## Political Science

## Meeting with Terry Check and Emily Esch

## October 15, 2014

1) What are the strengths of your department/program? What do you already do well? Remember that these responses will be shared with the community at large, so please use this opportunity to brag a little bit. What do you want people outside your department/program to know about your successes and strengths?

Our strengths lie in our contribution to the liberal arts education of our students and in the promotion of national and global citizenship. We see our department as contributing significantly to the **CSB-SJU Coordinate Values and Mission** in the following ways:

**“Fostering integrated learning"** – Our major curriculum creates excellent connections based on a solid foundation; it is a set of building blocks that enable our students to build connections between their values and political life and their world. Ultimately our students are able to think, write, discuss, and connect courses across the curriculum. They understand how to write and how to do research, thus our major is a great preparation for all careers. All of this reflects the institutions’ commitment to “clear thinking and communicating.” While our curriculum no longer has writing, quantitative, global or discussion flags, our department still sees these skills as important aspects of a liberal education and provides them for our students.

In particular, the department sees its strength in its ability to present the intersection of global cultures: we are “globally” focused in that we systematically look at the intersections between many different countries and cultures. In general we have 12-15 majors in each cohort who focus on international relations. In general the department does not like the institution’s curriculum shift from “global flags” to “intercultural designations” because we argue that it has lost the truly international element and feel new requirement is shallower than the old flag. The IC requirement took away a deeper, historical understanding of world systems. Instead of providing students with a bridge from their own culture to another, the new intercultural requirement starts in the middle and goes nowhere. There is a difference between domestic diversity issues and global perspectives. When we last revised the curriculum, members of the department fought for two designations: a race/diversity flag that focused on domestic diversity issues, and a separate international affairs/systems flag that focused on the wider world beyond the United States. Unfortunately this didn’t happen.

**“An integrative environment for learning”** – The breadth of our discipline enables us to fulfill this portion of the mission. Because political science includes both empirical study (qualitative and quantitative research) and normative study (political theory and philosophy) the field of political science, and the major itself is quintessentially liberal arts. We have revised our methods course sequence to ground our students in empirical research. The methods courses are by sub-discipline, although some methods courses more quantitative than others. This ensures that students pick up some of research skills early, so that these skills can be used later in upper division courses and in our capstone. All this means that the department does a very good job of connecting the dots: we connect our students with internships, other clubs, civic engagement and success in the job market.

Our curriculum (and the hard work of department members) enables us to be very supportive of undergraduate research. Our capstone requires all students to write a thesis. All of our sophomore students present a research project through poster presentations Scholarship and Creativity Day, and our seniors also present their honors theses on that day. The department is one of the largest contributors to Scholarship and Creativity Day. Our seniors also present at the Minnesota Political Science Association, and we are the largest college group there; we also send three to five students to NCUR every year.

The department has made a commitment to writing at all levels. The department is committed to writing skills. Often, we see students at about the same level in the FYS courses. But in the ethics courses, there is a larger disparity in writing skills. Some students in the ethics courses can’t write an essay. This is an issue that must be addressed. It’s worth asking what the writing expectations are in other departments. Are students getting needed research and writing skill sets from their majors?

We are also deeply committed to the understanding of gender in our society. We have four courses that fill the gender requirement, including a sophomore discussion and writing-based course that is taken by all majors and many students from outside the major.

2) What do you wish you could do better, or do more of? What would it take (resources, support, etc.) for you to reach those goals?

We would like to ensure that more students are encouraged to take our introductory courses so that they understand the importance of national and global citizenship. Because so many students come in having already fulfilled their Social Science requirement in high school, they don’t take POLS 111 Introduction to US Politics (a course that is a graduation requirement for many universities) despite the fact that this course would really help students understand their connections to their community and their citizenship responsibilities at all levels and encourage them to become civically engaged. Because fewer students take 111, and because of the pressure on students to take pre-professional coursework, it is difficult to give students access to the important learning goals that our courses provide. We need to figure out some ways to help non-majors become civically engaged.

In terms of resources, the department would like to be able to offer classes with smaller caps to enable us to give more attention to writing and discussion.

Office space is another resource that is important to us. The department has had a presence at CSB since the mid-1980s, but over the past year the department has moved to a single location at SJU, with the exception of one faculty member who is very close to retirement and stayed at CSB. Co-location of most of the tenured, tenure-track, and term faculty has improved faculty morale, collegiality, communication, and has enhanced the functioning of our department. We would like the administration’s sustained support to ensure that the department continues to be housed in a single location.

There has been no commitment from administration to replace a political science tenure track international relations/Asian politics position. Asia is 60% of the world’s population and 40% of the world’s land mass and CSB-SJU currently has three study abroad programs in Asia. If CSB-SJU truly means to be an internationally-focused institution, we really need to maintain this particular tenure line.

3) Leaving aside discipline specific knowledge, in what ways does your department/program best contribute to providing our students with a liberal education for their lives beyond college, as informed and engaged citizens, productive employees, ethical beings, etc.?

**“Exceptional leadership for change” –** All seven of the CSB-SJU Truman Scholars have been political science majors. We recognize the excellent work of Dr. Phil Kronebusch in achieving this remarkable outcome. All faculty members contribute to mentoring students in post-graduate placement. We have an exceptional record in placing our students in **Graduate School and Law School**, including students who have graduated from top law schools (Harvard, Stanford) and top graduate programs (including Harvard, Syracuse, and the Humphrey School at the University of Minnesota.) Our students are always heavily involved in student governance on campus, providing leadership to both Student Senates and many student clubs.

**“The integration of professional and personal lives through opportunities for experiential learning”** –The Washington D.C. Summer Study Program is a flagship program for our department and for CSB-SJU as a whole. Founded by a political science faculty member over 35 years ago, the D.C. Program is truly unique in providing a learning community that has enhanced careers for our students. Our program is exceptional because our faculty are on site (most other programs are outsourced). Our program directors visit internship sites, talk with students, work with alums and other volunteers. The directors hold over two dozen seminars in D.C. over the summer. In the spring prior, we have a series of workshops about how to be a successful intern and site supervisors in D.C. have recognized that our interns are some of the best-prepared (and some of the best interns) that they have ever seen. The program is open to all majors and we have a growing number of non-majors. About a third of the students return to D.C. after graduation, having received job offers from their sites or built career networks that lead to job offers at other organizations. We have a very strong network of D.C. alums, and D.C. is possibly the largest non-Minnesota alum chapter.

**“The habit of promoting the common good”** According to a national survey instrument used to measure civic engagement, CSB-SJU political science majors have a higher level of civic engagement that majors in other disciplines. Engagement levels of DC interns is especially high. Our connections with the McCarthy Center ensures that our students have an outlet for that civic engagement as well as an opportunity to transform their lives and their communities through careers in public service at the local, state, national, and international levels.

4) Are there ways in which you would like to see your department/program contribute to liberal education that so far it has not been able to?

Pressure on enrollments and hiring have pulled us out of FYS. We need to be more fully engaged.

We’d like to teach more POLS 111 so that we can ensure that all students understand their obligation to contribute to the civic life of their communities and their world.