

## IMPROVING RETENTION, PROGRESSION, AND GRADUATION

**Name** Dr. William M. Downs

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**Department and College Affiliation** Chair, Department of Political Science  
College of Arts and Sciences

**Phone** (404) 651-4837

**Email** [polwmd@langate.gsu.edu](mailto:polwmd@langate.gsu.edu)

**Title of Proposal** "PROPOSAL FOR INCREASING RETENTION,  
PROGRESSION, AND GRADUATION:  
Department of Political Science"

**Themes of Proposal**

- 1) Supplemental instruction for students in large 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) \_\_\_\_\_ APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_

## PROPOSAL FOR INCREASING RETENTION, PROGRESSION, AND GRADUATION

Department of Political Science

June 2006

### **Political Science in Context**

The Department of Political Science serves more than 620 undergraduate majors (ranking 5<sup>th</sup> in the College of Arts and Sciences), with growth in the number of declared majors at 64% since Fall 2001. The Department has boosted its undergraduate graduation from 63 students in FY02 to 155 students in FY05, yet the four-year (16%), five-year (30%) and six-year (42%) graduation rates demand continued scrutiny and improvement. Political Science has two courses in the University's General Education Core Curriculum—POLS 1101 American Government and POLS 2401 Global Issues. Together, those two courses enrolled 4860 students from Summer 2005 through Spring 2006. We must note, however, that the DFW rate for POLS 1101 stands in excess of 20% for the past three semesters, while the comparable rate for POLS 2401 is at 24%. Clearly, Political Science has the ability to reach a large portion of the GSU student body, and needed improvements to the Department's performance in retention, progression and graduation rates stand to make a noticeable impact on overall numbers for the College of Arts and Sciences and the University.

### **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 Spring 2006, for example, the Department offered four of its 15 American Government sections at the 200-student size and six at the 120-student size; likewise, three of the 11 sections of Global Issues that semester had 120 seats. We note with some concern that the DFW rate for large sections of American Government stood at 22%, while that for small sections was at 14%. Absent the hiring of additional faculty and instructors to offer more and smaller sections, it is evident that resources are needed to support students in large classes. *With ten of our POLS 1101 and 2401 course sections scheduled for Fall 2006 capped at either 120 or 200 students, we request funds to hire a Supplemental Instructor for each of those sections. The impact of SI on this large cross-section of the student body can be readily quantified and evaluated through comparison of DFW rates.*

### **Revision of Departmental Advising System**

GSU data indicate that retention rates are very low at the junior and senior levels. Because colleges and departments are the primary agents of student advisement at these levels, both have been encouraged to develop their own retention action plans. Georgia State is a decentralized institution, hence retention efforts must involve the departments or they are likely to fail. Yet, advising in Political Science has heretofore not been decentralized, and a Fall 2005 exit survey of graduating Political Science students shows dissatisfaction with the availability and quality of that advising (departmental mean of 2.8 on a 4-point scale, with University mean of 2.92). Believing that retention rates may improve if students have meaningful and regularized contact with faculty in their actual areas of interest, we propose no less than an overhaul of departmental advising. OAA provides good but often incomplete advising for our majors, and the Department proposes that all majors continue to seek regular assistance from that office. In addition, however, the Department proposes to assign all students a Political Science faculty advisor in one of the discipline's five subfields at the time they declare the major. Five faculty members (one each from American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Theory, and Public Administration/Policy) will serve as Undergraduate Advising Coordinators (UACs) for the department. This change will entail (1) a week long open advisement period once each semester, where advisees can schedule 20-minute appointments with their faculty advisor and (2) an orientation session for each new cohort of majors (and prospective majors as well) at the

outset of each Fall semester. The five UACs will convene a workshop in coordination with the Office of Academic Assistance in August 2006 to construct and begin implementation of the new system. Because Political Science is a research department in a research university where demands on faculty time are already quite substantial, we believe this revision in undergraduate advising requires faculty buy-in to work. *The Department of Political Science therefore requests support for each faculty Undergraduate Advising Coordinator to conduct the Summer 2006 Advising Workshop and to take on the responsibility of mapping out and implementing this significant transition. The impact of adding a genuinely decentralized dimension to advising can be assessed in the short term by student satisfaction scores on exit surveys conducted by the Office of Institutional Research.*

### **Sophomore Seminars**

We recognize that retaining second and third-year students is a particular concern of the University. We therefore propose to construct Sophomore Seminars that focus on topics of current interest in Political Science research and scholarship. They are small classes that encourage close interaction between faculty and students, thus cultivating a connection with this vulnerable target group. During the Fall and Spring semesters, we propose that sophomores earn two hours of credit through participation in these once-weekly seminars. To encourage a relaxed interchange of information and ideas, each seminar is graded credit/no credit and limited to 18 students. *The Department of Political Science requests support to hire two graduate assistants, which would release regular faculty to staff Sophomore Seminars in each of the Fall and Spring semesters. To evaluate this initiative, the Department will track the retention, progression, and graduation rates of Sophomore Seminar cohorts and compare with non-participants.*

### **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. Establishing a Sophomore Honor Society will help avoid the "trap of unacknowledged anonymity" that can plague students at a large urban campus such as GSU. *The Department of Political Science requests funds to support start-up costs and a modest operating budget for the proposed Sophomore Honor Society. To evaluate this initiative, the Department will track the retention, progression, and graduation rates of Sophomore Honor Society inductees and compare with non-participants.*

### **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 university community. Students may present work in a variety of ways, such as through panel paper presentations, poster sessions, and electronic media. This event, conducted in coordination with select faculty members, constitutes: (1) a reward for our best students, (2) an invaluable showcase of excellence for other existing or prospective Political Science students, and (3) an opportunity to correct for the infrequency with which students interact with faculty on activities other than coursework (the Fall 2005 Survey of Political Science graduates reports a mean of 1.65 on a 5-point scale, with "5" representing Very Often). *The Department of Political Science requests funds to support the creation and administration of an Undergraduate Research Day in Spring 2007. The event's success will be measured by the number of students participating as presenters and the number of students (as attendees) reached.*

**BUDGET**

<i>Request for Supplemental Instructors</i>	
10 SI @ \$1,800 apiece .....	\$18,000
<i>Request for funds to support revision of advising system, August 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>	
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 Undergraduate Research Symposium</i>	
Faculty mentors/coordinators, 2 faculty @ \$1000 apiece .....	\$2,000
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>