

Political Science Graduate Student Council Town Hall Meeting

Minutes

Date: November 10, 2006

Professor Wawro preliminary comments:

- The department is currently working on three areas of reform:
 1. Comprehensive exams (see below)
 2. Special minors
 - The department is currently working to formalize the law minor
 - Changes have also been made to the math minor (see below)
 3. Dissertation proposal review process
 - The review process will no longer be scheduled for two fixed dates per year, but will be on a rolling basis
 - This should allow both faculty and students to have greater flexibility in their schedules
- All of these proposals must still be brought before the full department for approval (nothing has changed until this happens).

Comprehensive exams:

- Methods minor:
 - New regulations for the math minor stipulate that it must be completed by May 15 of the third year – this includes both the proposal and the oral defense (in addition to the completion of comprehensive exams in the major field).
 - The purpose of these regulations was to eliminate the problem of students finishing methods papers in the fifth and sixth years.
 - Professor Wawro said the requirements can generally be met after 4291 but that outside research is almost always necessary.
 - Paper proposals can be drafted with the help of advisers; however, after the approval process, the student may not receive help from advisers.
 - Several students expressed concern about the feasibility of completing a math minor if they started the coursework in the second year. Such students would then have a limited time (less than five months) following the completion of 4291 to finish the methods paper, which could prove insufficient to collect data and attain a satisfactory degree of sophistication.
 - However, there are questions of equity because students taking exams in the four main subfields also have a limited time in which they must pass their exams.
- Professor Wawro said that there could be grandfathering with regards to the new regulations, specifically with regards to those who may not have sufficient time to

- complete the math minor before May 15 of the third year and who are currently in the first, second or third year of the program.
- Students suggested the department consider a date in August (just before the start of the 4th year, or December of the 4th year for the second oral exam for those students affected).
 - Several students also proposed having a variable due date based on the time of completion of the statistics coursework.
 - The question of grandfathering will be brought before the department
 - Students taking traditional exams must take both the major and minor simultaneously.
 - An exception is made for students who take the major early (at the beginning of the second year), who may choose to take the exam in the minor field at the beginning of the third year.
 - Those students who take exams early are evaluated for promotion to candidacy after the examination in the minor field.

TA assignments:

- Concerns were expressed about students who are repeatedly given TA appointments that are neither in their major nor their minor fields.
- Professor Wawro noted that there is a significant TA shortage this year, particularly in American politics.
 - Some students receive outside funding and then do not have to teach; others receive RA positions, exacerbating the TA shortage.
 - To deal with the shortage, there is a proposal to let MAO students teach in their second semester (to be reviewed by GSAS).
- Caroline Cardarople drafts the preliminary assignments, which are then reviewed by Professor Wawro.
- Professor Wawro said there is an attempt to make sure that unwanted assignments do not occur routinely.
 - Most students get their first request.
 - Students were encouraged to raise the issue with Professor Wawro and Caroline Cardarople should the problem persist.
 - It was suggested that students wishing to increase their chances of TAing a course of their choice should contact individual professors about appointments for specific courses; and indicate on the form which course they wish to TA and why.
- It is not unusual to be asked to TA two sections, however ideally TAs will not have more than thirty students.
 - Ultimate discretion is with the individual professor.

Course offerings:

- Comparative Politics: there are some problems related to course offerings in the Comparative Politics subfield. Specifically, in the fall 2006 semester, no comparative course was offered that took a thematic rather than a regio-based

approach. Moreover, of the few courses offered, those by Professors Murillo and Berman overlapped. As a result of the lack of offerings, some students chose to take courses at other universities. Students expressed concerns that they would not be prepared for the comprehensive exams if the department did not offer enough courses.

- Professor Wawro acknowledged that conflicting courses (both in terms of schedule and topics covered) were a problem in other subfields as well. In the case of the Berman and Murillo courses this year such conflicts were hard to prevent because Professor Berman's course was not listed through the Columbia political science department, and the conflict was not noticed early enough.
- Professor Wawro said there is difficulty in balancing area studies and thematic courses, especially given Columbia's historically strong area-studies program. Moreover, some fields, including Comparative, faced a faculty shortfall last year.
- Professor Wawro said that in the future the department will share the grid of classes with the PSGSC so that it can evaluate it for potential conflicts.

Other issues:

- Econ minor:
 - Concerns were expressed about the difficulty of getting approval for the minor from the Economics department.
 - However, every student who has done the minor has completed it.
 - Professor Wawro said that if the Economics department is not willing to let students into classes (specifically without passing the math exam), there is little the Political Science department can do.
- Administration: it is important for graduate students, and the PSGSC in particular, to be in touch with the department staff about any problems, specifically Kay Achar and Caroline Cardarople
 - Kay Achar specifically addressed the importance of this and is extremely willing to work with us and with graduate students (for instance about TA assignments).
 - Students expressed confusion over not knowing whom among the staff they should talk to when administrative problems arose. The PSGSC will circulate an organizational chart so that students can be better informed.
- Faculty hires:
 - There were 10 new faculty hires last year but this is now slowing down.
 - The department has the authorization to add three new people but search in several subfields (American politics, international political economy, international relations, comparative politics (East Asia), minority politics). There is currently an open search in Comparative Politics, as well as a targeted search in East Asian politics.
 - Choices will be based on the most exciting candidate.
 - The department is currently facing several retirements.

- Students asked if it was possible to participate in the faculty hiring process in a more substantive way. At present, students can go to lunch with job talk candidates, but their opinions of the candidates are requested inconsistently. Students expressed that playing a more institutionalized role in the process would encourage student participation in the process and could be a valuable learning experience for students. At present, students should contact Caroline Cardarople with their opinions about specific job candidates.

Points of Action for the PSGSC:

- Distribute meeting minutes to students and Professors Wawro and Huber;
- Follow up on department decision regarding May 15 deadline for methods minor and other comps reforms;
- Facilitate provision of staff organization chart/responsibilities to grad students;
- Obtain class schedule for coming semesters and provide feedback on time overlaps;
- Follow-up with faculty on greater participation in faculty hiring process.