

Department of Government

Strong areas of research

The Department of Government is a large, comprehensive political science department. This means that it preferably should not only provide the basis for good research in specific subareas of the discipline, but also offer teaching and research within a broad spectrum of general political science. In our view the department passes this test with a good margin. The research published by the department covers all major fields of political science and also includes the specialized thematic and theoretical focus necessary to offer in-depth research at an international level. Obviously the research quality is better in some areas than in others. A general grading of the department could in our view be based on the fact that there is much very good work of an internationally high standard; there is also some work of an internationally recognized standard. Some of the research groups will be within or close to the 'excellent work' category. In a Nordic comparison we consider the department to be in the top group of political science departments.

We noted that in the previous KoF07 report there was concern about a "discrepancy between symbolic and formal leadership", "antinomies with the academic hierarchy" and "values of individual autonomy." We interpret these comments as indicators that there were problems in the structure of the department and relations between academic ranks. In our view, these problems have been overcome to a remarkable extent. Indeed, it appears to us that the pendulum may have swung too far in the opposite direction. In general the academic atmosphere strikes us as lively and open, and the department appears to have tackled the recent generational shift well. No doubt there are many strong researchers also in the upcoming generation of scholars that the department can build on in the years to come. To make the department flourish, however, one needs careful nurturing of academic talent through academic leadership and organization. To put it simply, we recommend that the senior faculty carefully consider their leadership role in the department. We would not want the department to return to the days of overly strong hierarchies, but stronger leadership does appear in order. Specifically, while we have not evaluated teaching in this department, we suspect that stronger leadership could help the younger scholars strike a better balance in their time allocation between teaching and research.

The various research groups identified by the department vary in homogeneity and also in the strength of group coherence. On the one hand they have the character of administrative groups, on the other there are seminar activities and contacts indicating more of an organic group. Group membership is not fixed, but depends on the researcher's projects and interest. This caters for the dynamic character of all research and opens up new research perspectives and personal development. At the same time it makes for less commitment and both the broader milieu and the individuals become more vulnerable. These arrangements are nevertheless a good start for building broader, integrated research groups and a basis for pursuing more long-term funding as well as creating platforms for more internationally recognized impact research.

All research groups that were presented to the panel encourage internationally embedded research and do publish internationally. They actively work to publish in the better journals/publishers although resources, notably time constraints, sometimes also make publications in less prestigious journals acceptable.

The five groups differ in their publication volume, quality of publication channels and integration in and cooperation with international research networks. There are also differences between clusters within the research groups. The most successful ones we found to be clusters within welfare politics, political economy, gender studies, IR/EU-studies and state-building. However, there are strong talent and potential excellence to build on within all groups.

The department is an attractive place for PhD-studies and the department seems to have created a fruitful milieu for them. We did not get the full statistics on this, but there may be some concern regarding turnover.

Emerging science and potential for renewal

The Department of Government has several strengths. The open intellectual environment, the obvious intellectual respect that members of the faculty have for one another and the willingness to work together and read and comment on each other's work have to be highlighted as significant sources of these strengths. The department has strong elements in all of its five major areas of research. In this context, the department's emphasis and strength in the political economy of the welfare state is notable. The hiring at the senior level of one of a leading scholar in this area will certainly contribute to an already strong and growing research agenda. This research theme can build on the strengths already present in the department, but also has added potential because it can work with the new Center of Excellence program which will be operated in association with the Department of Economics. We would like to encourage the department to build on its ideas to integrate the massively important issues of demographic change and its implications of aging populations with issues such

as political culture and sustained support for the welfare state – especially in countries with large welfare states like Sweden. Indeed, we go further to note that the Uppsala department should benefit from its comparative strength in this regard. Sweden’s continued experimentation with models of social welfare delivery is of enormous interest to academics and policymakers alike throughout the democratic world.

We were also struck by another very promising area of research being initiated in the department in collaboration with colleagues in Economics as well as Sociology and the Karolinska Institutet, where they are using the extensive “twin registry” to investigate the role of genes in influencing political behavior and attitudes. No one on our committee or for that matter in the social science community generally, can know where this research will lead and/or whether the interesting findings generated so far will in fact “turn out”. Certainly, this is a very controversial topic for research in Sweden, as elsewhere. But, this is by any measure pioneering research. We also believe that this area of research might be fruitfully further combined with work in experimental methods, another promising relatively recent development. Moving in these directions could put the department at the forefront of social science methodology and theory building in the upcoming years.

Another promising direction of future research in the department lies in the bringing together of discourses from the sub-seminar on state building and democratization with ongoing research in the group on peace and democracy in post-conflict societies. Here, some of the longer-standing debates on constitutional design and power sharing arrangements in recent democracies could be brought in line with insights from research on election-generated violence and conflict-ridden societies. Such discourses have acquired renewed relevance by current events in the Middle East. Contributions from the political theory group could also be expected in this respect.

The strengthening of the relatively small group on public administration and policies should be further encouraged. Some synergy effects could also be developed with a stronger emphasis on governance and democratic performance in the democratization seminar. These remarks are not meant to downplay the important research taking place in other major subfields, including gender and IR.

Evaluation of results of KoF07

The main recommendations of the KoF07 panel were in general to clarify the role of promoted professors compared to the chairs, to secure long-term finance for a predictable recruitment policy and to find a better balance in the overhead costs attached to external projects. For the Department of Government in particular the challenges of transition after a number of retirements was focused, especially the clarification of leadership roles, both administratively and academically.

Among the first general points some of them are outside of what the department could do on its own. The role of promoted professors did not now appear to be a pressing issue although it still may have links to questions about the general leadership structure. Long term finance is still an issue with repercussions for both time used for producing applications for external projects and for creating better opportunities for nurturing potential talents to fill new positions at the department.

We can also note that after the KoF07-review the department has continued its good work to increase international publications, also in highly ranked journals. The main challenge identified in the review, however, was a too hierarchical leadership structure. It is our clear impression now that the department has managed to make the leadership less hierarchical and more transparent. In doing so, however, we also have the impression that the changes have created too little leadership, not in the administrative field but in academic terms. We interpret the call for a research director in this light. The department would benefit from a strengthened strategic leadership, leaders guiding developments more closely and advising academic staff about promising alleys for future research as well as to coordinate, or at least monitor, the applications for external projects more closely.

Recommendations

- There continues to be a lack of control over basic input factors connected to funding. It would be helpful to obtain more basic, long-term, and stable funding. Considerable time is spent on application writing and even though the department’s success rate is fine, this is an insecure basis.
- The department has successfully confronted the leadership challenges identified in KoF07. But personal autonomy, while a valuable good, must be balanced by leadership to develop the overall department strategy. This needs to be confronted at a time where the department is dynamic, increasingly internationalized in terms of research publication and collaboration, and with potential to become a world class force in some research areas.

- The department wishes to hire a research director to give greater strategic direction. This would be valuable. In the meantime, better use could be made of existing personnel resources to co-ordinate, streamline and develop research groups; to take the lead in more intensive collaboration across existing groups; and to act as a role model for younger scholars. There is plenty of force and talent among existing professors to pick up and develop that function. In short, the dynamic but also somewhat anarchic bottom-up initiatives in terms of research initiatives should be coordinated through a combination with more strategic leadership.

- A screening committee should be considered when it comes to larger applications for funding. It would be made up of scholars with membership experience in research councils.

- Expectations of young scholars in terms of success criteria concerning research and publication, the obtaining of external funding, teaching and relations to students, as well as interactions with society in general could be spelled out in clearer terms. There is, for example, a current debate about publishing monographs versus publishing articles, and about quantity and quality when it comes to publication in general. The department should aim for the highest possible quality in every area of publication.

Overall rating: Internationally high standard