December 5, 2012

Vice Chancellor Carole Goldberg
UCLA Academic Personnel
2138 Murphy Hall
University of California Los Angeles
Campus 140501

Re: New Political Science Department Procedure for Peer Review of Teaching

Dear Vice Chancellor Goldberg:

In briefings to Department Chairs that you gave in the fall of 2011, you described your expectations with respect to the Peer Evaluation of Teaching element of academic personnel cases. In response to those expectations, we have instituted a new system for peer review of teaching. To develop this new procedure, we surveyed the practices of other similar teachings units and held several meetings of the Faculty at which alternative mechanisms were considered. I am very pleased with our new system. Not only does it respond to your charge, but I believe it will allow us to better showcase the impressive teaching accomplishments of our faculty, provide valuable teaching mentorship and guidance to our junior faculty, and more generally disseminate best practice in this area of increasing emphasis for the College and the University.

Because this procedure is a new one leading to a different sort of assessment than has previously been found in our dossiers, I am including this letter of explanation of our new system.
Our new peer review follows the directives set up in at a faculty meeting on April 19, 2012. Our system embraces a holistic process, including not just classroom visits, but also consideration of all details of courses from the syllabus to the exam questions. The detailed rubrics are included below.

The process begins with our newly established Committee on Teaching appointing two faculty members to visit a class taught by the faculty member under consideration. New classroom visits are conducted at the time of each threshold review and at any other time that a faculty member requests. Without talking to each other about what they saw, and before reading student evaluations, the reviewers write up their reports. If the two reports concur they are amalgamated to make up the peer review report; if not, then the reviewers meet and discuss the case before writing a final report that reflects their range of opinions. After writing up their own impressions, the reviewers read the student evaluations and add in a reference to them in the report, weighing in on the accuracy of these evaluations, (i.e. on whether the problems student point out represent issues the instructor should address). This final report is then sent to the person being reviewed for comments, and then to the Personnel Manager who forwards it to the Chair, who may then address any issues in the teaching performance with the person being reviewed. The person being reviewed is also invited to write his or her own self-evaluation, with suggestions for self-improvement.

The faculty adopted the follow set of suggested rubrics for the evaluation of teaching performance. The teaching assessment reports in any particular case may not touch on all of them and may include others beyond these, but they serve to convey the Faculty’s sense of the appropriate evaluative criteria:

1. What are the primary pedagogical goals of the course as a whole? What skills or forms of expertise would an A student take away after completing this course? If the class is meant to develop critical thinking, what particular skills are taught and how?

2. [Given the reviewers experience ...] How likely do you think students are to master the envisioned forms of skill and/or expertise over a ten-week period, given the syllabus and the pedagogical strategies observed in class?

3. How does this course encourage active learning? Were any active-learning moments observed in the class meeting?

4. Are there aspects of the course that stand out and that other instructors might profitably adopt?
5. Are there aspects of the course that could be improved? Particular modifications that might be considered?

6. What were the most frequently reiterated comments, positive and negative, that arose in past student evaluations of this class? How do these line up with what you observed as a visitor to the class?

7. What role do TAs and graders play in the course? Are they given appropriate guidance and mentoring?

You will find Peer Evaluation of Teaching reports based on this new system included in promotion dossiers this year and in the years to come. I am proud of our new system and I thank you for provided me with the impetus to establish it.

Best regards,

[Signature]

Jeffrey B. Lewis
Professor and Chair