

**Improving student learning and student retention at the undergraduate level
Application Cover Sheet**

*Maximum funding for any single grant: \$50,000.
Proposal must be limited to two pages plus a budget page, in addition to the cover sheet.*

DIRECTIONS:

1. Complete cover sheet
2. Attach 2 page proposal summary
3. Attach 1 page budget
4. For projects requesting continuing funding attach a brief interim progress-toward-goals report
5. Submit your proposal electronically to your college office for approval. College offices will submit recommended college proposals to the Provost office **no later than March 16, 2007 for FY'08 funding.**

Name: **Dr. William M. Downs**

Date: **March 1, 2007**

Department and College Affiliation:

Department of Political Science, College of Arts and Sciences

Phone: **(404) 651-4837**

Email: polwmd@langate.gsu.edu

Collaborators (other departments, if any):

Title of Your Proposal:

Increasing Retention, Progression, and Graduation in Political Science: A Progress Report and Request for Continued Funding

Theme of Your Proposal (Support for students; Fostering connections; Enhancing advisement;

- 1) **Supplemental instruction for students in sections of General Education Core Curriculum courses**
- 2) **Decentralization of undergraduate advising**
- 3) **Fostering connections through Sophomore Seminars, Sophomore Honor Society, and Undergraduate Research Day**

College rating (approved; not approved) _____

INCREASING RETENTION, PROGRESSION AND GRADUATION A Political Science Progress Report and Request for Continued Funding

March 2007

Political Science in Context

The Department of Political Science received \$50,000 in support of its RPG proposal for FY07. Given the success of our initiatives to date – and on the basis of other indicators of the Department’s clear commitment to improving undergraduate instruction – we are requesting a renewal of the \$50,000 funding so that ongoing projects may be sustained and RPG goals realized. As will be documented below, all projects proposed in our FY07 plan are underway: (1) employment of Supplemental Instruction in two high-enrollment Political Science core curriculum courses – POLS 1101 American Government and POLS 2401 Global Issues--has made a positive and statistically significant impact on student performance; (2) a revised system of undergraduate advising is now in place and has been well received by majors; (3) two new Sophomore Seminars are established; (4) the first annual Political Science Undergraduate Research Day convened on February 28, 2007; and (5) the first cohort of a new Sophomore Honor Society will be inducted in March. Additional measures of the Department’s commitment to improving RPG include: the placement of one of our doctoral students (Roisin Florence) as coordinator of the College of Arts and Sciences Major Matters program; the naming of Political Science Associate Professor Peter Lindsay to the directorship of the GSU Center for Teaching and Learning; receipt of the 2006 Departmental Instructional Effectiveness Award (for our work assessing learning outcomes); and the participation of the Department Chair William Downs at the March 2007 Course Redesign Alliance Conference in Florida.

Large Sections and the Need for Supplemental Instruction

Large student sections, often of 120 or 200, frequently characterize the Department’s core curriculum courses – POLS 1101 and POLS 2401. In Fall 2006, for example, the Department offered five of its 15 American Government sections at the 200-student size and three at the 120-student size; likewise, three of the 13 sections of Global Issues that semester had 120 seats. With the benefit of RPG funding, the Department recruited and hired undergraduate and graduate student Supplemental Instruction leaders for our large sections of American Government and Global Issues. As data in the appended table demonstrate, the introduction of supplemental instruction produced a clear and positive impact on both student progression and retention. While the DFW rate for students who declined to make use of SI stood at 21%, the rate for those who did take advantage of SI (defined as two or more visits to SI-led sessions) dropped to only 8.9%. Disaggregating those data a bit, we find that 19% of students unexposed to SI received grades of D or F (compared to only 7.3% for those who used SI), and 8.4% of non-SI students withdrew (compared to only 2% of SI-users). According to the data accumulated to evaluate the impact of Supplemental Instruction, students who used SI had an average course GPA of 3.09 while those who did not had an average course GPA of 2.59. In Spring 2007 we have duplicated our effort to insert SI leaders in large sections of POLS 1101 and POLS 2401. *The Department of Political Science requests renewal of funds to support the successful employment of SI in 2007-08.*

Revision of Departmental Advising System

In Summer 2006 the Department commenced an overhaul of its advising system for majors. The Chair designated five faculty members from across the discipline’s primary fields to serve as Undergraduate Advising Coordinators. The five UACs received stipends to participate in an August 2006 workshop with the Office of Academic Assistance to construct and implement a new, decentralized advising system wherein all declared majors received a faculty advisor in the Department. Each UAC also took on a larger number of advisees and held more office hours each week than did regular faculty. In our first open advisement week in October 2006,

approximately 175 Political Science majors scheduled and showed up for 20-minute advisement sessions with their new faculty advisors. While we await student satisfaction scores on exit surveys conducted by the Office of Institutional Research, the overwhelming anecdotal evidence at this early stage is that students greatly appreciate the initiative (see illustrative e-mail from one major appended to this proposal). While changes to our advising are positive and deserve continued support, the Department still lacks a staff person devoted to academic advising and that is something we hope to garner in the near future. *The Department of Political Science requests funds to continue support of summer advising workshops for faculty and Undergraduate Advising Coordinators.*

Sophomore Seminars

The Department of Political Science received funds to hire additional graduate assistants, which allowed us to create and staff new Sophomore Seminars with regular faculty. The small size (15 students apiece) and targeted themes of these seminars (e.g., "Globalization and its Discontents," "Enduring Problems of American Democracy") have been popular with students and faculty alike. We have a new Sophomore Seminar theme ("Money and Politics") added to the schedule for Fall 2007. For a Department that normally teaches such large sections, these seminars are a valuable alternative for a vulnerable group of students. *We request continued funding of graduate assistants to free up faculty to teach Sophomore Seminars in 2007-08.*

Undergraduate Symposium for Scholarly and Creative Work

An Undergraduate Research Day can provide Political Science undergraduates with the unique opportunity to exhibit and share examples of their significant research and creativity with each other and with the broader research community. With support from our FY07 RPG funds, the Chair designated two faculty members to plan, organize and convene the Department's first (and hopefully annual) Undergraduate Research Day. That event was held on February 28 in the University Student Center. Four students provided oral reports of their projects in front of an audience of 40 undergraduates, seven faculty members, and five graduate students. The presentations covered a range of salient political themes: "Latino Immigration to the U.S. and the Power of Local Government in the New South," "Does the Level of Democracy Affect World Trade Organization Membership?," "Democracy and Human Rights," and "A Comprehensive Legal Analysis of Big Brother's Illegal Warrantless Wiretapping Program." An additional four students prepared poster presentations that were displayed throughout the conference room, and each described their findings to small groups of interested students and faculty. A panel of faculty judges awarded prizes to three students for superior research. *By all accounts, this event was a success and we request funds to support a renewal of the Research Day idea for 2007-08.*

Sophomore Honor Society

Accolades are often few and far between for undergraduates, and they invariably tend to come close to graduation. The two existing national honor societies in Political Science -- Pi Sigma Alpha and Sigma Iota Rho -- only accept students at the Junior and Senior levels. We believe that early recognition and rewarding of excellence by students taking Political Science courses will foster a sense of accomplishment, scholarship, and involvement by students who don't already have one foot out the door. Such recognition will be accompanied by an expectation of participation in other aspects of Political Science at GSU, such as attending talks by distinguished guest speakers. This Spring the Department will induct its first cohort of students in a new Sophomore Honor Society. Sophomores who have completed both POLS 1101 and POLS 2401 with a combined GPA of at least 3.5 in those courses (and at least a 3.0 overall) will be eligible for membership. By identifying high-achieving students early on, and then providing a forum to honor their achievements and engage them socially and intellectually, the Honor Society is targeted at both the Political Science Department's and the University's goals of retention, progression and graduation. *We request funds to support continued operating costs for this Society.*

BUDGET

<i>Request for Supplemental Instruction Leaders (Fall 2007 and Spring 2008)</i>	
10 Graduate Student SI Leaders @ \$1,800 apiece	\$18,000
<i>Request for funds to support revision of advising system, August 2007 Advising Workshop</i>	
5 faculty Undergraduate Advising Coordinators @ \$1000 per faculty.....	\$5,000
<i>Request for Graduate Assistants to Release Faculty to Teach Sophomore Seminars</i>	
<i>Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 (paid by semester)</i>	
2 Graduate Assistants @ \$12,000 apiece	\$24,000
<i>Request for Support of Sophomore Honor Society</i>	
Initiation costs and program budget for year	\$1,000
<i>Request for Support of Spring 2008 Undergraduate Research Symposium</i>	
Faculty mentors/coordinators, 2 faculty @ \$1000 apiece	\$2,000
Total	\$50,000

**Comparison of
Supplemental Instruction
and Non-Supplemental
Instruction Students
Fall 06
Political Science**

			Non-SI	SI	Total
ABC	Count		290	224	514
	% within SI		79.0%	91.1%	83.8%
DFW	Count		77	22	99
	% within SI		21.0%	8.9%	16.2%
Total	Count		367	246	613
	% within SI		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Significance	Significant
Pearson Chi-Square	15.760	1	0.000	
				at p<.001

			Non-SI	SI	Total
AB	Count		213	215	428
	% within SI		81.0%	92.7%	86.5%
DF	Count		50	17	67
	% within SI		19.0%	7.3%	13.5%
Total	Count		263	232	495
	% within SI		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Significance	Significant
Pearson Chi-Square	14.378	1	0.000	
				at p<.001

			Non-SI	SI	Total
ABC	Count		295	247	542
	% within SI		91.6%	98.0%	94.4%

	W	Count	27	5	32
		% within SI	8.4%	2.0%	5.6%
Total		Count	322	252	574
		% within SI	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Significance	Significant
Pearson Chi-Square	11.003	1	0.001	
				at p<.01

Correlation Between Course GPA and Number of SI Visits $r = .185$ **Significant at p<.001**

		N	Average		
Course GPA	SI	264	3.09		
	Non-SI	345	2.59	$t = 5.937$	Significance = .000
					Significant at p<.001

Note: Students with two or more visits were classified as having Supplemental Instruction.

From: "Nicole D. Hodo" <nhodo1@student.gsu.edu>
To: <POLWMD@langate.gsu.edu>
Date: 9/11/2006 4:16 PM
Subject: Re: [Poliscimajors] Changes to Advising System for Political Science Majors

Dr. Downs I cannot thank you enough for the changes you are putting in place, I believe these changes will be in the best interest of the entire student body as well as the faculty. I wrote you toward the end of the summer regarding setting up a meeting to discuss classes I need to register for, but my schedule has been so hectic I never followed through on my intention to meet you. Thank you for your continued support in making college life a little easier for students who may get lost in such a big university.

Thanks a lot,
Nicole Hodo

-----Original Message-----

From: "William Downs" <POLWMD@langate.gsu.edu>
To: <Poliscimajors@mailbox.gsu.edu>
Date: Mon, 11 Sep 2006 12:04:37 -0400
Subject: [Poliscimajors] Changes to Advising System for Political Science Majors

Dear Political Science majors,

First, let me extend a warm new semester welcome (or welcome back) to all of you! I hope that your summer was pleasant and productive, and that you are now off to a successful start in your studies at Georgia State University.

Our goal in the Department of Political Science is to give all of our more than 620 majors a first-class educational experience and to prepare you for the future (whether that be immediate employment, government service, or further studies in graduate school, law school and the like).

So that we may better meet this goal, the Department is considering a number of changes. One change that we will implement this semester concerns advising for our majors. You will each soon receive notification that you have been assigned a faculty advisor in the Department. You will then be encouraged to sign-up for an advisement session with that faculty member at the outset of each new registration period. The intention here is (1) to give you a familiar and consistent advisor within the Department to better help you select your courses, (2) to better help you understand what majoring in Political Science at GSU entails, and (3) to provide you with a faculty mentor who can provide valuable advice on careers for Political Science majors. In short, we think it important that you have the opportunity for regular face-to-face advisement with Political Science faculty throughout your studies at GSU.

Please note: All students intending to major in Political Science must still first declare the major at the Office of Academic Assistance (724 General Classroom Building) and then seek general assistance from that office regarding evaluation of transfer work, assistance with course selection and schedule revision, advisement concerning university policies and regulations, evaluation of degree requirements for graduation, and preparation of graduation audits. In short, go to OAA for Areas A-E and to your faculty advisor in Political Science for Areas

F-G.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful semester.

Dr. Downs

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