

Learning Objectives for the Political Science major

The Department of Political Science seeks to help students recognize the role that politics plays, and has played, in much of human society. The department's goal is that students in political science courses—and particularly those who major in political science—develop an understanding of the who, why, and how of politics. The department recognizes the value of developing such an understanding through the study of modern and historical political theory; of local, state, and federal realms within the United States; of the political systems of different countries; of international relations among states; of public policy development; and of formalized modeling of political interactions. The department also recognizes that the study of political dynamics can and should include a focus on government itself but should also include the politics of race, class, sexuality, and other forms and intersections of marginalization, especially in regard to interactions among actors who have no official roles in government but play crucial roles in governance at all levels.

The Department has identified several objectives for what we hope students will learn by taking political science courses and by majoring in political science. Students can expect each political science course to help them make progress toward one or more of these learning objectives. Political science majors can expect and should aspire to make progress on most or all of the following objectives in completing their degree.

Departmental Learning Objectives

1. Recognize and describe major variations in political institutions and policy processes
 - including variation over time among democracies, between democratic and non-democratic systems, across issue areas within countries, and across levels of governance from local contexts to the global arena.
2. Recognize the roles played by various actors, groups, and movements in political and cultural processes
 - including the social and material power resources to which they may have access, and factors that advantage certain social groups and exclude or marginalize others.
3. Identify the defining principles of major political ideologies and apply their perspectives to political issues
 - including liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, etc.
4. Describe how power, agency, and authority are constituted, disseminated, and exercised
 - including similarities and differences within and across groups, countries, and in the international arena.
5. Analyze, interpret, and explain why and how political processes or policy outcomes vary
 - including across countries, policy realms, and time.
6. Construct a sustained argument evaluating a theoretical claim against alternative theoretical traditions or perspectives and appropriate evidence
 - including in a written paper, oral presentation, or other creative output.
7. Identify and describe several analytical methods that political scientists use to study political phenomena.
8. Demonstrate engagement with social and political issues
 - including through politically-related employment or internships, regular critical reading about current events, or other forms of policy and political experience.
9. Produce clear and professional verbal and written communication
 - including in the form of policy memos, individual or collective presentations, or research papers.