

Learning Goals and Outcomes in Political Science and International Relations

Political Science is a diverse discipline but a coherent one. The diversity is partially indicated by the division of the discipline into several major sub-fields. Most of Carleton's Political Science courses belong predominantly, though not always exclusively, to American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations and World Politics, or Political Philosophy. The coherence of the discipline is seen partly in the overlap and commonality of methods—the same qualitative and quantitative methods lend themselves to the study of American Politics, Comparative Politics, and International Relations and World Politics—but mostly in the shared if broad substantive content of our courses: whatever their sub-field or specific focus, all of our courses aim to provide understanding of some part of the vast of the political. There is no consensus in the discipline about how best to define the political. Yet this lack and the consequent ongoing conversation among sub-fields and among competing methodologies keep the character of the discipline a live issue for students and faculty. Successful Political Science students acquire knowledge of multiple sub-fields, employ multiple methods, and reflect meaningfully on the character of politics in its vast range of expressions.

Because the study of Political Science educates students in citizenship, the department is mindful of its obligations to both majors and non-majors. To *all of our students*, majors and non-majors alike, the faculty seeks to convey the knowledge, the analytical tools, and the breadth of vision and respect for competing viewpoints necessary for informed and effective citizenship. We also seek to promote the development of intellectual and communication skills more generally. To *majors* we aim to provide, additionally, an understanding of Political Science as a discipline—including both a body of learning and the ability to use the discipline's tools—sufficient to qualify as a level of mastery appropriate to an undergraduate liberal arts major and to prepare them for further related endeavors, whether graduate study or serious work in politics or public policy, or simply more active citizenship. Department majors must opt for one of two “tracks”: the Political Science track or the Political Science/International Relations track. Although their requirements vary in certain ways, the two tracks are more alike than unlike and are oriented toward the same basic goals.

These goals are:

- Knowledge and analytic proficiency across a variety of sub-fields. Students following the Political Science track should acquire this knowledge and proficiency in all four sub-fields; students following the Political Science/International Relations track should acquire knowledge and proficiency in three of the four sub-fields.
- Understanding of and proficiency in a variety of investigative and analytic methodologies. Majors should be able to comprehend and evaluate the use of a wide variety of the sophisticated methodologies used by political scientists. They should also be able to: employ on their own a variety of scientific methods; use empirical data in the construction of arguments; and test claims and hypotheses made by others.
- The ability to construct and articulate clearly well reasoned arguments, grounded in evidence, in multiple sub-fields. Some of these arguments will be about political phenomena directly, others will be about various arguments or texts authored by scholars.
- The ability to perform and present original research. Majors should demonstrate the ability to conceive of and execute a major research project. They should show proficiency in analyzing and interpreting their findings. They should be able to present their research and analysis clearly both in writing and orally.

Progress toward each of these goals is assessed in the following ways:

- Majors opting for the Political Science track are required to take four “core courses” in American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations and World Politics, and Political Philosophy. Majors opting for the Political Science/International Relations track are required to take three of these courses. Each of these courses demands demonstration of the foundational knowledge and analytic approaches of their respective sub-fields. These are assessed through a variety of mechanisms, especially the writing of analytic and interpretive papers.
- Majors are required to take a statistics course (MATH 115 or 215) and the department’s own methods course (POSC 230). Success is assessed through a multitude of assignments that require students to demonstrate understanding and sometimes to employ a variety of sophisticated social science methods.
- Courses at all levels demand the writing of papers that present well reasoned arguments grounded in evidence. These papers are assessed for their rigor, clarity, and understanding of the relevant material. Some courses also include oral presentations.
- Majors are required to take at least one—in the case of the POSC/IR track, two—300-level seminars in which they write an original, twenty page research paper. This paper later becomes the basis of their comps projects, which entail the further development and refinement (and occasionally the reconfiguring) of that original research paper. In addition to the comps paper, majors also must produce a comps poster and present their work orally to all department faculty at a poster session.

Political Science/International Relations Comprehensive Project Assessment Tool

Student Number: _____

Faculty Supervisor: _____

Project component	Degree to which project "Meets Department Expectations"				
	Minimally (1)	(2)	Competently (3)	(4)	Exceeds (5)
Asks an interesting or original question					
Displays command of the relevant literature					
Develops an effective research design					
Implements an appropriate methodology (In instances where multiple methodologies were employed score each independently)					
Interpretive Textual Analysis					
Qualitative Case Study					
Policy Analytic/Evaluative					
Quantitative and/or Statistical					
Formal/Computational Models					
Discerns and explains substantive implications					
Communicates clearly in writing					
Communicates clearly in oral presentation					
Cites sources appropriately					

- Did this project:
- A) Generally follow the topic of a seminar paper
 - B) Represent a new topic developed at the comps stage

[Note: This assessment is for internal departmental use and will not be shared with students. Expectations scores do not necessarily equate to a grade scale. The bulk of students should fall in the 2 to 4 range. Please be sure to submit a form for each student that you supervised]