

**HOW THE MISSION OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE WAS  
REORIENTED TOWARD RESEARCH-CIRCA 1968-1975\***

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*It is needful to keep the ancient show while we secretly  
interpolate the new reality.*

-Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (1867)

**When I joined** the Political Science faculty at the University of Oklahoma in the Fall of 1968, I became a minor participant in a broad process of social change that was to alter the face of American higher education over the next two or more decades. An important example of successful bureaucratic mission change is the one that occurred during the decades of the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s on the campuses of most state universities. At different times, administrators and some faculty began to attempt to move their institutions' missions from emphasizing undergraduate teaching to emphasizing research and its associated enterprises of graduate teaching and grant getting.

The motivation was to seek increased prestige and an increased revenue stream after the example of most of the "Big Ten" and "Ivy

League" universities. University leaders who moved in concert toward this new mission concept were not exactly involved in a conspiracy, but over time this new vision of what a state university should be about clearly became the dominant one—the one that was reflected, for example, in such trade journals as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

I argue that leaders who wish to be successful in altering the mission of such a bureaucracy as a university must make a long-term, sustained, and thoroughgoing commitment to a program of change. A never-fails recipe for successful mission change cannot be given, but the ingredients for success would include such strategies as changing the university's recruitment patterns, changing the messages given when socializing new members and attempting to resocialize old ones, and changing the reward (and punishment) structure. Those who attempted to change higher education during the period under study followed exactly this recipe. And that recipe was followed by those who changed the mission of the OU Department of Political Science

### CHANGING FACULTY RECRUITMENT PATTERNS

One of the most important ways for administrators to implement the new mission was to increase their influence over the faculty recruitment process. For example, if a dean felt that departments were not recommending the hiring and retention of the faculty candidates who seemed the most likely to advance the new mission of increased research, publications, and grant getting, then the dean might intervene and insist on hiring and retaining those who seemed to be the most promising researchers.

Long after the fact, I learned that I was hired because I had a record of publication in good outlets—including the *APSR*—as a graduate student and that my future as a researcher seemed promising. My initial participation in the department's reorientation was unwitting because I was unaware that most of its members did little research. In fact, I knew very little about the department because I never interviewed for the job! When it was time for me to seek employment, I was in New Zealand writing my dissertation. My Fulbright had expired, and I was an impecunious Junior Lecturer at the Victoria University in Wellington. At least partially because U.S. universities were not willing to pay the

airfare to interview me, I was not a hot commodity on the job market. In the end, my choices were between Union College in New York and OU. I chose OU primarily because I assumed that a state university would provide more support for my research than would a liberal arts college.

The circumstances of my hiring may provide some insight into the department's norms. Dick Baker, a specialist in Latin American politics, had been visiting at Tulane, where I was a graduate student, during the year before I left for New Zealand. He found the Tulane faculty rather clannish and preferred to have lunch in the university cafeteria rather than at the faculty club. The result was that we often ate together, and I was able to profit from a one-on-one seminar on the topic of the day. Later, I realized that Dick had been interviewing me extensively the entire time and that I evidently had passed muster. As I left New Orleans, he said that OU might soon have a vacancy and that I should write him when I went on the job market. Fortuitously, when I wrote him, a vacancy existed, and he was the acting departmental chair. He used his influence to get me hired without an interview—an unprecedented situation, one that has not since been duplicated. Such was the level of trust in the department that his willingness to vouch for me was all that other members needed to hear.

Much later, I learned that my predecessor had been let go by the college Dean, John Ezell, for failure to complete his dissertation—over the department's vehement protests. The department responded to this shock by deciding to get with the program and embrace the university's new research mission. Sam Kirkpatrick (now the President of Eastern Michigan University) and I were hired in 1968 with the expectation that we would initiate a new chapter in the department's research history. Also in 1968, Vito Vardys, who had an established research record, was hired at the professorial level to run a departmental program at the university's Munich Center for Russian Language and Soviet Area Studies.

1968 was a watershed year: faculty members who were hired as little as one year earlier were not expected to undertake a program of research. In 1969, two faculty members who would make important contributions to the department's new research orientation were hired: Ted Hebert, who remained at OU until 1983 and who most unfortunately died in 2001 as Professor of Political Science at the University of Utah,

and Dave Morgan, who retired from OU in 2000. In addition, Don Kash and Jack White, who already had distinguished research records, were hired to create a Science and Public Policy program in 1970.

As early as 1970, a critical mass of faculty oriented toward research had been created, and there was no turning back from the department's new hiring policies. So far as I can recall, during my tenure the department has not hired anyone who did not seem likely to exceed, or at least meet, the increasingly stringent requirements for research and publication. Furthermore, in the vast majority of its hiring decisions the department has had the wisdom to select the person that I thought the most likely in the long run to be the best researcher and publisher. Of course, despite having the best of intentions, we have made mistakes in recruitment.

### **IMPLEMENTING THE NEW RESEARCH ORIENTATION**

As universities across the country implemented their new research missions, incoming faculty were reminded of their special roles in helping to change their department's orientation. In addition, long-term, non-research-oriented faculty were propagandized about the new mission; for example, they were often encouraged to attend seminars on how to publish articles and get grants. Their involvement with research also was encouraged in other ways; for example, they might be asked to compete for internal grants designated as "seed" money to smooth the way for obtaining larger outside grants. Among the important changes made by administrators implementing the new mission was to alter significantly the motivational structure—that is, the system for deciding whether to retain, promote, and give salary increases to particular faculty members. The message to departments was to devise systems that rewarded faculty for emphasizing publications and grants.

The process of implementing the new research orientation in the OU Political Science Department took several years to complete, but like the change in the recruitment process—it was quickly set in the new direction. John Wood, who was departmental chair (1967-1974) during the crucial reform period, was not himself a researcher, but he understood how universities were changing and believed that the OU department had to adapt to meet the new reality. He shepherded the many individual

decisions and policy changes needed to implement the new changes into being. These processes of reorientation were consolidated by Hugh MacNiven during his chairmanship, 1974-82.

During the early years, many of the important changes were made by the chair and Committee A, the department's personnel committee, which consisted of the chair and two members elected annually from the faculty. I was elected to Committee A—without campaigning for the position—in about 1972 as an untenured Assistant Professor. Although that election was unplanned, much of what those who wanted to reform the department did was planned—even conspired about. The usual conspirators were Hebert, Hill, Kirkpatrick, and Morgan. Kash and White were housed in a separate unit and were not normally involved in the deliberations, which often took place after lunch or late at night; we were proud of the long hours we worked.

Whether the occasion was a faculty meeting or a committee meeting, the reform group usually had devised a strategy. Kash was especially persuasive in faculty meetings, where he was prone to adopt his plain-speaking-Iowa-farm-boy persona—at considerable length. Our central idea was to champion the cause of research among faculty and graduate students and to increase the quality of the graduate program. In pursuing the latter goal, for example, I was placed on the Graduate Committee for many years; my job was to blackball applicants for the Ph.D. program who were not up to snuff, but who would have been admitted under the department's previous orientation. Ted Hebert was put in charge of placing our Ph.D.s and recruiting new graduate students; I followed him in doing that job when he left for Utah.

The venerable Bureau of Government Research played a key role in the department's reorientation after 1969, when Sam Kirkpatrick became the Director and David Morgan became the Associate Director. The Bureau formerly had been a sleepy entity that did descriptive research for state agencies. Under Kirkpatrick and Morgan, however, the mission was changed. Instead of simply writing a monograph to satisfy an agency, they did that and then in as many cases as possible also used the data to publish an article for a scholarly journal. Many of the articles were co-written with the graduate assistants who worked for the Bureau, and the graduate assistants also turned their dissertations into articles and books. When Kirkpatrick left to become Political Science Chair at Texas A & M in 1977, Morgan became Director and retained that job until the

Bureau was killed off in the university administration's foolish response to a budgetary crisis in 1987. The publications of those associated with the Bureau played a major role in putting the OU political science program on the scholarly map. And the Ph.D.s produced by Kirkpatrick and Morgan constitute the vast majority of the department's most talented and most successful graduates.

Similarly, the Science and Public Policy Program (SPP), which began in 1970, was important in strengthening the department's research orientation. The program was created as large amounts of federal money became available to universities through such mechanisms as NSF's RANN (Research Applied to National Needs). In the early years SPP obtained several million dollars worth of federal and private grants to study such subjects as North Sea oil drilling. Although SPP was a multidisciplinary program having only a loose linkage with the department, Don Kash and Jack White had departmental appointments and participated in departmental meetings and other activities. SPP resources for travel and other research support, which were generously made available to the Department of Political Science by the program leaders, were extremely important in supplementing the department's meager resources. Furthermore, most of the numerous graduate assistants hired in the program's heyday were high-quality political science students, who contributed greatly to the department's development. Although most of the program's output was descriptive reports to funding agencies (some of which were published as university press books), some faculty and graduate student publications were in scholarly journals that enhanced the department's research reputation. And the graduate assistants recruited both by the Bureau and by SPP made important contributions to the department's graduate classes and to the teaching of the required American government course.

A noteworthy event that solidified the department's transformation was the formal revision of the criteria for tenure and promotion in the mid-1970s. The draft the reformers had prepared involved a considerable toughening of the research requirements, and we were very interested to see how they would be received in the faculty meeting. When the faculty came to the part of the proposed requirements that demanded the publication of certain quantities of "scholarly books and articles," one colleague suggested that "scholarly" be struck as redundant. When I responded that this word was central to the new requirements, he said

that I must be mistaken, because that word—if interpreted strictly—would have the effect of not giving credit for textbooks and works of journalism. After I explained that this was precisely the intent, a lively discussion ensued about the role of research in the department's future. In the course of that discussion, some members of the department learned for the first time that the Dean's office (particularly under the leadership of Dean Paige Mulhollan, 1973-1978) had for some years been holding departments to standards reflected in the proposed requirements. And it was also made known that Committee A had for the preceding five years or so informally been implementing standards similar to those in the draft. In the end, the new requirements were adopted by the faculty—but not quite unanimously. Faculty decisions were usually passed by acclamation.

### **EXPLAINING WHY THE DEPARTMENT'S REORIENTATION CAUSED SO LITTLE CONFLICT**

The major reorientation of the OU Political Science Department toward research in terms of personnel, policies and institutions took place between 1968 and the mid-1970s. These changes were consolidated over the next several years as retirements occurred in the non-research faculty (the vacant positions were filled by those whose future as researchers seemed promising) and as new institutions were created whose focus included scholarly research: the Carl Albert Center (1979); the Institute for Public Affairs (1995), which replaced the Bureau of Government Research; the International Programs Center (1996); and the University of Oklahoma Public Opinion Learning Laboratory (1999).

One of the most striking aspects of the department's transition was the relative lack of conflict stimulated by the issue. Although the majority of the department's pre-1968 members were disadvantaged by the new orientation, little rebellion was engendered; nor did these individuals seek to halt the progress toward giving research increased prominence. Such reactions were common at other universities that newly embraced the research mission. Some faculty—especially those who were relatively young at the time the new mission was adopted

and who were strongly oriented toward teaching—were often very unhappy with the new mission and felt betrayed. The feeling of betrayal arose because they felt that the rules for organizational success were changed dramatically after they were hired.

Such reactions did not surface publicly in the OU department until the mid-to-late 1970s. And then they were expressed quite mildly and by only a few individuals. These reactions were precipitated when one of Oklahoma's recurrent budget crises resulted in a general lack of salary increases over a long period, but those in question learned that their colleagues who published research got small salary increases even in such difficult times. Despite the expression of dissatisfaction, the issue was never brought to the point of a reconsideration of the department's reorientation toward research.

The explanation for the Political Science Department's willingness to accede to the new research orientation lies mainly in its culture. Culture is often derided as a mere residual variable that the analyst may turn to when other explanations for a phenomenon have been discarded. But culture may be a valuable independent variable. For example, reorienting the OU Department of History toward research was not necessary in 1968 because that department's culture had long encouraged research and publication. In contrast, the culture of OU's Department of Sociology was so divisive in 1968 that a reorientation toward research was impossible for some years to come.

First, the Political Science Department's culture was not anti-research; the activity was simply not one that appealed to most members. However, Oliver Benson and Dick Baker, among the old-timers, had published significant scholarly studies. (Perhaps they are the two brightest people I have had the good fortune to meet.) And Walt Scheffer, who initiated the Ph.D. program, spearheaded the public administration program, and was department chair from 1962-1967, favored research—as did the aforementioned John Wood. Also, Hugh MacNiven and Harry Holloway had had to meet research requirements at their respective previous appointments: the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Texas. It was a mark of the innate quality of the department's earlier hiring decisions that when the standards changed, such faculty members as Steve Sloan took advantage of the new rules to prosper in their publishing careers.



Second: Oliver Benson's endorsement of the new direction was crucial. Benson was the department's George Lynn Cross Research Professor (departmental chair 1946-1951; 1959-1962), and it would be difficult to overestimate his influence over his colleagues. Benson was widely respected in political science nationally, and, if he had chosen, he could have moved to a much more distinguished university than OU. Although he did not take an active role in the department's transition, he gave it his general approval. The reaction among many of the old-timers was that if Benson said the department should move toward research, then that closed the issue.

Third, the prevailing norms in the department were genuinely collegial and built on trust. As long as the department was housed in Gittinger Hall, everyone went for coffee in the morning and in the afternoon at the Hester Hall cafeteria across the way; that pattern—as well as the easy opportunity for interdisciplinary contact—ended when we moved into the newly completed Dale Hall Tower in the Spring of 1969. On most days nearly the entire department trooped over to the inappropriately named Ming Room in the student union for lunch (this tradition continued through the late 1970s, when the Ming Room and its food were put through one too many reincarnations for us to stomach, so to speak). The result was that a great deal of group cohesion was built up.

The dominant attitude among the old-timers was: "If you young fellas want to do research and move the department in that direction, then that's fine with us." We reformers sometimes may have skirted the borderline of taking advantage of the civility of our older colleagues as we "secretly interpolate[d] the new reality." But we greatly valued the established norms and felt that our ideas were genuinely reforming the department as we gently moved it toward the national norms that focused on scholarly research.

\*Of course, this is my personal history. Another observer might write a somewhat different account of the period. I hope that I have not contracted what Harvard's Pitirim Sorokin called a "Columbus Complex." He said that some of the new members of the Department of Social Relations, such as Talcott Parsons, suffered from this affliction because they went around "discovering" things that did not need to be discovered.

