



**SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT
IN
POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council
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CONTENT

	Page No
Foreword	II
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Subject Benchmark Statement – Scope and Purpose	1
1.2 Nature and Extent of the Subject	1
2 Subject Aims	3
3 Subject Knowledge and Understanding	3
4 Skills and Attitudes	4
4.1 Generic Skills	4
4.2 Subject Specific Skills	5
4.3 Attitudes	5
5 Teaching and Learning Strategies	5
6 Assessment Strategies	6
7 Maintaining Standards	6
8 Student Attainment and Benchmarking Level	6
9 Annexes	8

FOREWORD

The work in connection with the development of Subject Benchmark Statements was begun in August 2003 as a part of the overall quality assurance framework that supports academic standards and the furtherance and dissemination of good practice in Universities in Sri Lanka. Subject Benchmark Statements will support and promote quality and standards by:

- Providing universities with a common and explicit reference point for internal and external programme approval and review;
- Guiding and promoting curriculum development, especially in new departments and new universities, and in other institutions of higher education;
- Evolving over time to take account of changes and innovations that reflect subject development and new expectations;
- Providing an authoritative and widely recognized statement of expectations of what is expected of a graduate in a specific (or designated) subject area in a form readily accessible to students, employers and others with a stake in higher education;
- Providing a clear and transparent reference point for External Examiners;
- Assisting international comparison and competitiveness of higher education awards and student achievement.

SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT

POLITICAL SCIENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Subject Benchmark Statement – Scope and Purpose

Subject benchmark statements are a means of describing the nature and characteristics of programs in a specific subject for the academic community. They also serve to convey the general expectations with regard to the standards of the qualifications at a given level, and state the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate. They serve as guidelines for those engaged in developing curricula by setting the minimum coverage and standards required. The statement also provides reference points for the periodic evaluation of programs for quality assurance purposes and helps in the comparison of programs between different educational institutions.

1.2 Nature and Extent of the Subject

Politics is a process emerging in social situations where groups make collective decisions. What make these collective decisions political is their collective character, affecting and committing those who belong to the group. However, the discipline of political science is concerned with politics of governments of nation state and the community of states not of the governments of private sphere or of the lesser organizations.

Political Science is the social science that studies the philosophies, theories, structures, processes and functions relating to these governing institutions of the state. Although political science is a late arrival in terms of social sciences the study of politics is first found in ancient Greece and ancient India. Hence it has a long tradition of adopting philosophically and historically developed approaches as well as scientifically tested principles within its reach. Over the long history of existence of systematic knowledge in politics, the discipline of political science has evolved through various theories, concepts and approaches that still form the core of the discipline. The discipline has a clear set of antecedents such as moral philosophy, political philosophy, political economy, history, and other fields concerned with normative determinations of what ought to be and with deducing the characteristics and functions of the ideal state.

In ancient Greece the objective of studying politics had been identified as the promotion of political justice in society. This has not been changed drastically even in the era of globalization though the discipline attempts to stay aloof from value goals in favor of applying analytical tools to state conditions rather than preferences.

Since the modern state is a territorial organization that enjoys the monopoly of exercising violence over the individuals and the groups live in its territory, politics of modern state has the capacity of interfering in almost all aspects of human living. As such the demarcation of the scope of political science is not easy as it

encompasses many areas of human decision making. However over the long evolution the political science discipline has developed core subjects of its own in order to be unique and distinct among other social sciences.

The core subject area begins with philosophy of politics as the human political phenomena have to be looked first from the human ethical standards rather than scientific methods which cannot be applied in every situation. The other core subjects within the discipline are study of state and government, political theory, political concepts and ideologies, comparative government and politics, public opinion, pressure group politics, political parties, the study of constitutions, public administration, local government, civics and citizenship, international relations and international organization.

The discipline of political science has been undergoing a transformation in the recent years. It has to accommodate new areas in response to the emerging new public policy focuses that has been taken place in government and politics. The public policy making has accommodated new areas such as space research, global environment, global economy, global arms race, transnational corporations, public resource management, development administration, comparative public policy, conflict management and resolution, peace building, human security, human rights, gender, science & technology etc. In this context the discipline has found several sub-fields with more practical focuses and thereby expanding its philosophical base. The identification of core subject areas of the discipline points to what constitute the political science undergraduate teaching programme. The adjacent areas of the subject highlight the importance of self-education by the undergraduates in order to keep abreast with the rapidly changing political environment around them.

Being a social science the discipline focuses on empirical and operational research in order to understand political phenomena with testable hypotheses. The field-research by individual students and group of students and several types of class room activities can be used to help them to engage in application of the theoretical knowledge. In this regard accommodation of the subject areas which have been identified as sub-fields of the discipline could be useful. Further it can be used to provide the students an opportunity to acquire practical skills which may be useful for them when they would be integrated in to the larger society.

At the university level political science teaching has also undergone a change of approach. The emphasis followed from 'an understanding of the political science as one component of a broader social science education rather than as pre-vocational training' has changed. Now the general trend is identifying the purpose of studying political science is not to produce political science graduate students who comprehend and deal with the political world only, but to enable them to be employed in the public, private or non-profit sectors after graduation. As such the university level syllabi should be prepared enabling the students to acquire academic abilities as well as skills that develop dynamic personalities fitting to the ever changing needs of the institutional and societal environment.

Currently, political science is taught in two levels in the Universities in Sri Lanka, namely, a 3-year general degree programme and 4-year special degree programme with compulsory and elective courses. In several Universities the subject is offered

by separate political science departments. However some universities still offer the subject under Departments of Economics. The benchmarking of political science should focus on the standard setting to be applied to the courses offered for 3-year and 4-year degree courses. However this must not interpret that this is to lay down any restrictive framework for the university level academic pursuit. It is worth noting here that the present state of the discipline is the result of curiosity, free inquiry and debate and its future will be driven by the same force.

2. SUBJECT AIMS

The main aims of a degree programme in or including political science are:

- Assist students to gain knowledge and theoretical understanding in core subject areas within the discipline of Political Science.
- Develop in students the ability to understand politics and governance processes in modern state from philosophical, theoretical, historical, institutional, comparative and country-specific perspectives
- Encourage students to improve their analytical skills in order to develop their own frameworks to understand critically and independently the real world political events, ideas and institutions
- To cultivate among students knowledge, awareness and consciousness to be model citizens in a democratic society based on values of pluralism, multiculturalism and tolerance
- Encourage students to engage in social science research to understand political phenomena and search for ways and means to promote democratic governance in society
- Help students to acquire cognitive abilities as well as practical skills that could be transferred into their work environment when engage in employment and self-employment
- Promote interest among students in life-long education, particularly post-graduate education

3. SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

To achieve above aims any degree programme in Political Science or including Political Science as a subject normally should comprise the following areas:

- Political theory and concepts
- Political ideology and philosophy
- State, Society and Government
- Constitutions and classification of constitutions
- Political System and government of the country
- Theory and practice of public administration
- Theory and practice of public policy and governance
- International Relations and organizations
- Comparative politics and government
- Political parties and party systems
- Public opinion and pressure group

The core-curriculum should comprise the majority of the course units covering the above areas or courses developed under thematic areas related to these core subjects. The content of the courses will be prepared to suit the nature and the objective of the particular degree programme. The programme can incorporate courses related to the sub-fields of the discipline in order to improve the relevance of the graduates. The graduates having studied a programme comprising a majority of these core courses are capable of teaching the subject in universities, schools and engage in research, consultancy and professional work in multi level governance structures, International Organizations, private and non-profit sector organizations.

The programme should include

- Courses based on the core subjects of political science providing both broad-based and in-depth knowledge of the discipline
- Courses from the sub-fields enabling the application of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches
- Courses providing the knowledge on fundamental principles, theories and concepts that explain political phenomena
- Courses familiarizing with the analytical and explanatory methods applying to the examination of constitutions, political systems, governmental structures and the political processes attached to each of them
- Courses highlighting the historical and current contribution of the discipline to the development of human civilization based on justice, rule of law, pluralism, human security and good governance
- Courses facilitating engagement in social science research focusing on political phenomena
- Courses enabling the graduates to acquire life skills which enable them to integrate into the mainstream of society

4. SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

There is a range of skills and attitudes, which a Political Science graduate will have acquired during the programme of study. These are:

- Generic Skills
- Graduate or Key Skills
- Attitudes

4.1 Generic Skills

Graduate in political science should be able to:

- Gather, organize and deploy evidence, data and information from variety of secondary and primary sources
- Identify, investigate, analyze, formulate and advocate solutions to problems
- Construct reasoned argument, synthesize relevant information and exercise critical judgment
- Manage their own learning-self critically
- Recognize the importance of ethical requirements of study which requires critical and reflective use of information and communications technology in the learning process

4.2 Graduate or Key Skills

Graduates in political science should be able to:

- Understand the nature and significance of politics in human society
- Apply concepts, theories and methods used in the study of political science to the analysis of political ideas, institutions and practices
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different political systems, the nature and distribution of power in them, the social, economic, historical and cultural contexts within which they operate, and the inter-relationship between them

4.3 Attitudes

Graduate in political science should have

- Proactive attitudes to face with the life situations and problems
- Ethical attitudes to promote the idea of just society
- Dedication towards the protecting of diversity and plurality in human society
- Commitment towards an international order which promote good governance and human rights

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

The teaching programme should aim to equip the students with the subject knowledge and the skills appropriate to their chosen area of work. The learning process should be in an environment where the students take the lead in the search of knowledge and engage in problem solving exercises. The process should be aimed at the fostering of enthusiasm among the students for the subject and encouraging them to take the responsibility for deep learning by themselves.

The teaching and learning can be developed combining the appropriate techniques appeared below:

- Lectures, Seminars, workshops with audio-visual aids
- Large or Small Group or individual Presentations by the students
- Student-led and Tutor-led discussions and sessions
- Using module based or specially designed materials
- Critical reading of text books, documents, monographs, scholarly articles and the sources on the internet
- Projects, assignments and other self-directed studies
- Field Visits and Internships
- Meet political actors through field visits
- Tutor-student interactions including face to face communication
- Communication via information technology
- Publication of student led-magazines and news bulletins

The above list is not prescriptive. The accommodation of these strategies will differ from course to course and appropriate to the availability of resources and institutional support.

6. ASSESSMENT METHODS

The assessment strategies should be designed to match the intended learning outcomes. These strategies should aim to test subject knowledge; skills acquired and set the standards of the programme, enabling the possible employers to assess the level of knowledge acquired by the graduates.

The assessment methods may include:

- Closed and/or Open Book Examinations
- Examination based on questions which requires descriptive and analytical answers
- Examinations based on MCQ papers
- Essays, Assignments, Reports, Projects or Dissertations
- Case Study Writings
- Oral Presentations or Viva-voce
- Work Experience Reports
- Book Reviews and Reaction Papers

The applicability of above assessment methods depend on the appropriateness to the courses. Nevertheless the End-Semester Examinations and Continuous Assessments are preferred as the basic standards. Wherever possible students should be given feedback on their progress and attainment.

7. MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS

The three skill areas identified above, namely, Generic skills; Graduate or Key Skills and attitudes would be the basis for evaluating the level of standards achieved by the graduates. They should be monitored by external reviews and interaction between Professional Associations.

8. STUDENT ATTAINMENT AND BENCH MARKING LEVELS

The Benchmarking of the subjects should be based on two levels, namely, Threshold Level (i.e. minimum acceptable knowledge and skill level in the areas specified in this statement) and Good Level (i.e. an excellent performance where graduates have demonstrated range of competencies and skills at an advanced level).

a) Threshold Level

Graduating students should be able to:

- Describe the nature and scope of politics; the key concepts, theories, methods and approaches employed in the study of politics
- Describe and illustrate politics and political phenomena; the terminology of political debate; the different political systems and their operation; the political behavior in different contextual settings; and the factors accounting for political change
- Describe the ways in which key concepts, theories and methods are used to analyze political ideas, institutions and behavior
- Describe and illustrate different interpretations of politics and events

- Have an ability to explain political phenomena and be able to explain conditions that determine them
- Have some understanding of ethical issues relating to politics and how they affect the society

b) Good Level

Graduating students should be able to:

- Describe the nature and scope of politics; the key concepts, theories, methods and approaches employed in the study of politics in a way that is methodological and critical
- Describe the ways in which key concepts, theories and methods are used to analyze political ideas, institutions and behavior in way that is well organized
- Describe critically different interpretations of politics and events
- Demonstrate the ability to use approaches in politics and to suggest lines of further investigation of political events
- Undertake independent research to solve problems on political phenomena
- Engage in independent academic writings on political phenomena

9. ANNEX1. MEMBERS OF THE BENCHMARK GROUP

Prof. A.M. Navaratne Bandara	University of Peradeniya
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