

October 8, 2007

Professor Donna L. Bahry, Head  
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University Park, PA 16802-6200

Dear Professor Bahry:

At the recent American Political Science Association Meeting, the Foundations of Political Theory Section of the APSA learned of your department's decision to discontinue the track in political theory as a course of study available to doctoral students.

At our annual Business Meeting, our membership voted unanimously to voice our serious concern for the devaluation of political theory at The Pennsylvania State University and its potential impact on the profession. In light of the central place that political theory has for the study of political life, we find this decision regrettable and ill-advised.

In the development of the discipline of Political Science, it has been political theory that has been the moral voice of political science and emphasized the need to attend to the moral and ethical aspects of political explanation. It has been political theory that has emphasized the need to study those aspects of political life often ignored by methodologically driven research, problems such as those dealing with gender and race. It has been political theory that has encouraged the discipline toward problem based research, as reflected in the most recent edition of *The State of the Discipline* (2004) rather than methodologically driven research. It has been political theory that continues to remind us that our methodological choices have normative and ethical implications that we cannot ignore. Finally, it has been political theory that first raised and continues to raise the question of the ways that ethnocentrism influences our understanding of other cultures and ways of life.

In light of the centrality of political theory to this range of issues, it is not surprising that the Foundations of Political Theory annually has the highest attendance of any section at the APSA Meeting and that the three sections of political theory (Foundations, Normative, and Historical) combined have greater attendance than any other three sections from all other subfields. These reflect the central place of political theory in the discipline as a whole.

We understand that there are times when Departments and Colleges must make difficult choices. We have all faced such challenges, particularly those of us whose institutions have undergone budget crises and reductions. However, cutting political theory from the course of study for doctoral students is, we believe, short sighted. Moreover, not only is it disadvantageous for graduate students, but such decisions have ways of adversely impacting undergraduate education as well.

We sincerely hope that the faculty of the Department of Political Science will reconsider its decision.

Respectfully yours,

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