

THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

The Department of Political Science was born in a climate of suspicion, uncertainty, and fear. For many years, courses in government fell under the umbrella of an ever-growing and unwieldy Social Studies Department. This department included economics, sociology, and religious studies, but its major focus was history. The Social Studies Department was chaired by historian Paul Murray. A long-time observer described him as an even-tempered man of few words, somewhat like former president Calvin Coolidge. Murray made administrative decisions autocratically and, other than at the beginning of the academic year, rarely held department meetings. So the Social Studies faculty were shocked when everyone received a memo announcing a faculty meeting for a late Tuesday afternoon in February 1963.

Over the next several days department members discussed the meeting and even agonized over its purpose, and Murray himself would not comment. The most unsettling rumor related to a book contract. Early in the 1992-1993 academic year, an agent from Alfred A. Knopf Publishers had met informally with a large group of Social Studies professors urging the adoption of his company's introductory history textbook. In jest he said "If you adopt my textbook, we'll buy enough liquor to keep the department drunk for a week! Eventually, the book was adopted, but for the right reasons, of course.

Shortly thereafter, Chairman Murray, a non-drinker who would *not* have appreciated the Knopf agent's with, departed for his annual Christmas trip to see relatives in Georgia. Each year, taking advantage of the chair's absence, the department held a Christmas party which included alcohol among the refreshments. Faculty members remember the 1962 Christmas party as a bountiful feast where the alcohol flowed a bit more freely than usual. Had the straight-laced chair been told of this event? Even worse, had it perhaps been suggested to him that enthusiastic faculty support for the Knopf text had been tied to a promise of liquor? Was the "lavish" Christmas party the result of this "bribe?" Would fearful faculty be dismissed from the University in a huge scandal?

At [sic] this line of speculation continued, part-time university administrator and political theory teacher Robert Williams chimed into the discussion. Williams knew the real purpose of the meeting, which had been disclosed to him, Murray, and a handful of other individuals who were told not to share the information. He pretended to reassure the nervous faculty. He said, "Oh, I'm sure it's *not* about that. If it were about that, President Leo Jenkins would be attending the meeting." (All the while Williams knew Jenkins *would* be there).

When 4:00 PM on the date arrived, the faculty walked into the dreaded meeting. Who should already be present but the ever-punctual Jenkins! Had the worst fears been realized? Chairman Murray immediately turned the meeting over to Jenkins. The tension in the room was palpable. But there was a great sigh of relief when the President stated that the meeting had been called to announce the split of the department into several units: political science, history, and sociology. Economics would be sent to the new School of Business. There would also be a new Philosophy Department. Jenkins stated that Dr. John Howell, a specialist in international relations, would chair the new Political Science Department. It would be up to Howell to decide who would move to the fledgling department. Thus was born the Department of Political Science. Its first home was the old Austin Building.

Howell, an Alabamian with a PhD from Duke, had been on the Social Studies staff since 1957. For someone who would serve as East Carolina's Chancellor years later, Howell's initial introduction to what was East Carolina College approached the perfunctory. He received a phone call from East Carolina College president John Messick in the late summer of 1957. Messick, who reached Howell in Memphis, described the position and stated a salary figure. Howell told Messick that he was interested in the appointment and would mail his credentials. Messick immediately responded, "I called the graduate director in political science at Duke University, described the job, and asked if he could recommend someone. He recommended you and I am offering the job to you. I would like your response to the offer."

Howell asked for a day to decide as he was unfamiliar with East Carolina. However, a friend from Tarboro, North Carolina who taught at Memphis State knew historians Joe and Lala Steelman who were on the East Carolina history faculty. He said they seemed to like ECU and Greenville. Howell called Messick to accept the offer.

Now, back to the autumn of 1962, when Jenkins had quietly approached Howell about the impending split of the Social Sciences department and asked him if he would chair a new department of History and government. Howell responded that he would prefer to head a separate department of government to be called Political Science, which by then had become the more usual designation. After checking with his right hand administrator Dean Robert Holt, Jenkins agreed to establish separate History and Political Science departments in 1963.

From the Social Studies Department, Howell selected Robert Williams (the part-time administrator mentioned above), Kathleen Stokes, and Herbert Carlton. Professor Stokes had been teaching a full-time load of government courses. Professor Carlton handled teacher-training programs in social studies. John Howell remarks to this day that the procedures were very casual at the time. He did not remember any formal letters of transfer or appointment. Two other faculty members were hired by telephone from the outside although they did, subsequently, receive letters of appointment.

Howell's task was to build the department. Having started out with six faculty members, Political Science grew rapidly. Howell preferred to reach decisions informally and by consensus. Carlton states that a group of faculty might be enjoying a snack when a subject relating to departmental policy would come up. After a few minutes of discussion Howell would say, "Well, we seem to have a consensus on this. Why don't we start doing it?" This was an effective as well as popular style. Howell recalled that he eventually received a memo from Dean Robert Holt stating, "We haven't been receiving minutes of your faculty meetings." Afterward, he felt an obligation to hold occasional formal meetings with brief notes.¹

Chairman Howell made many wise hiring decisions, but one of the most noteworthy was the appointment of John East in 1965. For many years, East was the only admitted Republican in the department. An enthusiastic conservative, East was a popular professor with students of all political persuasions. He and Herb Carlton made certain that their students received full exposure to the conservative and liberal perspectives by team teaching a course. When East entered the classroom at the midpoint of the semester, he would begin by telling students that "Now, the

¹ In 1966 Howell left the department for full time administrative duties as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. He returned full time to the department in 1979-1981 after which he served as university chancellor from 1982 to 1987.

truth squad is here.” He ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 1966 and for North Carolina Secretary of State in 1968, a time in which few Republicans were elected to public office in the Tar Heel State. But in 1980, East was swept into office by the Reagan Revolution, defeating ECU alumnus and former trustee Robert Morgan for a U.S. Senate seat. East resigned from his faculty position to serve in the Senate until his death in 1986. For years East had been confined to a wheelchair as a result of contracting polio while serving with the United States in the U.S. Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune. It is interesting to note that ECU’s Brewster Building was constructed to be handicapped-accessible because of East’s involvement in the original design.

William Troutman, a former professor at Appalachian State University and Atlantic Christian College, had also been recruited by Howell. Troutman remains, by far, the longest serving chair in the history of the department (1966-1979). The Troutman administration saw substantial growth in the undergraduate program. He was an enthusiastic supporter of expanding departmental offerings on the graduate level and looked toward the development of a PhD program. Although the department was unable to establish a PhD program, graduate programs expanded rapidly. Troutman, along with Larry Hough and Oral Parks, were among the founders of the North Carolina Political Science Association. In the early 1980s, the Association’s journal was published at ECU under the title of *Politics and Policy: The Journal of the North Carolina Political Science Association*.

A moderately-sized but dynamic MA program developed. Professors J. G. Kim and H. A. I. Sugg were major builders of the graduate programs, which were extended to off-campus facilities on military bases at Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point, and Fayetteville. With a major push from Dr. Young-dahl Song, the department gradually broadened its focus to the field of public administration. Initially, a Master of Science in Administrative Services (MSAS) program was established. During this time Political Science played a big role in an overseas program in Bonn, Germany. Because of the advocacy of Herb Carlton and others during this developmental period, a Bachelor of Science degree with a professional orientation was adopted.

Perhaps the most astute hiring decision made during the Troutman era was the choice of Cynthia Manning Smith as departmental secretary. The department was blessed over the years with superb secretarial staff (among them Gladys Howell, Faye Leggett, Diane Hankins, Claudette Fonseca, Sandy Winslow, Mimi McNairy, Gretchen Goodwin Skinner, Loretta Adams, Violet Blackwelder, Mary Hawkins, Patricia James, Becky Moye, Mary Harris, and Shelia Ellis), but Cindy has been incomparable, serving as the “real chair, since entering what she sometimes calls—in jest, ECU’s “political asylum” a quarter century ago. When the department nominated her in 1997 for a Chancellor’s Award for Excellence—a distinction she naturally won—we called her “the heart, soul, and mind of the department.” Truer words have never been uttered. No one could match Cindy’s loyalty and devotion to the department, its students, and its faculty.

After stepping down as chair in 1979, Troutman taught in the department for an additional nine years. Tinsley E. Yarbrough became acting chair in the 1979-80 academic year, and was then selected as the department’s unanimous choice for a full term. His operating style was informal as well as efficient. The Master of Public Administration (MPA) got underway during the Yarbrough administration with Professor Song continuing to play a leading role in nourishing the program. Yarbrough promoted the idea of the professor as a teacher-scholar, of

which he was a superb exemplar. He startled the department in the opening faculty meeting of the 1983-84 academic year when he announced his intention to step down at the end of the academic year. He remains with the department and was pressed into service for the spring semester of 1988. Yarbrough also served two eventful years as Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (1994-1996). He was named Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor in 1995. In 2001, Yarbrough, one of the most eminent scholars ever nurtured at ECU, was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Research and Creative Activity and designated Distinguished Research Professor of Political Science. Among his other achievements are Phi Kappa Phi Southeastern Outstanding Scholar Award (1997) and the Silver Gavel Award from the American Bar Association for the book *Judge Frank Johnson and Human Rights in Alabama*. Other outstanding and favorably reviewed university press books by this distinguished judicial scholar include: *John Marshall Harlan: Great Dissenter of the Warren Court* (1992); *Judicial Enigma: The First Justice Harlan* (1995); *Mr. Justice Black and His Critics* (1988); *The Rehnquist Court and the Constitution* (2000); and *The Burger Court: Justices, Rulings, and Legacy* (2000).

In the spring of 1984 Maurice D. Simon was recruited from UNC Greensboro to serve as chair. Simon pursued several goals. One was to promote an increase in departmental research output. Also, he was a dynamic exponent of departmental and university outreach from the community level to international contacts. Being an authority on Poland, he was especially active in advancing contacts in that country, this at a time when it was still operating under the Communist system. Simon promoted seminar and guest speaker programs to broaden the horizons of students. He stepped down at the end of 1987 to administer the university's new international affairs office and its various programs.²

Robert J. Thompson, who had joined the department in 1981, was selected chair. During the Thompson administration there was a major reorganization in the M.P.A. program. This resulted in a more focused, professionally-oriented program designed to win national accreditation. The goal was achieved under MPA Director William R. Mangun, a scholar as well as an administrator, whose publications include *Managing the Environmental Crisis* (second edition, 1999) and *Public Policy Issues in Wildlife Management* (1991). Thompson, like his predecessors, promoted the "teacher-scholar" professional model. He maintained a strong interest in undergraduate teaching and expanded course offerings. During the last year of his chairmanship, Thompson was also working full time as the interim director of Planning and Institutional Research. He was the first chair since Howell to serve as a departmental administrator and university administrator at the same time. After the 1992-93 academic year, Thompson took leave from the department to serve on a full-time basis in his new administrative position. In March 2001, Thompson became Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Before joining the department as chair in 1993, David Conradt had taught and served as graduate director at the University of Florida for twenty years. Conradt came to East Carolina after having established a reputation as one of the top U.S. experts on German government and politics. His noteworthy scholarly work includes *Germany's New Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1990s* (1995), *The German Polity* (in its seventh edition in 2001), and *Power Shift in*

² Simon later returned to the department where he served as director of undergraduate studies.

Germany (2000). During his tenure as chair (1993-1998) the department put a major emphasis on establishing and maintaining regular communications with past graduates through a departmental newsletter. Secondly, a new emphasis was placed on attracting extramural funding. During Conradt's chairmanship, the MPA program was officially accredited (in 1994) for a seven-year period.

Richard Kearney was a graduate director and institute director at the University of Connecticut when recruited by East Carolina in 1998. Kearney, a scholar in public administration and state and local politics, stressed faculty research productivity and grants and external funding at East Carolina. Among Kearney's publications are *State and Local Government* (published in its fifth edition in 2002), *Public Personnel Administration: Problems and Prospects* (in its fourth edition in 2002), and *Labor Relations in the Public Sector* (in the third edition in 2000). Financial contributions from alumni and friends of the department reached a new high as did the level of external grant funding. In 1998, alumnus Mitchell Hunt endowed a \$10,000 scholarship for graduating seniors with demonstrated writing skills in 1998. And in 2000, the John East Scholarship was endowed with a major gift from Wayne and Sherry Holloman, ECU alumni and friends of the department and the university.³ Carmine Scavo was appointed director of the MPA program in 1997 following interim appointments of Dr. Peter Haas and Dr. Bonnie Mani, and in 2001, the MPA program was awarded NASPAA reaccreditation for a second seven-year period.

Despite humble and uncertain beginnings, the Department of Political Science is today a vital, vibrant contributor to graduate and undergraduate education in the College of Arts and Sciences. Its faculty have attained record levels of research productivity while consistently fostering strong, cordial, and open relationships with students. It is interesting to note that three ECU political scientists returned to their alma mater to teach: Herb Carlton (who taught at ECU for 36 years), Bonnie Mani, and Caroline Orth. Political Science faculty have garnered the top university teaching awards, including the Robert L. Jones Alumni Teaching Award (Herb Carlton, 1986 and Tinsley Yarbrough, 1988) and the Robert and Lina Mays Award for Teaching Excellence (Tom Eamon, 1987). With new teacher-scholars coming aboard in 2001 and beyond, the department's future appears bright, indeed.

³ The scholarship is awarded to a top student majoring in political science with an interest in public service to eastern North Carolina.