

**Strategic Focusing Initiative Round 2 Proposal:  
Political Science Program  
(Bylaw Unit and Graduate Group)**

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**SECTION A - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The political science program at UC Merced is distinct in two important ways. First, our program is organized in a unique manner. We divide the field into two complementary tracks – Political Economy and Political Institutions and Political Behavior and Cognition. This organization facilitates greater intra- and inter-disciplinary collaboration. Our faculty regularly coauthor with scholars in other fields and publish in general science, interdisciplinary, and other-discipline journals, and our graduate students receive uniquely interdisciplinary training. Second, our faculty has established a rate of publication in our field's top journals and book presses comparable to or surpassing the best programs in the country; we are *the top ranked program* in terms of article publication rate. In this document, we outline the resources necessary to establish our program as one of the best in the country by 2020. This includes a substantial increase in faculty and a modest increase in physical space.

## **SECTION B – DEFINITION OF THEMATIC AREA**

As discussed in detail below, political science is a naturally interdisciplinary field. Both in terms of the substantive focus and the methods of inquiry, political science is founded on cross-disciplinary principles. As such, we have connections to several themes. However, our unique strength lies in quantitative political science (as discussed later in the proposal), and thus we fit most squarely within Theme 7: Information, Computational, and Data Sciences, and Engineering.

We consider our proposal a more sharply defined theme within this theme, though we connect our proposal to the more general theme's proposal, as well as the Center for Statistical and Quantitative Research proposal, which is another more sharply focused area within this theme. We also connect to several proposals that are focused primarily in other themes. These are discussed below.

### *Connections to Other Round 2 Proposals*

The Political Science program at UC Merced is moving towards analyzing larger and larger datasets to understand political behavior on a mass level. Thus, in line with the more general thematic move towards big data, there is an increased need for computational hardware capabilities, development for next-generation computational models, and methods to analyze data. These factors intensify the need for hiring faculty that can harvest and make use of research techniques and methods described in the Computational and Data Science proposal.

Our proposal is similarly situated with the spirit of increasing campus research in computational and data science across social science. The political science program at UC Merced is distinct in its internal organization, which facilitates greater intra- and inter-disciplinary collaboration. Faculty regularly coauthor with scholars in other social science fields and publish in general science, interdisciplinary, and other-discipline journals, and our graduate students receive uniquely interdisciplinary training. With interdisciplinary training of methods of computational and data science, graduate students in the Political Science graduate group could benefit enormously from applying novel analysis techniques to large complex datasets in the field of political science.

The benefit of the CeQR on UC Merced's campus enables advanced statistical and related quantitative and computational research and education across social science disciplines. Hiring Political Science faculty that are highly trained in advanced quantitative techniques would greatly benefit faculty within social science groups affiliated with CeQR. Further, faculty with advanced techniques and methods would enrich graduate training and provide an initiative for providing undergraduate level courses in advanced quantitative techniques. These hires would also serve to broaden interdisciplinary social science research at UC Merced.

The Applied Philosophy Proposal embraces a program whose research and teaching strengths are all founded in substantive ties with other academic programs. One of the specific research areas to be emphasized is Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE). PPE would comprise research with the strategic focus of encompassing other academic units. For example, the analysis of collective action problems such as the tragedy of the commons paradox (Ferguson, 2013): this is one of a class of examples where individual rationality appears to conflict with the common good, and forms a core aspect of many political science theories. Hires in this area would serve to bolster the undergraduate curriculum in political science, as well as provide opportunities for training graduate students in formal theory and computational modeling.

Finally, we have significantly overlapping interests with the proposal for the School of Innovation, Management and Economics. One of the tracks of our graduate program – Political Institutions and Political Economy – relies on economic tools and theoretical principles for the investigation of questions about politics. Thus, we seek to grow our faculty in this area by hiring economists and political scientists

that study political economy, with one upshot being that we could offer crossover graduate training for our students. In the longer run, we may also jointly create a separate PhD in Political Economy, which has been a rare but very successful type of program established at places like Cal Tech and Stanford Graduate School of Business.

### **SECTION C - INTELLECTUAL COMPONENTS OF THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVE**

Political science is the academic study of choices and outcomes: the roots of individual preferences, how they are aggregated into group decisions, and how these decisions shape the world in which we live. Political scientists are interested in how rules are made and how they affect behaviors; how institutions—like legislatures and courts—are structured and how differences in these structures lead to differences in real political outcomes. Why does the US only have two political parties? Why is Denmark’s currency more stable than Brazil’s? Why do wars occur when we know they are inefficient? How do voters respond to political advertisements? Answering these questions requires studying both individuals and the institutional context in which they operate. As such, political science is a *naturally interdisciplinary field*; it uses theories and methodologies from other disciplines in the social sciences and beyond to generate and test explanations of political phenomena.

While the majority of political science departments across the country organize themselves along traditional subfield lines (e.g., American Politics, Comparative Politics, and International Relations), Political Science at UC Merced is designed along two complementary tracks: Political Cognition and Behavior (CAB) and Political Institutions and Political Economy (PIPE). Our program is unique in viewing the discipline this way. By structuring ourselves in this manner, we encourage our faculty and graduate students to generate research across traditional subfield lines. Within the PIPE track, for example, faculty in American Politics and International Relations are working together to study agenda-setting processes in the United Nations.

### **SECTION D – UCM’S ROLE IN THIS THEME**

While political science is a naturally interdisciplinary field, our group’s *intra*-disciplinary organizational structure naturally lends itself to even more interdisciplinary integration. The CAB and PIPE tracks naturally afford opportunities for collaboration – both in terms of teaching and research – with Economists, Cognitive Scientists, Sociologists, and Psychologists at UC Merced and outside the University.<sup>1</sup> While our faculty has developed a record of excellence within the field of political science (as quantified below), our interdisciplinary hiring values and internal organization have resulted in a political science faculty that publishes and collaborates extensively outside of the discipline.

The members of our faculty have published in the following general science, interdisciplinary or other-discipline journals: *Science*, *PLoS ONE*, *Cognitive Science*, *Communication Methods and Measures*, *Law and Society Review*, *Environment and Behavior*, *Urban Affairs Review*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, and *Political Psychology* (four times). Many of these publications, along with dozens of current working papers and grant applications, are co-authored with professors and graduate students in Biology, Cognitive Science, Sociology, Psychology, Law and Economics.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Professor

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<sup>1</sup> Our graduate group also includes a UC Merced faculty member from each of these disciplines.

<sup>2</sup> These include a recently funded UC Merced GRC grant co-authored by Steve Nicholson (UC Merced Political Science), Kyle Dodson (UC Merced Sociology) and Nella Van Dyke (UC Merced Sociology); an NIH proposal by Emily Ozer (UC Berkeley Public Health) that includes Alex Theodoridis (UC Merced Political Science) as an investigator; and other collaborations between various members of our political science faculty and Evan Heit (Cognitive Science - UC Merced), Rick Dale (Cognitive Science - UC Merced), Teenie Matlock (Cognitive Science – UC Merced) Anna Song (Psychology - UC Merced), Jason Emory (Psychology - UC Merced), Nicholas R. Eaton (Psychology -

Thomas Hansford (UC Merced Political Science) and Sarah Depaoli (UC Merced Psychology) were just jointly awarded a \$271,000 NSF grant from the Law and Social Science section.

Aside from encouraging innovative research, our distinctive organization and interdisciplinary values shape our graduate student training and undergraduate pedagogy. We have drawn interest from and admitted graduate students from a range of disciplinary backgrounds including political science, economics, history, and cognitive science. Our graduate training exposes students to theories and methodologies from economics, psychology, sociology, and cognitive science. The graduate/undergraduate game theory course in our program regularly enrolls students from economics and management, and our introductory graduate statistics course enrolls all of the first year sociology PhD students. More generally, our courses at both the graduate and undergraduate level feature *extensive* exposure to approaches and methods from psychology, cognitive science, sociology, and economics that are beyond enumeration given the scope of this document.

The political science faculty has shown strength across fields, but has truly excelled by comparison to other political science departments in terms of research productivity and placement. In political science, where grant dollars are scarce, peer-reviewed journal and book publications are *the most important* metric of faculty success. Using data on faculty publications in the top six academic journals and book presses in the field of political science, we developed a measure of the average annual rate of publication per faculty member for the top 20 political science programs ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*, as well as the five additional UC programs. We find that for a combined measure of article and book publication rates, UC Merced's political science program ranks second among these elite programs, behind only Washington University and ahead of, for example, Yale, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Harvard, Princeton, UC San Diego, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Michigan, and UCLA. If we consider only publications in the top peer-reviewed journals in the field, UC Merced is the top ranked program in the country.<sup>3</sup>

This excellence has also manifested in numerous awards for members of our faculty. Several of these awards – including two “Emerging Scholar” awards, one “Best Dissertation” award, one “Best Book” award, and one “Best Paper” award – were given by our field's largest professional organization, the American Political Science Association. Two members of our faculty have also received UC Merced campus-wide recognition for “distinction in research” and “distinguished early career research.”

#### *Extramural Funding and Political Science*

Although many disciplines require scholars to receive extramural funding as part of their pursuit of promotion, grants are not required for advancement or used as a metric of success in political science. Additionally, Congress has specifically targeted for elimination the discipline's National Science Foundation (NSF) Program in recent years (which accounts for about 95% of funding for political science research), resulting in a requirement that future proposals include language discussing the relevance of research to US national security or economic interests, as well as the cancellation of an annual call for

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University of Minnesota), Mario Scalora (Psychology - University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Robert F. Krueger (Psychology - University of Minnesota), Nicholas Duran (Psychology - Arizona State University), Aiden Feeney (Psychology - Queen's University), Brett K. Hayes (Psychology - University of New South Wales) and David Tewksbury (Communication - University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign), Lindon J. Eaves (Behavior Genetics - Virginia Commonwealth University), Jacob Rugh (Sociology - Brigham Young University), and Thomas König (Economics - Universität Mannheim).

<sup>3</sup> A detailed report on these rankings are attached to the proposal, and can also be found at <http://polisci.ucmerced.edu/node/105>.

grants.<sup>4</sup> Even while we face more limited access to funding than our fellow social scientists, UC Merced faculty have received grants from the NSF and other sources, and we are developing an intra-department reward system to further support the pursuit of extramural funds.

## **SECTION E – PARTICIPATING GROUPS AND UNITS**

The political science bylaw unit and graduate group will be the primary participants, though with notable exceptions. Our graduate group, for example, includes faculty from Economics, Psychology, Cognitive Science, and Sociology. Moreover, we have taught graduate courses in quantitative methods to PhD students in Sociology, and have plans to draw in faculty from Philosophy as well as Economics to teach our advanced formal theory courses. In the slightly longer term, as discussed above in Section B, we plan to collaborate heavily with the Economics faculty to offer PhD courses and training in political economy.

## **SECTION F – PROGRAMATIC NEEDS**

### *Faculty Recruitment Strategy*

We currently have ten ladder rank faculty in political science, and are awaiting the arrival of the eleventh this fall (Brad LeVeck, who is trained in experimental economics and cognitive science methods). In every case, the recruitment strategy has been the same: to cast a very wide net and hire faculty that (1) are the best available research faculty on the market, and (2) contribute to UC Merced's "brand" as a program that uses a quantitative, multidisciplinary, scientific method-based approach to studying politics and teaching students.

While many programs sacrifice quality by conducting overly narrow searches in order to fill particular, predetermined substantive needs, all of our searches have been open to candidates that study political economy and political institutions as well as political cognition and behavior. This has yielded very large applicant pools (upwards of 250 applicants), including candidates from *all* of the top PhD programs in the country. Remarkably, this process has also organically produced a relatively broad and balanced faculty in terms of both substantive focus and interdisciplinarity. Although the lines between the study of institutions and behavior are not clearly demarcated, half of our faculty has a primary focus in the former and half in the latter. Similarly, as discussed above, our faculty are engaged in interdisciplinary research across a variety of fields, including economics, psychology, cognitive science, sociology, and biology.

Going after the very best candidates on the market has sometimes meant losing candidates to offers from top programs, such as Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, UC San Diego, Emory, and Vanderbilt. But this aggressive strategy has also yielded great success, hiring faculty with competing or retention offers from excellent programs including Princeton, Michigan, Iowa, South Carolina, Indiana, and UC Irvine.

Given the success of our faculty recruitment efforts to this point, we plan to continue using the same approach for future hires.

### *Current Use of Physical Space*

Political science research by UC Merced faculty is primarily based on two sources of data. The first is large-N quantitative data, which requires very little physical space. The second – which is a great strength of our program relative to other top programs in the country – is data generated by experiments, often done on subjects in physical labs on campus. Under some models (e.g. assigning lab space to each faculty member), this focus on experiments could require substantial physical space. Rather than assigning labs to specific faculty, however, we have chosen a model that maximizes the efficient use of physical space. Our program has adopted a "common lab model" that allows our experimentally-based faculty and grad students to utilize high end lab space and equipment in a common-pool way.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/339/6127/1510.summary>.

We currently have 3 “large labs” in the Social Sciences and Management building (Between 500 and 620 sq. ft.) – one used for graduate student work space and two used for running experiments – as well as one small lab administrative office. These labs are managed by a committee within political science, outfitted with SSHA and political science bylaw funds, and available for use by any political science faculty member or graduate student. This space has also created positive externalities for interdisciplinary research. For example, Steve Nicholson (political science) and Evan Heit (psychology/management) have used the lab for joint work on political psychology. We have also begun to consider ways to make our lab space available to faculty and graduate students outside of political science, even when they are not working with a member of our program.

In short, political science has used a relatively small amount physical space – as compared to engineering, natural sciences, and even some social sciences such as psychology and information/cognitive sciences – to build a program that has published top quality research at a rate that is equal to or surpassing the top programs in the country. Moreover, as discussed below, we expect to continue building a program that will bring national and international distinction to UC Merced.

#### *Growth of personnel and physical space*

Although we require significant growth in faculty and graduate students to meet our goal of becoming a top ten political science program, we can do this with a relatively modest increase in physical space. Specifically, we would like to grow to 23 ladder rank faculty by 2020 (an increase of 13) and 27 PhD students (an increase of 17). This would put us at a faculty size similar to some of the smaller UC political science programs (e.g., UC Davis - 23, UC Irvine 25), and slightly smaller than other top programs outside of the UC (e.g. Washington University – 26, MIT – 28). With a ladder rank faculty of 23 to 25, we could produce both research and graduate students at a rate to rank as one of the top programs in the country.

While this represents a substantial investment in faculty lines, we need a comparably modest increase in physical space to achieve this growth; three more large experimental labs (roughly 550 sq. ft. each) and 22 new offices, which includes 13 faculty offices, nine shared graduate student offices (three per office), and four support staff offices.

If we grow at the proposed rate, not only will it create the conditions necessary for a top national ranking, but we will be able to provide our undergraduate and graduate curriculum relying only on ladder-rank faculty (i.e., we will not need any LSOE or Unit 18 lecturers).

#### *Current and Aspirational Peers*

As noted above, in terms of research productivity, we are competitive with the very top programs in the country. However, in order to maximize our reputational impact and the placement of our PhDs, we aim to create a UC Merced “brand” based on a core set values that revolve around a quantitative, scientific method approach to studying politics.

Programs that we view as aspirational peers, which have successfully used a “branding” approach to building their programs, are UC San Diego, Washington University (St. Louis), and Stanford. Although we already publish at a rate comparable to or surpassing these programs, they have larger faculties, more established graduate programs, and extensive PhD placement records. None of these programs receive abnormally high support from grants, but Washington University and Stanford benefit substantially from alumni gifts. As such, we expect our funding support to track more closely with UC San Diego. Note that this program began producing PhDs in the late 1980s and were ranked in the top 10 programs in the country by US News and World Report by the late 1990s.

We aspire to a similar trajectory.