Response to GFEC requests regarding program after 10 year review:

We appreciate the GFEC’s recognition of the strength of our graduate program, including selectiveness of admissions, quality advising, connection between program requirements and learning outcomes, professional development programming, attraction of endowment funding, and high retention rates.

The GEFC had four recommendations for the program:
1. Develop a plan to improve climate in the program including soliciting regular feedback from graduate students.
2. Explore strengthening the Methods sequence in the program.
3. Explore use of peer mentoring to help graduate students.
4. Encourage use of Individual Development Plans for career and professional development preparation among graduate students.

This memo addresses how the department is approaching implementing the GFEC’s recommendations on each of these fronts.

1. **Develop a plan to improve climate in the program including soliciting regular feedback from graduate students.**

We have already undertaken a number of initiatives intended to improve climate in the program, including soliciting regular feedback from graduate students. These include:
- Led by the department’s DE&I committee, we implemented a graduate student climate conversation kit and feedback form which encouraged graduate students to continue their conversations about climate among themselves and inform us of their concerns. Graduate students are now able to voice their concerns through this form (accessible at the bottom of the D&E page on the grad student tab on polisci.wisc.edu). We will be reminding students of this opportunity each semester.
- The Director of Graduate Studies has initiated a schedule (begun before the review) of once-a-semester open town halls. These provide an opportunity for graduate students to provide feedback to the department on a regular basis on all issues that touch the graduate program and graduate student life, including climate. In addition to the face-to-face meetings, these town halls include a document in which students can anonymously post any issues in advance of the meeting.
- The Graduate program continues to support the “Women in Political Science group” in order to provide support and networking opportunities to anyone who identifies as female in our department. As we reach a critical mass of underrepresented students and faculty we hope to create a similar group as well. In the meantime, we are connecting these students with networks outside the department (in the university and in the wider discipline) that can provide similar support and networking opportunities.
- The graduate program will continue to work actively in its targeted outreach to recruit under-represented minorities. These efforts include personal conversations and communications with students in various pipe-line programs and name exchanges, covering
of application fees for those students, and fully funding their visits to campus as part of the recruitment effort.

- The political science department has also implemented a number of efforts to diversify the various speaker series in our department. These speaker series are a key part of graduate student intellectual life in the department and, we hope, taking intentional steps to diversify the presenters in those venues will improve the climate in the department by demonstrating our support for minority scholars and their research.

- The biggest impact we can have on climate in the program is to diversify the faculty through hiring. Our hope is that campus will allow us to do so. In the meantime, the department has funded a Pre-Doctoral Fellow position in Race, Ethnicity, and Politics and is actively building relationships with TOP-eligible candidates.

2. **Explore strengthening the Methods sequence in the program.**

We appreciate the recommendation to add additional methods requirements beyond the two we already require (812 and 817). However, we feel this is unnecessary for two reasons. First, our students are already getting the methods training they need to succeed in meeting our learning goals. Among the 46 current Ph.D. candidates (who have already completed taking classes), the median number of methods classes taken beyond the two required courses is 4 (the mean was 3.7, and the mode was 5). Even this understates the actual methods training that our students possess because many of those who took relatively few of our methods courses did so because they already had extensive methods training in other contexts (i.e., in Ag Econ, Math, etc.). In other words, most of our students already take between 18 and 21 credits of methods classes out of the 51 credits required for the Ph.D. Adding additional required classes would come at the expense of substantive and other training (e.g., language) requirements and likely increase our time to degree.

Second, political science remains a very diverse field. Perhaps most importantly in this context, the political theory subfield contains very little or no empirical, much less statistical, component. Adding a methods requirement for these students would add a significant burden with relatively little payoff in terms of their research or of their ability to achieve our learning goals.

At the same time, we will continue to explore ways of strengthening our methods training, including by updating the courses we offer to match methodological developments in the field.

3. **Explore use of peer mentoring to help graduate students.**

We have re-established the peer-mentorship in the program. Every summer, the DGS and Graduate Program Coordinator will issue a call to current students interested in being peer-mentors. All incoming students will be assigned one of these mentors who serves as a resource for them as they progress through the program. We have already implemented this process for the last two incoming classes.
4. **Encourage use of Individual Development Plans for career and professional development preparation among graduate students.**

The graduate program already encourages students to craft IDPs and provides a link for them to start the process on the Graduate program part of the department’s website.

As additional context, we attempted to require IDPs for our graduate students about 5 years ago. However, at the time the use of IDPs was not popular among our students. Many of them found the template too restrictive and natural-science oriented. Instead, we opted for a required advisor-advisee meeting once a semester, with a recommended template of topics for discussion that covers many of the kinds of things covered in an IDP (attached).

The Graduate Program Committee will reconsider the addition of a requirement for graduate students to create an individual development plan and use that as a resource in conversations with their advisor and committees.
Advisor-Advisee Meeting Guidelines

Each semester, each student in the program must meet in person or virtually with that student’s advisor. Prior to the meeting, the student should send the advisor a document that addresses the questions below. After the meeting, the advisor should send an email to the Graduate Program Coordinator indicating that the meeting has taken place. Ideally, the meetings will take place at the start of each semester. The questions to address are:

A. What are your main accomplishments from the past semester?

B. What are your main plans for the next semester?

C. What courses do you plan to take next semester (if appropriate)?

D. What plans do you have to complete course-related requirements (e.g. incompletes, minors, or courses needed to qualify in two fields) (if appropriate)?

E. What progress have you made towards developing your dissertation?

F. What professional development did you do last semester (e.g. attending workshops, meeting with visiting speakers, etc.)?

G. What are your plans for publishing papers or presenting at conferences (if appropriate)?

H. What are your plans for the summer?

I. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?