TO:       Beth Dobkin, Provost
FROM:  Steve Cortright, Chair
        Academic Senate
DATE:   March 7, 2011
RE:      Senate Action S-10/11-16CA
         Changes to the Politics Department
         Major and Minor

At the March 3, 2011 meeting of the Academic Senate, the attached proposal to revise the Politics Department Major and Minor was approved on the Senate’s consent agenda. The issue was forwarded to the Senate from the Undergraduate Educational Policies Committee (UEPC) where it was approved unanimously. This action was assigned Senate Action # S-10/11-16CA.

Attachment

cc:  Brother Ronald Gallagher, President
     Dean Steve Woolpert
REQUEST TO THE UEPC

Date: December 8, 2010

Re: CHANGES IN POLITICS MAJOR AND MINOR

From: Mindy Thomas, J.D., Chair, Department of Politics,
On behalf of: Dr. Hisham Ahmed, Dr. Ron Ahnen, Dr. David Alvarez, Dr. Patrizia Longo, Dr. Steve Sloane, and Dr. Suzi Weissman.

PROPOSED CHANGES IN OUR MAJOR:

1. General Description of the Politics Major:
   Our major is designed to provide a systematic understanding of political power, political processes, and political institutions both in the United States and in the world at large. Politics majors gain insight into public affairs, improve their conceptual, analytical, critical and communication skills, and explore normative questions concerning the relation of individuals to governments and governments to each other.

2. Departmental Learning Goals:
   - Acquire knowledge of, and understand the dynamics involved in, American Democracy and its political events and issues.
   - Acquire knowledge of, and understand the dynamics involved in, local, national, and international political events and issues.
   - Effectively analyze political issues, events, institutions and structures.
   - Acquire information literacy as it relates to the field of political science.
   - Develop a sense of personal civic engagement.

2. Current Structure of the Major:

   Majors take the following four, lower division, foundational courses:
   - Pol. 01 Introduction to Comparative Politics
   - Pol. 02 Introduction to American Government
   - Pol. 03 Introduction to Political Thought
   - Pol. 04 Introduction to Political Economy

   Based on these lower division requirements, majors then proceed to take a total of nine, upper division elective courses: one each is required from the four substantive areas for upper division courses, and five more of the student’s choice selected from any of the four substantive areas. The four substantive areas for all upper division courses are: American Politics, Comparative Politics, Political Theory, and International Politics.
3. **Proposed Structure of the Major:** (*the proposed change is in italics*)

Majors will take the following four, lower division, foundational courses:

- Pol. 01 Introduction to Comparative Politics
- Pol. 02 Introduction to American Government
- Pol. 03 Introduction to Political Thought
- Pol. 04 *Introduction to International Relations*

4. **Rationale for Changing Pol. 04 from “Introduction to Political Economy” to Pol. 04 “Introduction to International Relations.”**

   A. In response to changing views of the field, our own discussions around our program review (December, 2010) and discussions with our external reviewer, Professor Brian Weiner (University of San Francisco, Department of Politics) we have reviewed our curriculum and the needs of our students. The ten schools to which we have fruitfully compared our program, for many years now, no longer require political economy as a lower division requirement. Six of those schools offer, but do not require, political economy as a separate, upper division course. This reflects the view that political economy, which is a sub-field of international relations, is better treated at the undergraduate level within the context of international relations. We have come to believe that view is sound and it reflects current best practices. Accordingly, we propose to substitute a foundational course in international relations for the current course in political economy.

   B. Continuation of the study of political economy will take place in the Introduction to International Relations course. In other words, we do not intend to eliminate political economy from our major. Placing lower division political economy within the broader context of a lower division foundational course on international relations, will require some redesign of the overall coverage of the political economy curriculum. Foundational elements of political economy will now be included in Pol. 04 and more advanced elements of it will be included in upper division political economy electives, of which we normally offer two per year. Consistent with best practices at comparable academic institutions, this distribution of political economy will give each student appropriate grounding in the subject at the lower division level and will allow for broader, fuller coverage of international relations at the lower division level.

   C. This exchange of a lower division political economy course for a lower division international relations course that includes political economy makes our lower and upper division curriculum more coherent because each general subject matter foundational course will lead specifically into its related general subject matter area of the upper division major concentrations. In other words, the introductory, lower division courses in comparative politics, American government, political thought, and international relations will now lead directly into upper division
comparative politics, American politics, political theory, and international politics.

D. This exchange of a lower division political economy course for a lower division international relations course is more consistent with our program learning goals and our ability to track outcomes related to those goals in individual courses. If one thinks of our first two departmental learning goals at a general, “macro” level they require the student to master American political science institutions and issues, and then, next, to master local, national, and international political science institutions and issues. Thus, having a separate foundational course in “political economy,” (again, a subfield of international relations) is not as direct a correlation with our learning goals as having a separate course in international relations that includes the subfield of political economy.

E. Students who want to focus more on political economy can still do so at the upper division, elective level.

5. Conclusion

We are requesting only one change to our current major: to change one of our four, lower division requirements from political economy to international relations. Four lower division foundational courses would still be required for the major as is currently the case. The proposed change would eliminate political economy as a “free-standing,” lower division requirement, place the subject matter of political economy within the context of a broader, lower division international relations course, and create this lower division, international relations course as a more coherent part of the student’s progress from lower to upper division courses in the curriculum. No other changes to the major are requested.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO OUR MINOR

1. Current Structure of the Minor:

Minors must complete the following courses, for a total of seven (7) courses:

- Three out of the four lower division, foundational courses: Pol. 01, Pol. 02, Pol. 03., or Pol. 04.
- One course each from the four, upper division subject areas for the major: American Politics, Comparative Politics, Political Theory, and International Relations

2. Proposed Structure of the Minor: (the proposed changes are in italics)

Minors must complete the following courses, for a total of six (6) courses:

- Any two out of the four lower division, foundational courses: Pol. 01, Pol. 02, Pol. 03, or Pol. 04.
• One course each from the four, upper division subject areas for the major: American Politics, Comparative Politics, Political Theory, and International Relations

3. **Rationale for Proposed Changes to the Minor:**

A. The Department seeks to bring the number of courses required for its minor more within College norms. (See, e.g., English and Communication, which require 6 courses for a minor). The Politics minor will still remain on the high side of courses required for a minor (see, e.g., Sociology which requires 2 courses; Theology and Religious Studies which requires 5 courses; History which requires 4 courses).

B. Reducing the minor requirements by one course will make the minor more available while allowing students to fulfill other graduation requirements, including the learning goals and outcomes related to the new core curriculum.

C. The change in allowing students a choice of two, rather than three, of the lower division foundational courses will better accommodate student needs. The reality is that most students who minor in Politics want greater ability to shape, or individualize, the minor to complement their particular interests or chosen major field.

4. **Conclusion:**

The proposed changes will allow more students to combine a Politics minor with another major by requiring 6, rather than 7, courses to complete the minor. Thus, more students will not only be able to choose the Politics minor but, more students will be able to support a selected substantive dimension to their major. The changes will also allow the student who chooses a minor in Politics more room to individually shape the minor to his or her particular needs and/or personal interests (such as law school or other graduate studies) irrespective of major area of study.

**Please note:** Any course listed in the Department with a prerequisite continues to assume a grade of C- or better in the prerequisite course. There is no change to this requirement.