

Department of Politics
Discipline-Specific Scholarship Guidelines
November 11, 2010

In the mid 1980s, the Department of Political Science at Whitman College changed its name to the Department of Politics. The new title more effectively captured the Department's belief that many strategies, including those conventionally deemed "scientific," are appropriate to the study of politics. Around the same time, the Department also overhauled its curriculum, retiring a traditional Political Science major structure built around four obligatory subfields and replacing it with a more flexible course of studies designed to encourage methodological pluralism, cross-field fertilization and interdisciplinary learning.

This history is central to how the Department views its educational mission. It is also central to how the Department understands the scholarly endeavors of its members. Accordingly, if there is one message about scholarship that the Department wishes candidates for tenure and promotion as well as their external reviewers to hear, it is this: Whitman Politics places a paramount value on freedom, flexibility, and the challenging of boundaries.

This value shapes our expectations about the arc of Department members' scholarly careers: Department members are encouraged to develop new areas of expertise, branching out into new fields as they grow through the course of their time at Whitman. We recognize that establishing oneself in a new area of scholarly activity requires considerable time and effort, and we count exploratory research, grant writing, and extensive reading in new fields as important components of scholarship.

This value shapes our expectations about the scope and focus of Department members' scholarship: The Department values scholarly contributions to the conventional disciplinary venues of Political Science, but it has no expectation that its members' scholarship will contribute primarily (or even at all) to them. Engagement with other disciplines is equally valued. Contributions to interdisciplinary, and even non-disciplinary, debates are integral to who we are as a department. They are not something Department members are expected do only after completing the "real" work of engaging with Political Science.

Finally, this value shapes our expectations about the types of scholarship Department members may conduct: the Department values traditionally construed academic scholarship (e.g. articles in peer-reviewed journals and books, as well as other activities, such as conference presentations, outlined in Article IV, Section 3 of the Faculty Code). It also values experiments with scholarly forms, venues, and methods that go beyond those types of activity. Activities such as community-based research, scholarly collaborations with non-academics, writing for non-academic audiences, activist research, academic production that challenges seemingly fixed boundaries between "Art" and "Social Science," and other endeavors that we cannot

even imagine yet may be considered important and appropriate parts of Department members' overall scholarly trajectory.

This degree of freedom and flexibility, of course, raises difficult questions of how to evaluate individuals' scholarship. As Department members' scholarship branches out into, possibly unfamiliar, new directions and venues, we cannot assume that we will always "know good scholarship when we see it." Furthermore, while we value peer-reviewed publication as a *necessary* and meaningful part of Department members' scholarly life, we do not fetishize peer-review as the best or only indicator of appropriateness or quality. For example, while community-based or activist research may reflect the most rigorous of intellectual and academic standards, it may not lend itself well to publication in peer-reviewed journals. At the same time, we do not believe that any and all activities should count towards "excellence in scholarship."

As a way of resolving this impasse, members of the Department are committed to engaging with each other in ongoing processes of reflection about the focus, formats, and outcomes of their scholarly work. More specifically, Department members are encouraged to discuss their scholarship with each other, particularly during the early stages of projects. Candidates for Third Year Review, Tenure Review, and promotion to Full Professor are encouraged to have other department members read and discuss their work with them. We believe that dialogue of this sort will give candidates a chance to develop appropriate indicators of quality that help them and the Department gauge the success of their work well in advance of review by the Personnel Committee. Tenured Department members are also urged to engage in this kind of dialogue. The Department appreciates that administrative duties (in the department, College-wide committees, and interdisciplinary programs) will consume considerable faculty time after tenure, but also expects that candidates for promotion to Full Professor will continue to engage in a lively program of research and publishing.

Statements on Scholarly Activity written for Personnel Committee review are taken seriously by the Department as a chance for candidates to forward self-reflective arguments about the rigor, merit, and/or impact of their scholarship. And, unlike many departments, Politics expects that internal review letters written to the Personnel Committee on behalf of candidates will clearly reflect ongoing engagements with one another's scholarship.

In sum, the Department recognizes the productive value of working across differing conceptions of scholarship. This value has made the Department a place of rich and innovative scholarly work over the years. At the same time, we recognize that "working across difference" is not easy. We recommit ourselves to wrestling with the challenges it brings.