

Public and International Affairs at Princeton University

A statement by President Christopher L. Eisgruber and Provost David S. Lee

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The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs is defined by twin commitments to unsurpassed academic quality and to, in the words of the School's Self-study and Strategic Review Committee Report, "creating a space for Princeton in the policy arena." The School's distinctive approach to the study of public affairs emphasizes the importance of disciplinary excellence in its research initiatives and of foundational skills and knowledge in its teaching programs.

The size of the Woodrow Wilson School, the eminence of its faculty and programs, the extent of its resources, and even the striking architecture of Robertson Hall all contribute to making the School a prominent Princeton institution. As the committee observes, the School has more than 80 tenured or tenure-track faculty, making it the "largest department on Princeton's campus". It is also home to 20 research centers. The School's faculty and centers produce scholarship on a wide array of policy issues and attract significant press coverage. Members of the faculty have held high-level policy offices in Washington and elsewhere. The School's professors are highly decorated, outpacing other policy schools in academy memberships and other honors. The School has on four occasions, including three times in the last fifteen years, celebrated the award of a Nobel Prize in Economics to an active member of its faculty. No other policy school comes close to matching that record.

At a University that has no law or business school and so confers relatively few professional degrees, the Woodrow Wilson School's master's degree programs are, like its faculty, the largest on the campus. Its undergraduate concentrators are now also among the most numerous at Princeton. The undergraduate program's size reflects not only student interest but also an important decision by the School's faculty, which voted in April 2011 to remove restrictions that capped the number of concentrators. Until that change, the School offered the only selective concentration at Princeton, a controversial distinction that added to the School's visibility on campus.

The Wilson School's prominence at Princeton occasionally causes it to become the focal point of expectations that outstrip what it can deliver. Alumni, students, and other observers sometimes imagine that it is uniquely or specially the Woodrow Wilson School's role to teach leadership, or to inculcate values of service, or to connect the University to the world beyond its campus. Certainly we do expect the School to encourage service, produce leaders, and connect to the broader world—but we expect that of all Princeton departments. "Public and international affairs" is a specific field of study, grounded in theory and research in the social sciences; it is not a synonym for "leadership," "service," or "engagement." One need not study public affairs to become a leader, nor does one necessarily become a leader by studying that topic.

Princeton's mission statement includes a commitment to "prepare students for lives of service, civic engagement, and ethical leadership." The University's strategic framework, approved by the Board of Trustees on January 30, 2016, calls upon Princeton to "renew and enhance its longstanding commitment to the ideal of service" and to "cultivate interaction between its faculty members, researchers, and students and their counterparts in the non-profit, corporate, and government sectors." The Wilson School, like other academic units at Princeton, will participate in the pursuit and realization of these goals. These aspirations, however, span the University. We would compromise the missions of both the School and the University were we to suppose that values related to service, civic engagement, and leadership either defined the School's agenda or were its special responsibility.

Specific recommendations

The Woodrow Wilson School Self-study and Strategic Review Committee kept both the character and the limits of the School's mission clearly in mind as it developed its report. Its recommendations focus upon the School's research and teaching programs in public and international affairs. Many of the School's proposals pertain to matters, such as curriculum reform, that the School can execute with its existing resources, subject to appropriate approvals through ordinary University processes. In the remaining pages of this statement, we comment on a few recommendations that may require new funds or that bear importantly on the School's relationship to other units of the University.

Resources for the undergraduate program. The 2011 reforms to the Wilson School's undergraduate program enhanced its value in two ways: they expanded the range of students able to benefit from the School's teaching, and they enriched the School's core curriculum in several ways, including by adding more training for independent research and by requiring students to pursue a cross-cultural or field experience (such as study abroad, an international internship, participation in ROTC, or extended involvement with an underserved community) during their time at Princeton.

The new program is in high demand, and more resources are needed to sustain it (the School cannot draw for this purpose on the Robertson endowment, which supports its graduate program). We agree with the committee that it would be appropriate to raise new funds to address these needs. The University is seeking new resources to support study abroad and curricular innovations throughout all of its academic departments, and the School may benefit from those efforts as well as from funds raised specifically for its programs.

Faculty hiring. Faculty quality is essential to any academic program, and the committee's report appropriately devotes considerable attention to faculty hiring. We are pleased that the committee highlighted the importance of intellectual and demographic diversity to the School's hiring. In the School and throughout the University, the pursuit of excellence demands that we attract talented persons from all backgrounds who will advance arguments from varying viewpoints and perspectives.

The report recommends “hir[ing] more tenure-track and practitioner faculty—both to ensure the School has enough faculty to teach core courses, particularly in the undergraduate program, and to provide expertise in important and emerging policy areas.” We agree that the Wilson School needs to ensure that it has faculty dedicated to its vibrant and well-subscribed undergraduate program, and we believe it would be appropriate for the School to raise faculty chairs to support that goal. We also believe that it makes sense for the School to use its existing resources to add faculty chosen judiciously to support new areas of research. We look forward to working with the School as it identifies those areas.

Growth may not, however, be the only or the best approach to the School’s curricular challenges. The committee observes that the Wilson School faculty has grown from 53 tenured and tenure-track faculty in 1995-96 to 84 in 2015-16. Nearly all of these professors are jointly appointed, so the size of the School is not as large as the raw numbers might suggest, but the growth rate is nevertheless high. As the committee also points out, the increased size and intellectual breadth of the School contributes to the challenges that it faces as it attempts to forge a cohesive community. We accordingly agree with the committee’s recommendation that the School should “develop creative ways to increase the number of tenure-track faculty who teach at the School and administer WWS programs.” We look forward to working with the School as it examines which needs genuinely require additional faculty and which might be addressed through new incentives for existing faculty or by reassigning faculty lines over time as professors depart from the School.

Space. The committee recommends renovations to Robertson Hall to improve teaching spaces and facilitate faculty interaction. Space is important to academic community: thoughtfully designed spaces can facilitate collaboration and encourage serendipitous interactions that generate new ideas and launch interdisciplinary projects. The need for attractive space is especially acute in the Wilson School, which, as noted above, faces some inherent challenges to community-building: its faculty is large, drawn from many disciplines, and distributed over multiple departments and buildings.

We accordingly believe that the committee was correct to assign a high priority on renovating Robertson Hall. The School has been willing to devote its own funds to the renovation project to supplement costs covered by central budgets. We are pleased that the design phase for the project is underway, with work expected to begin by early spring of 2018. In addition to improving the quality of the School’s classrooms, the renovations will replace loud hallways and opaque barriers with spaces that are more transparent, welcoming, and conducive to collaboration.

New audiences of learners. The committee recommends that the School “thoughtfully consider developing” short-term courses for professionals such as “current policymakers and leaders, journalists, and other interested parties who wish to ‘return to school’ for short but intensive seminars focused on emerging challenges in public policy.” The committee correctly indicates that the quality and feasibility of such programs would depend on faculty interest and support. We welcome experiments of the

sort contemplated by the committee and believe that they have the potential to increase the School's visibility and impact in the policy world. We hope that the School will pursue the path recommended by the committee, and we would be happy to work with its leadership and interested faculty to move proposals forward.

Conclusion

We thank the members of the Woodrow Wilson School Self-study and Strategic Review Committee for their careful analysis of the School and thoughtful recommendations about its future. We look forward to working with them, with the School, and with the University's alumni and friends to ensure that the Woodrow Wilson School remains one of the world's leading centers for the study of public policy and an effective vehicle for bringing Princeton University's research and teaching to bear upon public policy in this country and abroad.