

**Political Science Department
Five-Year Program Review
Focused Progress Report
February 13, 2006**

Introduction

The purpose of this follow up report to the one submitted September 23, 2005, is to assess the ongoing progress in one particular area of the department's mission—preparing majors for a post-collegiate world of further education, work, profession, citizenship, and service. This particular mission is most closely aligned with *Standard 4: Active Social and Intellectual Engagement*. It is also consistent with the 1999 Declaration of the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education which states that “we must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship.”

The Need to Respond

In earlier assessments, the Political Science Department surveyed seniors and alumni for feedback that would be helpful in our ongoing assessment efforts. In the Alumni Survey of 2001, respondents indicated that in most areas of department involvement, alums were largely satisfied with the major. In a few areas, they appeared to disagree as to possible improvements. In terms of career advising, their assessments of department efforts were more negative. These comments were representative:

“Career planning is the weakest part of the major.”

“Not very helpful in getting a job.”

“I feel I was just told I could go to law school or work in politics.”

“Never felt I could use my degree beside teaching or graduate studies.”

2005-2007 Responses and Activities

In response to these data, the department continues to engage in a number of activities to further career education among our majors.

1. As noted in the 9/23/05 report, the department established a local chapter of the National Political Science Honor Society, to honor scholarship and encourage graduate study. Over the next two years, we desire to explore ways to enhance this group's effectiveness beyond an honor society.
2. The department has and continues to encourage and support several new campus organizations of particular interest to our majors including Amnesty International, The Beatitudes Society, and a Law and Politics Society. Such groups provide necessary

leadership opportunities for majors. In this vein, please note that a disproportional number of student body presidents in recent years have been political science majors.

3. In terms of classroom activity, several faculty have and continue to invite guest speakers to classes; these practitioners model professionalism and provide career insights to our majors. Such speakers have included foreign affairs experts (Foreign Service professionals and an African development specialist), a local superior court administrator, a county prosecutor, and a recent alumus who holds an Assembly Fellowship in the state capital. Each year, a number of majors attend the Sacramento Legislative Seminar, a several day event in the State Capitol that features numerous practitioners such as legislators, legislative staffers, administrators, lobbyists, and journalists. The International Law course features a Model United Nations simulation that exposes students to UN officials in New York City.

4. The department's internship course has recently launched a more deliberate career advising component including a workshop by the Director of the Career and Life Planning Office, opportunities to take various career interest assessment tests, and hear from alums who provide career guidance along with career path narratives.

5. The entire department has hosted a career advising workshop for all majors; this effort has made use of the Career and Life Planning Office as well.

2005-2007 Assessment Activities

While the department has made more intentional its career advising responsibilities, we still need more systematic feedback on how these activities have been received and to what extent they have impacted career goals and decision making. At bottom is this question: Do these activities actually make a difference to our majors? To that end, we propose to conduct the following assessment activities for 2005-2007 and, depending on their success, to continue them beyond this academic year:

1. Conduct another career advising workshop and provide opportunity for feedback from attendees.
2. Better utilize certain courses to provide career insights appropriate to course material and inquire in course evaluations as to the usefulness of those efforts.
3. Conduct another alumni survey to assess recent career advising initiatives by the department. The senior survey (consisting of several exit interviews) will also be modified to include questions assessing our success at career advising. With appropriate modifications, we will be able to develop longitudinal feedback that indicates career advising progress over time.

A Caveat

Career advising is not and should not be a primary mission of a liberal arts college or an undergraduate political science department. Furthermore, the impact of a residential liberal arts college education (including general education, major courses, student/faculty interaction, student life activities, and a growing number of off campus program experiences) cannot be assessed in the short term only. For example, one department member who participated in the Fall 2005 Europe Semester encountered a Westmont alumnus in Turkey. This alum proceeded to recall a course taken from the professor in the 1970s (!), including course detail and the impact the course had on him. Such feedback from years gone by will likely not be evident in short-term assessment instruments. The value of short-term assessment efforts to which we pledge ourselves is to improve those activities so as to provide the best career advising experiences possible in concert with our mission as a liberal arts college.