Prospectus for
Initiating the Master of Arts Degree in
Political Science
through Distance Learning

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August 1, 2000

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Nature of Change

Virginia Tech's graduate program in political science, established in 1969, leads to a master of arts degree. It is designed to provide students with a firm grounding in the scope of the discipline and a strong foundation of research methods. It is especially appropriate for students who want to acquire analytic skills before pursuing a Ph.D. in political science or entering a public or private career requiring research skills.

The program consists of a core of seven methods and theory courses (21 credit hours) balanced by four elective courses (12 credit hours) in the fields of American government, comparative politics, international relations, and policy analysis leading to the writing of a master's thesis (12 credit hours). The 45 credit hour degree program is normally completed in four semesters of full-time study.

Building upon the experience and expertise of Virginia Tech Faculty in teaching on-line undergraduate courses since 1995, students have been able to take graduate level political science courses since 1997. The online Masters of Arts in Political Science is aimed at place-bound students, who want to earn their first graduate degree, but who find themselves unable to begin a residential degree program at Virginia Tech's main campus in Blacksburg. This program was in place at the time of the 1998 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges reaffirmation visit to Virginia Tech.

Assessment of Need

Expansion via Synchronous Delivery:
Expansion of the program through synchronous delivery will be as part of the online Internet-based delivery method. Desktop synchronous activities such as chat rooms will be used.

Expansion via Asynchronous Delivery
The expansion of the program through an Internet-based delivery approach is based on meeting the needs of working professionals who are unable to attend campus-based or off-campus extended site programs even when they are scheduled in the evening or on weekends.

(more data needed here – any surveys with numbers on potential PS market?)

Relationship to Institutional Purpose and Mission

Virginia Tech has offered degrees through distance learning since 1983. Using advanced technologies Virginia Tech continues to create more responsive teaching and learning environments while meeting the changing needs, resources, and expectations of our students.

The expansion of the M.A. degree in Political Science to delivery in a distance learning format is congruent with the university's mission of a 21st century land-grant university and the five university aims as outlined in the *Update to the University Plan: 1996-2001*.
These aims are:
- to serve a growing student population with new expectations;
- to create an atmosphere where learning can occur regardless of time and distance;

- to enable graduates to work with many different kinds of people over a lifetime;
- to generate research that addresses human concerns and anticipates future action;
- to be an active partner with learning communities of all kinds to design what is needed for future success

The distance delivery of the M.A. degree in Political Science is also congruent with the University's "Strategic Directions" as outlined in Virginia Tech's *Academic Agenda.* The *Academic Agenda* is the blueprint for achieving the *University Plan 1996-2001* and is central to the academic planning process of the University. Relevant examples from the *Academic Agenda* are:

Strategic Direction 3.1: Teaching and Learning: A Land-Grant Learning Community
    Strategy 3.1c: Develop teaching and learning initiatives, methodologies, and curricula to insure that they help prepare students to become effective professionals, life-long learners, and productive citizens of their society and the world.
    Task3.1c.3: Facilitate new teaching pedagogy through the integration of technology in distance and distributed learning environments.

Strategic Direction 3.3: Outreach and Economic Development
    Strategy 3.3b: Develop and deliver mission and client-oriented programming, building the institutional capacity for university expertise to rapidly respond when and where it is appropriate and adds value.
    Task 3.3b.5: Expand the use of distance and distributed technologies to deliver credit and non-credit and certificate courses and programs.

Strategic Direction 3.4: Information Technology
    Strategy 3.4a: Provide opportunities and capabilities for faculty to transform courses and curricula for use in a network-based distributed learning environment.
    Task3.4a3: Develop targeted credit and non-credit courses, programs, professional certificates, and degrees for use in a distance and distributed learning environment.

Locations and Delivery System

Synchronous Delivery:
    Synchronous delivery systems will be part of the online Internet-based delivery method. Desktop synchronous activities such as chat rooms will be used.

Asynchronous Delivery
    An Internet-based instructional system was selected as the teaching method. The University is a leader nationally in the use of information technology to support teaching, research, outreach and administration. The University's information technology infrastructure therefore is robust both in technology and in the support of technology. Internet-based courses and resources are stored on university servers in a distributed model. Course content resides on Political Science departmental servers, learning resources reside on library and University servers and on the web, administrative information resides on University servers and general distance learning information resides on the

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Institute for Distance and Distributed Learning server. The University operates a ???? modem pool for access to this material via the Internet. Therefore, anyone meeting program admission requirements and has access to the Internet can enroll in the program.

(describe your instructional process)

Quality Management

Virginia Tech adheres to *the Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs* as outlined in the Commission on Colleges policies, procedures and guidelines. In addition the university employs *Five Guiding Principles for Distance Learning* that were adapted from the American Council on Education. These principles are:

- there is no one best instructional delivery and interaction media or method *(media and methods are selected for their contribution to the achievement of the learning outcome in a given situation)*
- a true learning community is interactive where participants have the opportunity to engage information, their teacher and their fellow students.
- all learning environments, traditional and virtual, are important to the university and will be cared for.
- a systems approach to instructional design will be modeled.
- technology is a tool that enables distance and distributed learning to occur.

Quality management of the distance delivered M.A. degree in Political Science is handled in the same manner as the campus-based program. Faculty are responsible for insuring the instructional quality of the program's courses. The same faculty who teach campus-based courses also teach the distance learning sections.

The Planning Process

(Description of the University and IDDL planning process to come. Need info on the college and departmental planning process – need to show cycle of planning,implementing,evaluation and use of results.)

Systematic Evaluation of Instructional Results

(IDDL efforts to come. Need departmental/course methods and results? Grade analysis (online vs classroom, DL surveys alumni surveys, employer survey, etc. – need documentation)

Monitoring and Evaluating Programs and Activities

(IDDL & University efforts to come. Need info on college, department and faculty

Differences in Admission or Graduation Requirements
Students enrolled in the online M.A. degree in Political Science must have access to the Internet and appropriate computer. There are no other differences in admission or graduation requirements for students enrolled in the online line program.
(Is this correct?)

Special Arrangements for Grading, Transcripts, or transfer credit policies.
> There are no special arrangements made for grading, transcripts or transfer policies. The distance learning students follow the same policies as campus-based students.

(Is this correct?)

Acquisition of Instructional Materials from Other Institutions

> Not applicable. The instructional material is developed and maintained by Virginia Tech faculty in the Political Science program.

Faculty and Personnel

Differences in Selection of Course Content
> There are no differences in the selection of course content for courses offered at a distance and those offered in the campus-based environment. Students enrolled in either type of course receive the same content as determined through the departmental and university governance system.

Qualifications of Faculty
> Faculty teaching distance learning courses are the same faculty that teach traditional campus-based courses. Please see the attached "Roster of Instructional Staff" for specific faculty qualifications and courses taught.

Evaluating Faculty
> Faculty teaching distance learning courses are evaluated each semester by students using a similar evaluation instrument as that used in traditional campus-based courses. Modifications have been made to reflect differences in delivery methodologies. Results of the student evaluations are shared with department chairs and can be used as part of the faculty member's promotion and tenure portfolio and for merit raises. The evaluation process is administered by the University's Institute for Distance and Distributed Learning.

Teaching Load Policies

Learning Resources and Services

> Virginia Tech has made a significant commitment to electronic library and learning resources for distance learners as well as for campus-based students. (The University owns ????? electronic journals….., e-reserve……., electronic thesis and dissertation……. Etc ……..). In addition, the University is a member of VIVA the Virtual Library of Virginia with combined holdings of over ??????. representing ??? universities, colleges and public libraries. The University Libraries provide next-day inter-library loan mailing of materials capability for non-electronic resources. A full-time distance learning librarian is also available to work with faculty and students to insure that specific resource needs are met.

> Virginia Tech's University Libraries currently owns ????? volumes and ????? periodicals within the Political Science and related discipline.

(need more documentation of arrangements to provide learning resources at an appropriate breadth and quality to distance learners.)

Support Services

(IDDL and university support services such as FDI & CIL, course development, training to come. Also info on admissions, technical help, course registration, records maintenance, course advising, counseling.)
(Any departmental support- specifically advising?)

Contractual Arrangements for Support Services with Other Organizations

Not applicable. All support services are handled by Virginia Tech.

Distance Learning Organizational Structure

(IDDL & extended campus organizational structure to come)

Financial Resources

(IDDL budget to come)
(Need info on financial resources required to support the change, together with information on how such resources have been secured, projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow, and the amount of resources (if any) going to institutions or organizations providing contractual instruction or support services. (We also need a specific budget for the first year of course offerings of the distance learning activities)