Faculty of Social Science policy.

Ahead of the adoption of the Faculty policy, greater efforts were made to explain to graduate students how the Department allocates and funds students, and how the claw back worked as part of this.

Dean's Comments:

The current adjustment policy reflects a recommendation of a university-wide Task Force on Graduate Funding , which called for all Faculties to have an explicit adjustment policy that is readily available to students and is applied consistently. The current FSS policy was developed in consultations with Department Chairs and graduate programs and is progressive in two dimensions: other things equal, those with greater base university scholarship support and/or a larger external award faces higher rates of adjustment than those with less base funding and/or smaller external awards. Further, a student is never financially worse off for having obtained an external award – the adjustment to university scholarship funding is always less than the external award. Finally, the adjusted funding stays in a program to enable to program to provide additional support to students in need. It is never diverted from graduate scholarship support. The adjustment policy is therefore a critical element for equitably using the limited university scholarship funding to support graduate students.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation:

**Rebuild community across programs and the department**

(a) Consult with new faculty, CLAs, and sessional instructors to determine what degree of orientation/onboarding to the Department meets their needs and expectations, and work to bring that into effect

Responsibility for Implementation:

Department Chair

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

Summer/Fall 2023

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☐ **Completed**

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

No issues were identified in follow up discussion with new faculty and CLAs. They all indicated a welcoming response and comfort in being able to approach the Chair and other faculty members. The formal Faculty of Social Science mentoring program was initiated for three of our four newest faculty members, with the fourth declining the offer.

Dean's Comments:

The Faculty of Social Sciences has enhanced its new-faculty on-boarding programming to provide greater orientation for new faculty. This is done in coordination with departments, and is supplemented with department-specific information. As noted, the Faculty also has a formal mentorship program. That said, most of this is targeted at new tenure- and teaching-stream faculty, and to a lesser degree CLAs. While support for new sessional instructors has increased in recent years, it varies across departments and is less consistently provided. This has been identified as an area for further work. We can do better for our sessional instructors.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation:

**Rebuild community across programs and the department**

(b) Consider working with the university to unlock space expressly purposed for graduate students, to enable them to develop a stronger sense of community; use this enhanced space to continue providing shared office space to PhD students beyond their 4<sup>th</sup> year.

Responsibility for Implementation:

Department Chair

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

Summer/Fall 2023

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☒ **Completed**

☐ In Progress

☐ **Other (please explain)**

Department's Comments:

The Department is working to make use of existing formal meeting space more amenable to greater and more informal use. KTH-503 has been converted to multi-use space and students were given keypad access in late 2023/early 2024. This room gets regular use by graduate students for both work and breaks.

Dean's Comments:

The use of space by both faculty and graduate students has changed notably since the pandemic. Social Science's Director of Finance and Administration, working collaboratively with the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies undertook less than two years ago a survey of graduate students and held a small number of focus groups to understand better the space needs of graduate students in Social Sciences. The findings revealed considerable satisfaction with the current approach to assigning graduate student space and few calls for change.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation:

**Rebuild community across programs and the department**

(c) Provide opportunities for graduate students to meet formally and informally, with special emphasis on interactions between junior and senior PhD students. Provide more structured onboarding for graduate students about what to expect in graduate school that goes beyond the graduate student handbook

Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair, Graduate Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Summer/Fall 2023
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Completed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: The Department has made more financial resources available to the Political Science Graduate Student Association for programming, although much of it has been left unspent. The Department Chair and the association continue to dialogue on improving the take-up of funds. The Department also continues to support the Mapping the Global Dimensions of Policy conference, whose planning provides interaction and mentorship between more senior and junior graduate students. The Department now delivers its orientation sessions for incoming students online and in the summer, in order to provide more transition time to students to aid in onboarding.
Dean's Comments:  Two years ago the Faculty of Social Sciences Associate Dean of Graduate Studies introduced a Faculty-level graduate-student orientation for students from all graduate programs in the Faculty. The goal is to enable new graduate students to meet students from other programs and to ensure they are aware of the different types of supports available to them at the university (it features guests from the library, the student success centre, the teaching and learning institute, etc.). Again, this is meant to complement program-specific orientations. The Associate Dean can work with programs to strengthen their orientation programming, and will contact Political Science to see if there are ways to enhance its approach.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):  See above

Recommendation: <b>Match TA availability to pedagogical formats</b> (a) Consider rebalancing tutorial assignments to target this scarce resource where it is most needed, either by increasing its provision in courses at Level I and Level II, and/or reducing the number of courses that utilize TAs at Level III (in line with any collective agreement provisions). Either action will involve revising course design to maximize available TA support,
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for example by adopting under-used assessment methods such as group projects and peer assessment in Level III.
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Fall 2023-Spring 2024
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Completed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: TA Budget constraints have reduced the availability of TAs beyond 2 <sup>nd</sup> year. Tutorials were increased to 30 to ensure resources at 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> year are available. This was dealt with in course planning for the 2024/25 academic year. The Department also brought in resources from the Macpherson Institute to provide a workshop on alternative grading methods and less resource-intensive student evaluation in the winter of 2024.
Dean's Comments:  As noted earlier, department's have discretion to use available TA resources to best meet the needs of their undergraduate curriculum. The department has engaged in considerable work that last two to three years to adjust how TAs are allocated across courses to meet the needs of its undergraduate program. This work continues.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):  See above

Recommendation: <b>Match TA availability to pedagogical formats</b> (b) Work to reduce the numbers of undergraduate students used as TAs by expanding use of graduate students as TAs (as above).
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair, Graduate Chair, TA Coordinator
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Fall 2023-Winter 2024
Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one) <input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Other (please explain)</b>
Department's Comments: With no expansion of the TA budget forthcoming, we cannot expand the use of graduate students as TAs. Undergraduate TAs were only used as a last resort when no Graduate Students were available. They are unlikely to be used in the current resource environment.
Dean's Comments:  No further comment.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):  See above

Recommendation: <b>Relieve the administrative burden on staff and faculty</b> a) Relieve the burden on administrative staff through efficiency gains, or by adding more complement to the existing staff
Responsibility for Implementation: Department Chair
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Summer-Fall 2023
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Completed</b> <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: Department Chair consulted with administrative staff to determine needs and explored the potential of additional administrative support. The Faculty of Social Sciences continues to upload responsibilities from departments (e.g. expense claims). There were no needs identified as unmet by the Department's administrative staff. There is adequate capacity within current staffing responsibilities.

Dean's Comments:

The Faculty of Social Science has in the last two to three years centralized human resource processing and many aspects of financial processing, uploading these responsibilities from departments. This was done to increase efficiencies, reduce errors, and provide better service. It was also done to enable Academic Department Managers to improve support to department faculty in areas such as post-award research support. The Faculty also regularly reviews the administrative workloads and staffing across departments to ensure equity in available resources.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation:

**Relieve the administrative burden on staff and faculty**

(b) Work to establish precisely the types of support which faculty require to further incorporate experiential learning into their courses, so that the university can act on these requests

Responsibility for Implementation:

Department Chair and Undergraduate Chair

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

Fall 2023-Winter 2024

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☐ **Completed**

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The Chair consulted with faculty members. In November 2023 and January 2024, Macpherson personnel came in to discuss pedagogical options for faculty to reduce TA needs and deal with AI. A further session on AI is planning for end-of-April 2025.

Dean's Comments:

The Faculty of Social Sciences has invested heavily in recent years in its Office of Careers and Experiential Education. This Office provides support to instructors on how to integrate experiential elements into courses, expanding course-based experiential learning.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above