

THE ORGANIZATION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AT RUTGERS

AS I REMEMBER IT

Harvey Waterman

When I came to Rutgers in 1966 there were three political science departments on the New Brunswick campus, at Douglass College, Rutgers College and University College (the evening division). Douglass College had a faculty of six, led by Neil McDonald and including Jim Rosenau. It was the group that embraced the current trends in the discipline and was a nice place to be for a new faculty member. In the period immediately following my arrival a flurry of appointments brought Roy Licklider, Steve Salmore and Bob Kaufman and, briefly, Alan Wolfe, among others. We actually liked each other and remain friends, though Steve died and Alan has visited only a couple of times in the intervening years. One of the reasons for the success and collegiality of that small department was the benign chairmanship of Neil McDonald, a classic gentleman. Another was the mothering of its department secretary, the formidable Ruth Bennett, who told us which pediatrician to go to and which dentist to patronize and provided daughters to babysit our kids.

The Rutgers College department was dominated by a conservative group of men who more or less resisted new trends in the field and with whom the Douglass faculty members had minimal contact (Douglass discouraged cross-registration of students, which further alienated the groups.) The newer appointees at Rutgers, Ross Baker, Jerry Pomper, Gordon Schochet, Barbara Callaway and Dick Mansbach were themselves in an awkward relationship to their senior faculty members. Not long after the new Livingston College was created, intended to be a campus concerned with “urban” issues, and Pomper and Schochet escaped thereto, only to find themselves in a fairly conventional political science department surrounded by a quite radical faculty in neighboring departments and a college with a number of bizarre elements as the school tried with good will and bad judgment to respond to the rather electric atmosphere following the Newark riots of the late sixties.

These conservative faculty members, disrespectfully known as the seven dwarves, were, of course, seven individuals, but there were among them some rather sour and defensive and, indeed, misogynistic types and one rather flamboyant avatar of the Old Left who made faculty meetings more than a little “interesting”. Once the two most difficult personalities retired things settled down quite a bit.

Nevertheless, the relative isolation of the (now) four departments from one another did not promote harmony—though one might argue that less isolation might well, at that point, have been worse. One of the consequences of the separate colleges was to limit the choices of undergraduates, constrained by local—and different—rules concerning majors and course selection. Another was that there was no cooperation in the selection of new faculty appointees, so there could be no coordinated graduate program—a problem in all fields at Rutgers. This led to a push by the university to consolidate the fields administratively by the creation of entities called “New Brunswick Departments”. The chairs of the New Brunswick Department of Political Science, Jim Rosenau and Jerry Pomper, faced the prospect of meetings that brought together the warring factions to make decisions about faculty

appointments and promotions and about curriculum. Since a number of the participants were, shall we say, rather impatient with one another, these produced occasions that might have been amusing to an outsider but no fun for those in the room. It became clear that the university would have to move toward a more unified set of departments and of rules and procedures along the lines of what were thought of as “normal” universities. The process of doing so was the cause of a good bit of controversy, especially on the part of alumni of Douglass College and some faculty members whose focus was primarily on undergraduate education and whose loyalties were to the colleges. Indeed, the final report of the so-called Pomper Committee that led to a recommendation for reorganization was made possible by the fortuitous absence of the Dean of Douglass College from the meeting.

The reorganization process of 1981-83 created a single department of political science within the new Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The colleges (that is, Rutgers, Douglass, Livingston and University) retained some of their earlier functions, but lost control over faculty hiring and the curricula in the departments. Students could express preferences for certain colleges, but the major was common for all. Graduate programs now had a single base of operations and could be taken into account in hiring decisions in a more coherent way. Shortly after the reorganization was put in place Governor Kean committed a lot of money to the university, some of which went to graduate fellowships, some to attracting Roberta Sigel to the department, further improving the prospect of strong graduate programs. These changes contributed significantly to attracting excellent new faculty members and students and to the steady improvement in quality experienced by the department. No doubt something was lost, especially at Douglass, where the engagement of faculty members with the college quickly faded, but political science at Rutgers could now be perceived by others as the real thing.

For all that much has happened and much changed in the subsequent decades, nothing has been as important to the Department of Political Science as the changes made in the 1980s and the developments that followed directly upon them.