

AURORA UNIVERSITY

CSC ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW  
PREPARED BY DAVID A. LASH

JULY 1, 2021

Executive Summary

One page Executive Summary (written last)

Introduction

Aurora University periodically reviews its academic programs to confirm that they support its mission as “an inclusive community dedicated to the transformative power of learning…[that encourages] undergraduate and graduate students to discover what it takes to build meaningful and examined lives…[and that empowers them] to achieve lasting personal and professional success.” The University has established three goals of program review:

1. To evaluate program quality

2. To identify opportunities for program development

3. To reflect on a program’s growth and its place within the university community

It is within this context that this document reviews the state of the university’s undergraduate political science and public policy (hereafter PSC) program. Particular attention is paid to how curricular changes instituted during the 2017 – 2018 academic year affected the program’s historical structure and learning outcomes, its alignment with the university’s mission and objectives, and the quality of its course offerings. When appropriate, the information contained in this review is drawn verbatim from prior years’ assessment reports and plans. To further aid in the review process, the program is compared to similar programs offered at North Central College, St Xavier University, and St Francis University.

Procedures Performed

The following procedures were implemented to perform this evaluation:

1. Research into the evolution of the CSC program over the past decade.
2. Informal appraisal of program resources and structure, course offerings, and instructional quality via conversations with key stakeholders, including students, faculty, library representatives, and the Dean of the Dunham School of Business and Public Policy.
3. Assessment of Smart Evals and other student feedback periodically gathered by faculty.
4. Review of three prior assessment reports, as well as feedback provided by the university assessment committee.
5. Evaluation of enrollment trends provided by University Analytics.
6. Consideration of career outcome data compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
7. Comparison with similar programs offered at Elon University, Lewis University, and North Central College.

# Areas of Focus/Findings

# *The Program Review Materials File will be compiled and referenced to complete this section of the Academic Program Review Report. Essential components are listed in the Appendix of the Guidelines.*

1. Program Description

As described in the university catalog, the Aurora University Computer Science program include computer architecture, software engineering, database systems, algorithm design and analysis, multiple language study, and web development. *“*

The program is intended

“to provide students experience with current technologies in order to prepare them for the changing expectations of employers, or as strong preparation for graduate study in computer science. “

*Over the past 5 years the CSC program has had the following significant changes:*

1. Since the F2016, the Aurora University CSC program saw low enrollment with less thatn15 total students. 100% of the faculuty during that time have left Aurora University.
2. A new curriculum was introduced during 2016 that included a complete overall of the courses offering. Approximately 75% of the courses offered changed that include X Y and X
3. Several electives were added from 2016-2020 that included Mobile Development, Linux Administration, Programming Languages, Advanced Web Development and Computer Security.
4. During 2019 the Software Engineering program was launched with 2 additional courses that included Software Design and Software Quality and Testing. The Software Engineering course was realigned to better support Software Engineering studies. In addition the core programming language in CSC1700 was changed from Java to Python to better align the program with transfer students.
5. Also during 2019 a set of curriculum changes were completed that included: increased the course perquisites for CSC2200, increasing the perquisites for the Operating Systems and Network programming electives.
6. During the 2020-2021 year, several program enhacements have been proposed and adopted to ensure students are exposed to tools and techniques required in their field. These enhancements include: the requirement for students to
   1. master a web application development framework in CSC4350,
   2. Master and include a new technology in CSC4990 (Capstone) and complete a series of review exercises designed to prepare them for the professional world.
7. *Several problems with this new curricular structure emerged during the 2016 – 2017 academic year. First, the program did not have the faculty resources to offer a number of the courses that were included in the catalog. Second, too many courses were included in the catalog given the number of political science majors. This meant that even if faculty resources existed, some courses would not be offered except once every five or more years – if at all. Third, the requirements for the major exceeded 40 semester hours, which was a point of concern due to the then-ongoing curriculum consolidation. Fourth, the program was not properly structured to act as a viable pipeline of students into the MPA.*
8. *During the 2016 – 2017 academic year, the faculty committed to teaching applied political science and public policy. The purpose of doing so was to increase the program’s rigor and augment students’ marketable human capital. A substantially revised program launched in Fall 2017, replacing the existing curriculum. Ten entirely new courses form the core of the major. As described in the curriculum change form presented to the University Senate, “the restructured political science and public policy program is designed to teach undergraduates content area knowledge in public policy and government operations as well as a broad range of marketable skills, such as experience in public opinion polling, interest group advocacy, and political campaigns. Students who continue into the MPA program will augment this stock of human capital by completing courses in program evaluation, budgeting and financing, and public policy analysis, among others.” Majors are now required to complete a 4 semester hour internship that is designed to help them further develop their marketable capital.*
9. *As the department transitioned to the new political science and public policy program, it also “taught out” its previously existing political science program. A few of the courses existing in the old program continued to be offered as needed through AY 2019 – 2020.*
10. *Additional courses are expected to be added to the curriculum over the next academic year or two to support other university initiatives (e.g. the pre-law and environmental studies programs). An LSAT Prep course was piloted in Spring 2020, and based on student feedback and instructor impressions, this course will likely be added to the regular PSC course rotation. Environmental politics is scheduled to be piloted in Spring 2021.*

During the last 5 years the CSC majors has grown 46% with an average annual growth of 8.7%.

Table 1.

Number of CSC Majors at Beginning of Academic Year

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Academic Year* | *Number of Majors* | *Percent Change* |
| *Fall 2015* | *77* |  |
| *Fall 2016* | *91* | *18.2%* |
| *Fall 2017* | *109* | *19.8%* |
| *Fall 2018* | *106* | *-2.8%* |
| *Fall 2019* | *98* | *-7.5%* |
| *Fall 2020* | *113* | *15.3%* |

*Top number in each cell denotes combined first year and transfer enrollment. Numbers in parentheses indicate transfer enrollment.*

*Nearly all of these students were full time, with one part time student enrolling in Fall 2015 and two part time students enrolling in Fall 2017. Demographically, the PSC student profile reflects the diversity of the university student body. There are some evident trends. First, whereas males comprised the majority of program students in Fall 2015 (25 males compared to 14 females), females constituted the clear majority of students by Fall 2018. In Fall 2019, 21 females majored in PSC versus 15 males. Second, between Fall 2015 and Fall 2019, traditionally-aged college students comprised the majority of majors. Third, whereas approximately 59% of majors identified themselves as white in Fall 2015, only 30.5% did so in Fall 2019. Hispanics comprised about 18% of PSC majors in Fall 2015. In Fall 2019, 50% of the majors were Hispanic. These changes reflect the university’s ongoing demographic shifts.*

1. *Alignment with University Mission, Strategic Goals, and Objectives*

*As noted in the Introduction, the University commits itself to encouraging students to “discover what it takes to build meaningful and examined lives.” In addition, the University works to “empower our students to achieve lasting personal and professional success.” The PSC program aligns itself with these missions and goals in a number of ways. First, program courses expose students to a diverse array of policy problems and issues that may directly impact their lives and the lives of those around them. A small sampling of the topics covered in PSC courses include wealth and income inequality, human trafficking and modern slavery, checks and balances, the imperial presidency and the erosion of the separation of powers, collective action problems and the tragedy of the commons, terrorism and national security policy, and principal-agent problems. Especially in introductory courses, students often remark that they are hearing about these issues and problems for first time. Second, through instructor lectures, whole class and small group discussions, the viewing of films, and experiential learning activities, PSC courses encourage students to ruminate on the significance of these issues, both personally and for the world around them. Students often express that they become more thoughtful and politically engaged through these activities. Third, to augment the larger student body’s civic awareness, the program occasionally hosts forums on contemporary events. Discussions on immigration policy, the 2020 Census, media bias, and women in leadership are among the topics covered over the past five years. Fourth, course assignments augment students’ marketable capital. In addition to developing their critical thinking and communication skills, students learn precinct analysis, survey research methods, and data analytics, for example. In addition, they learn how to prepare press briefings and how to design political and advocacy campaigns. Through these assignments, students gain valuable experience that translates to a range of policy careers. Fifth, the program includes tutorials in resume and cover letter writing, interviewing, and LinkedIn. In addition, the program occasionally host guest speakers. In Fall 2019, for example, the PSC program partnered with the Department of Social Work on a legislative forum. The purpose of these activities and events is to increase students’ job market prospects. Sixth, with respect to the University’s enrollment goals, the PSC program offers a pathway for students interested in pursuing graduate work in law, public administration, public policy, and political science. Program faculty actively recruit PSC students to the MPA Plus One. Since its inception in Summer 2018, six PSC majors have enrolled in the MPA Plus One program.*

1. Alignment with University Mission, Strategic Goals, and Objectives
2. Quality of instruction - What do the reports suggest about the quality of instruction and how the quality has changed over time? What do the reports suggest about actions that could be taken to improve instructional quality?
3. Quality of curriculum - What do the reports suggest about the quality of the curriculum and how the quality has changed over time? What do the reports suggest about actions that could be taken to improve quality of the curriculum?
4. Quality of co-curriculum - What do the reports suggest about the quality of the co-curriculum and how the quality has changed over time? What do the reports suggest about actions that could be taken to improve quality of co-curricular offerings?
5. Assess the evidence supporting extent to which Student Learning Outcomes have been achieved. Has achievement of Student Learning Outcomes changed over time? What do reports suggest about actions that could be taken to improve achievement of Student Learning Outcomes? Do the Student Learning Outcomes remain appropriate for preparation for the career or graduate education aspirations students might have?
6. Quality of program assessment - in what ways could the assessment of the program be improved?
7. How does the program compare on similar dimensions to peer institutions?
8. How does the program compare on similar dimensions to aspirant colleges and universities?
9. Review of what the evidence suggests with regard to development of the program currently in place. What is the demand for graduates and, similarly, are there patterns in student demand for additional or revised programming? Does the environment suggest opportunities for the program to develop additional majors/minors to prepare students to meet emerging needs? Additionally, does the environment suggest the need to modify or eliminate any of the current programmatic emphases?

*\*\*\*Additional questions pertaining to the program under review may be offered by the program chair, Jurisdictional Dean, Dean of Academic Administration, or Chief Academic Officer.*

Analysis

The analysis section can be structured as a SOAR (strengths, opportunities, actions, and results) analysis. Each section should refer to specific evidence from observations and reflections of the reviewers to support the conclusions drawn.

Recommendations and Strategy

The program will develop 2-4 strategic goals, supported by 3-5 tactical objectives each. The goals must include at least one addressing the short term (1-3 years) and one addressing the long term (3-5 years).

The goals should be based on evidence and analysis, for development of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment; student recruitment, development, and retention; recruitment and development of faculty and staff members; facilities; partnership with entities external to the university; potential development of new initiatives and programs; and enhancing alignment with programs at aspirant institutions.