Department of Political Science  
MIU Phase III Proposal  
Research Skills Initiative  
October 28, 2010

Summary/Abstract

The Department of Political Science proposes a Research Skills Initiative. The Initiative represents a fundamental curricular reform, designed to increase the practical skills of our undergraduate majors, as well as to provide "hands on" opportunities to apply these skills. When implemented, these reforms will have a transformative effect on the largest undergraduate major at UW-Madison. The Research Skills Initiative has four main components. First, all majors will be required to take a new research methods course, designed to teach practical skills in political inquiry. Second, the Department will offer new intermediate courses in research methods, such as Comparative Analysis in Political Science, Formal Methods of Political Analysis, and Philosophy of Political Inquiry. Third, the Department will develop a new quantitative option for majors who wish to specialize in quantitative analysis. And fourth, the Department will introduce Research in Practice seminars that will apply these research skills in small class settings and with close faculty interaction. Across all these components, we will emphasize and develop students’ ability to communicate research and analysis effectively. To pursue these reforms, we request MIU support in the form of five new faculty positions and six new teaching assistant positions.

Introduction and Benefits

The Department of Political Science is planning a significant reform of its undergraduate curriculum and is requesting funding from the MIU to staff the changes. At the core of these reforms is a Research Skills Initiative. This Initiative will provide numerous benefits to our undergraduate majors, as well as to the large number of students outside of our major who regularly take political science courses. These benefits include:

1. An improved understanding of how research and political inquiry are conducted. This understanding will enable students at this flagship research institution to better comprehend, critically analyze, and engage in such research, and enhance students' skills in communicating the results of their research efforts.

2. The development of a set of fundamental analytical skills that will be valuable for a range of careers. These careers include not only politics and law, but also positions in government, public policy, public health, marketing, communications, nonprofit organizations, education, finance, and other professions where training in social science research methods is increasingly essential.

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3. **Strong preparation for further study.** The Research Skills Initiative will enhance students' experiences in substantive, upper level political science classes. By taking research methods courses from the ground up in the major, our students will gain more from their intermediate and upper-level classes and from their major, and faculty will be able to assign research activities with greater confidence that students have sufficient background in and exposure to appropriate analytical skills.

4. **Enhanced citizenship skills.** Critical reasoning abilities, analytic skills, and a sophisticated understanding of research results are increasingly essential for effective participation in democracy in the United States and around the world. Learning about methods of political science research will enhance students’ skills as citizens, providing lifelong benefits by improving their ability to critically assess and evaluate the ways in which information is produced and presented and the strengths and weaknesses of political arguments.

The Department faculty unanimously and enthusiastically endorses this Initiative. On several occasions in the past, faculty have discussed the need for a greater research and analysis focus in the major, and a recent external review called on the Department to provide greater instruction in quantitative analysis. Thus, the Research Skills Initiative builds on years of discussion about ways to remake instruction in political science. However, in past years the Department lacked sufficient faculty and TA staffing opportunities to make these necessary reforms. Now, with MIU support, the Department would be able to introduce a fundamental curricular reform that, if funded, would have a transformative impact for our undergraduate students. In past departmental surveys of majors and degree recipients, students have said that they wished they had more opportunities to conduct research using appropriate analytical techniques. The Research Skills Initiative squarely addresses this student interest, and it embraces the University’s interest in essential learning outcomes by fostering the acquisition of intellectual, analytical, and practical skills.

**The Need for MIU Support**

MIU funding for Political Science’s *Research Skills Initiative* will benefit thousands of current and future UW-Madison undergraduate students. As we detail below, Political Science faculty teach more undergraduate credit hours than any other department in L&S, and Political Science is the largest major on campus. The Department has a tradition of high quality teaching and of having faculty teach the vast majority of credit hours, including in our introductory level courses. Our track record of teaching undergraduate students is outstanding. Eleven of our current faculty—nearly one-third of the faculty—have won a campus-wide Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching Award. Our undergraduate courses average a 4.5 rating by students, on a five-point scale. As this record shows, the Department is deeply committed to undergraduate education and to excellence in instruction. Below, we present University and other data to graphically represent our service to undergraduate students and to document recent trends.

Figure 1 shows the average number of undergraduate credits taught per faculty FTE over the past six years for several of the largest departments in L&S (this graph was created by our colleagues in the Department of Mathematics). For each department the height of the bar stacks this number
over several years' worth of instruction, showing the average number of credits per faculty in these departments over six years. Political Science far exceeds the credit levels seen in other departments, with a total of near 1000 undergraduate credits per faculty FTE for each of the six years, totaling about 6000 over that period.

Figure 1: Undergraduate Credit Hours

As shown below in Figure 2, Political Science also has the largest number of majors on campus. According to University data, the Department has conferred more degrees on average than any other department on campus. Between 2000 and 2009, the 10-year average for Political Science is 480 degrees conferred per year. Between 2004 and 2009, Political Science's five-year average was even greater at 558 degrees conferred per year. In contrast, the next largest major on campus was History with a 10-year average of 336 and a five-year average of 359 degrees conferred. Political Science accounted for more than 9 percent of undergraduate degree recipients from the College of Letters and Science, more than any other department.

Without belaboring the point, there are other ways to indicate that Political Science serves a large number of students with relatively few faculty for a department with this level of student interest:

- As of 2008, the Department averaged 29.2 majors per faculty FTE, higher than any other department on campus. A decade ago, majors per FTE ranged between 13 and 17, depending on the year. Over the past few years it has ranged from about 26 to 30.

- While our number of majors was growing, the drop in FTE between the beginning of the 2000s (average of 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03) and 2009-10, was larger in Political Science than in other high enrollment social science majors including Psychology, Economics, and Journalism.
Using the “credits follow the instructor” method from the Office of Academic Planning and Analysis, which recognizes that faculty in some departments do extensive teaching for other units, Political Science again tops the list, with a higher number of credits taught by faculty FTE than other high demand departments such as History, Chemistry, Economics, Communication Arts, Psychology, and Spanish. Across the past five years, credits per faculty FTE in Political Science under this method is effectively two-thirds more than in the next two ranked departments. For other departments with significant credits taught, it is effectively double, or more.

Compared to other leading top 15 political science departments at public institutions, as ranked in the 2009 US News and World Report reputational analysis, UW-Madison lags behind every one in faculty FTE. This shortfall does not appear to be due to a higher number of majors or course enrollments at these institutions. For example, Michigan, our CIC/Big Ten neighbors to the east, had about 6 more FTE than UW-Madison in 2009-10, but had over 100 fewer students graduate with Political Science degrees.

Figure 2: 2004-2009 Annual Average of Degrees Conferred by Department

Student demand for political science courses comes not only from majors but non-majors as well, especially students involved in inter-disciplinary majors such as Gender and Women’s Studies; Legal Studies; International Studies; Jewish Studies; Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies; East Asian Studies; Southeast Asian Studies; and African Studies. At the introductory level we serve students from every college and major on campus. The Department
has a long and strong tradition of interdisciplinary instruction and a tradition of a globalized, international curriculum. Many of our faculty members teach in other departments, many of our courses are part of the requirements for various interdisciplinary programs, studies, and certificates, and other majors require some of our courses as part of their major requirements.

We take great pride in being such a large major and that students have great satisfaction with the instruction we provide. We also take great pride that faculty do so much of our teaching at all levels of instruction, accounting for the vast majority of our undergraduate credits. Our faculty are in the classroom and teaching large numbers of students. These successes, however, come at a price: they make it impossible to implement needed improvements in our curriculum that would benefit our students as well as nonmajors who take our courses. By providing us with new faculty hires and teaching assistants, the MIU would provide an opportunity to make this vision of a transformed and improved major a reality.

Proposed Changes

The Research Skills Initiative includes a series of interrelated curricular reforms. Together, these reforms will transform the political science major at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels.

*Introductory level*: The Department will add to its curriculum a new 200 level course titled Methods of Political Inquiry. This course will be required for all political science majors. Students will consider issues fundamental to all rigorous political inquiry, including questions of research design, inductive and deductive reasoning, and the nature of causal inference. They will be exposed to the basic techniques of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Finally, the course will cover a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches, including, for example, game theory, survey research, experimental work, case studies, and focus groups. Throughout, students will engage with real examples of political science research, so that they might see the approaches and methods they are studying put into practice.

Exposing students early in their political science coursework both to basic issues of scholarly research and to a range of methods and approaches will, in turn, better prepare them for upper level courses. Requiring majors to take Methods of Political Inquiry will significantly enrich our existing substantive courses in all four subfields of the discipline. Faculty teaching our existing courses in the four major subfields of American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, and Political Theory will be able to assign more sophisticated and challenging material with the expectation that students will be able to comprehend the methods employed. Students will also be better able to design, pursue, and communicate their own research projects as part of course requirements.

*Intermediate level*: The Department will offer a new set of intermediate level courses in the nature and methodology of political inquiry. These courses will be designed for students who wish further to explore epistemological and methodological issues in political inquiry. The courses will be particularly valuable for students looking toward careers—academic or non-academic—that demand more advanced research and analytical skills, and these students will be advised and strongly encouraged to take one or more of these courses. To begin, intermediate-
level courses in political inquiry will include Philosophy of Political Inquiry, Comparative Analysis in Political Science, and Formal Methods in Political Analysis, and we will add others in future years.

The Department will offer additional intermediate level courses as part of a new quantitative option in the political science major. This option will be directed towards those students who wish to develop specific expertise in quantitative analysis. Such expertise is increasingly important for a variety of career paths in both the public and private sectors. To fulfill the quantitative option, students will take a series of introductory and intermediate level courses in statistical analysis. These classes will include a new Introduction to Statistical Methods for Political Science and a new intermediate course on Advanced Application of Statistical Methods, in addition to our existing courses: Understanding Political Numbers (PS 218, interpreting numerical evidence about politics), Strategy and Choice (PS 274), Survey Research (PS 544), and Multivariate Statistical Methods for Political Inference (PS 551 and 552).

Advanced level: At the advanced undergraduate level, the Department will offer a new series of Research in Practice seminars. In these seminars, students will pursue independent research under the guidance of a faculty member. Research in Practice seminars will thus offer students the opportunity further to pursue their substantive interests while putting into practice the skills they have learned in Methods of Political Inquiry and other courses. At least one seminar will be offered in each of the four subfields of the discipline each term, with enrollment capped at 20 students per seminar. Each seminar will be focus upon a particular thematic research interest. Possible topics include Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict; The Politics of Globalization; Gender and Security; Comparative Electoral System; Democracy in Developing Countries; Human Rights; Race and Politics in the United States; Campaign Finance; The Presidency and Public Opinion; Problems in American Public Policy; Interest Groups and Lobbying; Political and Electoral Reform; Democracy in Theory and Practice; and Social Justice. Topics will vary from semester to semester and from one faculty member to another. The Department will also seek to establish research arrangements with organizations in the Madison area that will allow us to establish research internships at these organizations, under the guidance of a professor teaching a Research in Practice seminar. Each seminar will require students to complete the equivalent of an article length research paper (which might be one paper or several shorter papers, depending on the seminar) that draws upon and further develops their skills in rigorous political inquiry. Emphasis will be placed not only on students' ability to conduct the research, but their ability to present their research and analysis effectively both orally and in writing.

Addressing MIU Priorities

The Research Skills Initiative speaks to several of the most important MIU priorities.

Instructional quality and innovation

The Research Skills Initiative will substantially improve instructional quality and instructional innovation. Stronger training in research methodology will allow the major to become more rigorous. With a new emphasis on research methodology in the major, students will benefit from advanced courses that focus not only on the substance and theory of political questions and
issues, but also on empirics and the systematic collection, analysis, and communication of data. These skills are essential for reading and understanding advanced political science scholarship, as well as scholarship in other social science disciplines, and they are critical career-related skills. The new focus on research methodology will empower students to conduct their own research and analyze the research of others. Students will learn not only to consume knowledge, but the importance of producing knowledge as an academic, life, and career skill.

Undergraduate access

The proposal addresses another major MIU priority: improving undergraduate access. In the Department of Political Science, faculty members teach the large introductory classes; thus, the main problems of access are not at the large introductory level. The Department prides itself on putting its best scholars and teachers in the introductory classes, and in general the Department does not restrict enrollment to these large classes. The main problems of access and blockage come at the intermediate and advanced levels. Beyond the introductory level, political science majors look for more specific and focused intermediate and advanced classes, and these often fill up quickly. Some of the most popular classes generate waitlists that are twice as large as enrollment, even when the enrollment is in the hundreds. With the Research Skills Initiative funded through the MIU, the Department would have additional faculty to allow us to offer a new set of intermediate and advanced classes. In so doing, the Department would provide students with more opportunities to take such classes, and through the design of these courses, the Department would have students put into practice the research and analytical methods they have learned at the introductory level.

Expanding research and small course opportunities

Third, the proposal will expand undergraduate research opportunities and opportunities for capstone and other small courses—two other MIU priorities. The Research in Practice seminars are the functional equivalents of capstone seminars. Given the number of our majors, the Department cannot require that every student take a capstone seminar. Such a requirement would require a much larger number of faculty than we currently have or would have if this proposal is funded. However, through this Initiative, the Department will be able to offer a much larger number of small seminars than are currently available as well as a dedicated quantitative option for those students who want to specialize in quantitative analysis.

High impact practices

In addition to meeting the general goals of the MIU, the changes to our undergraduate program that would be made possible by MIU funding would allow the Department to expand significantly our high impact practices while improving others that are already in place. We envision a portfolio of high impact opportunities:

- **Comm B**: We will offer Comm B sections in the new Methods of Political Inquiry class and will structure some of the Research in Practice seminars to qualify for Comm B credit.
• *First Year Interest Groups*: We will offer Freshman Interest Group (FIG) sections as part of Methods of Political Inquiry class. The FIGs would be comprised of related classes in the social sciences, as well as at least one more substantively oriented class that would allow students to apply their analytical skills.

• *Writing intensive classes*: We will offer several and perhaps most of the Research in Practice seminars in a writing intensive format. Learning to communicate effectively the results of independent research, both through written and oral reports, will be an important part of the Research in Practice seminars.

• *Research internship seminar*: We also plan to develop some of the Research in Practice seminars as research-based internship seminar. In these seminars, students will be paired with businesses, state agencies, interest groups, or state legislators who are looking for interns capable of doing independent research on assigned topics. Fortunately, the Department has a very large alumni base in the Madison area that opens the doors to us in establishing these internship relationships with these organizations.

• *Peer mentoring*: We will offer volunteer opportunities for peer mentoring by having students from previous offerings of the Research in Practice seminars consult with and advise students currently taking the course.

Overall, we are committing to a combination of five high-impact experiences annually, one per each of our new faculty hires. In any given year, these will include some combination of FIGs and Comm B sections connected to Methods of Political Inquiry, writing intensive and Comm B versions of the Research in Practice seminars, and a research internship version of the Research in Practice seminar.

**Diversity in Hiring**

An important MIU priority is to promote diversity in hiring. To ensure a diverse applicant pool, we would employ techniques we have used in previous searches. These include:

• Faculty attendance at and sharing of information from the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) workshops.

• Posting our job listings with the listserves or websites of the American Political Science Association Asian Pacific American Caucus; APSA Latino Caucus in Political Science; APSA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Political Science Caucus; Midwest Political Science Association Women’s Caucus for Political Science; and National Conference of Black Political Scientists.

• Writing to every political science student listed in the Minority and Women Doctoral Directory; this directory includes students at a range of Ph.D. institutions.

• Contacting recent participants of the American Political Science Association’s Minority Fellows Program.
• Using faculty networks to contact colleagues at other universities. In our most recent searches, this included, but was not limited to, contact with faculty at Princeton, Georgetown, McGill, Berkeley, Yale, Chicago, Ohio State, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, California-Riverside, Duke, and Michigan to identify candidates and encourage them to apply.

**Benchmarks and Accountability**

The following enhancements will be made to the Political Science undergraduate program with the support of the MIU. Some changes, such as new courses and revised requirements for the major, will require the approval of the College of Letters and Science Curriculum Committee. Progress in meeting the Department’s commitments will be presented in our annual MIU accountability report. We offer the following as our accountability commitments:

• Offer once per semester a new required introductory Methods of Political Inquiry class.

• Offer at least two new intermediate research methods classes annually, such as Philosophy of Political Inquiry, Comparative Analysis in Political Science, and Formal Methods in Political Analysis.

• Offer at least two intermediate level classes for students taking the quantitative option in the major.

• Offer at least four Research in Practice seminars per semester, including a research internship version and peer mentoring opportunities.

• Offer five high impact experiences per academic year, including a combination of Comm B sections and FIGs in Methods of Political Inquiry; writing intensive versions of the Research in Practice seminar; and research internship versions of the Research in Practice seminar.

• The Undergraduate Program Committee will monitor course evaluations from the new research-focused classes and seminars to determine which mid-course corrections may be necessary.

• The Undergraduate Program Committee will review a random, anonymous sample of papers and other writing annually from the Research in Practice seminars to gauge the effectiveness of our research skills instruction.

**Budget Narrative**

*The faculty portion of our MIU request is for five new positions.* To offer Methods of Political Inquiry every semester, we will need three active instructors in a rotation. This arrangement allows us to cover the course when one of the three faculty members is on leave. We request a
fourth faculty line to allow us to introduce new intermediate level methods and analysis courses, courses, in particular Comparative Analysis in Political Science and Philosophy of Political Inquiry. The fifth requested position is necessary for us to offer the new courses necessary to create a quantitative option in the major for students who wish to deepen their study, application, and communication of statistical analysis in political science inquiry. We expect all faculty, including our current faculty and the five requested new faculty, to teach the Research in Practice seminars.

*We request six TA positions funded at 50% to lead discussion sections of Methods of Political Inquiry.* Because this course will involve difficult material and require hands-on teaching of skills, we propose to limit the number of students per section to 15. We would offer 12 sections per semester of the course, enrolling 180 students per semester and 360 students per year.

**Budget Detail**

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<td><strong>Five faculty, Assistant Professors</strong></td>
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<td>• Salary</td>
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*AAUDE peer salary, Political Science new hires, 2009-10 report. This figure is consistent with recent hires in the UW-Madison Political Science Department.*
MEMORANDUM

December 1, 2010

To: Provost Paul DeLuca
From: Gary Sandefur, Dean
Re: MIU Round 3 proposals

We are pleased to submit proposals from the College of Letters and Science for MIU Round 3. We solicited two page pre-proposals and received over 40. We reviewed these pre-proposals in the Academic Planning Council and in Senior Staff. Based on these reviews, we invited 15 submissions of full proposals. These proposals were reviewed by Senior Staff and we decided to forward these 15 to you for consideration. All are worthy of funding and would help meet critical needs in the University.

The proposals are grouped into three tiers in order of their importance in meeting the goals of the MIU, with tier 1 being the most important. Importance is based somewhat on the quality of the proposals but primarily on undergraduate educational needs. We also took into account losses in faculty numbers prior to the MIU and the success or lack thereof of departments in previous rounds of the competition.

Tier 1: Communication Arts, English, French and Italian, School of Journalism and Mass Communications, Philosophy, Political Science

Tier 2: Anthropology, Chemistry, Math, Sociology, Statistics

Tier 3: Communicative Disorders, Religious Studies, Service Learning, Undergraduate Research Scholars

We did not carefully assess the budgets of the proposals since we assumed that this would be done by the office of the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance.

cc: Associate Vice Chancellor Aaron Brower
    Associate Dean Nancy Westphal-Johnson
    Academic Associate Deans
    Associate Dean Anne Guither
    Sheila Voss, Office of the Provost

Office of the Dean
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