POLITICAL SCIENCE’S REPLY TO THE TASK FORCE ON GRADUATE EDUCATION

The Task Force ranked Political Science as Good. Three major concerns, as expressed in the Task Force’s rationale, seem to have precluded our expected rank of Very Good: the PhD completion rate, the placement record for PhDs, and funding. We address these and then offer a summary statement on our overall rank.

PhD Completion Rate The Task Force cites a very low PhD completion rate of 30%. However, this value is taken from the 1996-2000 entering classes. In effect, it is at least one decade removed from where the program is today. The composition of the faculty, the program itself, and the student body have all changed substantially. As our narrative pointed out, looking at the much more current 2001-2005 window (data provided by the Graduate College), which includes many students now just in their 5th year, results in a much higher rate. At the time we submitted our self-assessment, we reported the PhD completion rate for this group at 31%, with a strong expectation that it would top 50%. The accuracy of our forecasting much higher rates for a more contemporary time period is evident in the following developments between our report submission in September 2009 and now (January 2010):

- 2 additional students (Hansen and Jeong) defended their dissertations, bringing our 2001-2005 PhD completion rate to 33%
- 3 additional students (Bowen, Day, and Licht) are all but finished with their dissertations and have secured tenure-track jobs beginning in the fall of 2010, which will further increase our 2001-2005 PhD completion rate to 40%
- 1 additional 4th year student (Knoll) is all but finished with his dissertation and has secured a tenure-track job for fall 2010

The expectation that 50% of the 2001-2005 cohort will receive the PhD will be met if just 5 additional students complete the degree. Based on reports from dissertation advisors, we are virtually certain this projection is easily attainable by the end of 2011. This increase is notable in size and brings us above the average for the Social Sciences/Business category (43%).

PhD Placements The Task Force’s rating rubric states that “few go on to peer institutions.” Here, we point to other indicators of placement success and provide evidence of peer institution placements.

A good measure of placement for both students pursuing jobs at teaching colleges and those seeking appointments at research-oriented institutions is the percent of PhDs placed in tenure-track lines. Our initial and current tenured or tenure-track placements for the 2003-2008 period are both at 67%, more than twice the University-wide rates of 26% (initial) and 32% (current). 67% is also well above the Social Science averages of 42% (initial) and 56% (current); in fact, we rank 2nd on both initial and current T/TT placements in this comparison group. Another measure, placement in College/University Teaching yields very similar results: Political Science’s rates for both initial and current placements are well above the University and Social Sciences means.

The Task Force’s statement that “few go on to peer institutions” is incorrect, and we do not know how the Task Force members themselves interpreted this, or why they considered the institutions listed in our narrative’s discussion of recent placements as unimpressive. For the 21 students in the August 2003-May 2008 placement data, 5 (just under 24%) got TT jobs at RU/VH (“R1”) institutions: U of Florida, 2 at U of Kansas, 2 at U of Kentucky, while 2 (9.5%) got TT jobs at RU/H (“R2”) institutions: San Diego State & Ole Miss. Therefore, Political Science is placing 33.3% of its PhDs in the top two tiers of research institutions (as rated by Carnegie Mellon). In other words, our RU placement rate is higher than the University-wide T/TT placement rate.

As emphasized in our original report, looking at bigger-picture indicators strongly suggests that our program has a national and international reputation for producing top-notch students. For instance: our PhDs were ranked 3rd among graduates of all programs in terms of the number of publications per capita in 5 of the discipline’s leading journals (McCormick and Rice 2001). Also, we have PhDs who have used their excellent training to move up the ranks to join the faculty at prestigious institutions (Stanford, UCSD, UCLA, U of Illinois, Ohio State, Penn State, TAMU, and Washington University at St. Louis). Some of our fine PhDs have obtained jobs at exemplary international universities (e.g., Exeter, Seoul National), prominent military academies (e.g., VMI), or excellent private or government positions (e.g., 2 analysts at the CIA), which we also consider highly successful outcomes.

Funding We agree with the Task Force’s assessment that our internal funding is fragile and are concerned that without maintained (if not augmented) support from the Graduate College and the CLAS, our program may fall from its current national prominence.

Our initial report did not detail external funding. Here is a list of external funding secured by current and recent students:

- NSF Dissertation Improvement Grant ($11,791), E. Hally, 2006-2007
- NSF Diversity Fellowship, A. Licht, 2009
- European Consortium for Political Research’s Graduate Mobility Funding, Z. Greene, 2009
- ACOR-CAORC Dissertation Research Grant, G. Buttorff, 2009
- NSF Scholarship to the EITM Workshop, J. Rydberg, 2008
- Fulbright, H.S. Park, 2006-2009
- Southern Political Science Association’s Prestage-Cook Award, J. Rydberg, 2010
- Best Graduate Student Poster, State Politics & Policy Annual Meeting, J. Rydberg, 2009
- Henry Institute travel grant, B. Knoll, 2009

Overall Rank The rating rubric states that High Quality programs “rate very well in most areas,” and we firmly believe, based on the information provided here and in our original report, that Political Science meets this criterion. Moreover, we are confident that our program enhances the University’s national reputation.