

Learning Goals and Assessment Instruments for the Political Economy Concentration (POEC)

The political economy concentration provides students with knowledge about how the complex institutions of the global and national economy work in comparative political and sociological contexts. At the same time, course work in the concentration emphasizes the ability of students to critically analyze what they have learned by transforming that knowledge through further inquiry in written work, sustained research, and discourse.

Through their course work primarily in the social sciences of economics, political science, and sociology, students engage in much sustained inquiry into the ways in which political and economic institutions interact. This is evident in the emphasis given to instruction in public policy courses, most notably the required “gateway” POSC 265 Politics of Global Economic Relations and the middle-division requirements and electives in American public policy. The required capstone seminar often deals with questions of public policy as well.

In this way, the political economy concentration is most useful for students wishing to pursue graduate training in public policy, business, and law. These are all professional areas in which training across the social sciences is especially relevant.

Learning Goals of POEC

The primary learning goals of the political economy concentration involve cross-cutting competencies including areas of knowledge, critical thinking, and skills of expression such as writing and oral-presentation ability. These competencies are best understood as a five-fold set of learning goals:

- An ability to write about political economy using quantitative evidence and reasoning.
- An ability to understand abstract theory and apply empirical data to test hypotheses flowing from such theory.
- The acquisition of knowledge concerning both the global and the U.S. political economy, specifically how complex institutions work and how they change over time and across regions of the world.
- An ability to bring insights from distinct social sciences to bear on the understanding and analysis of political economic issues.
- An ability to orally present one’s own research on political economy to an audience of peers.

Assessment of Learning Goals

Assessment of the concentration’s learning goals relies primarily on evaluative instruments contained within the course work. Some attention in this section will also be given to how the structure of the concentration enables the learning goals listed above.

(1) Writing with quantitative evidence and reasoning

Students in the concentration write extensively across the curriculum. This is especially evident in the history, public policy, upper-level elective, and seminar requirements, which all contain extensive writing requirements. A notable portion of this writing employs quantitative analysis and formal models, the latter being most evident in the economics courses in macroeconomics, microeconomics, trade, finance,

development, and the economics of the public sector. The gateway POSC 265 and 263 European Political Economy, which is offered in years POSC 265 is not available, employ training in statistical social science methods to train all concentrators to use these techniques in their research and in their written and oral presentations of their analysis.

(2) Theoretical understanding and hypothesis-driven testing

Students in the concentration are exposed to much abstract theory and they are encouraged to test these theories through hypothesis-driven analysis. This is true in both the required as well as the elective courses in the concentration. The gateway course provides training in hypothesis-testing, data collection, and statistical analysis in addition to what majors in the social sciences normally get. The capstone seminar plays a special role as well, as it intends to apply student knowledge in a variety of areas under the rubric of classic questions in political economy inspired by the thinking of canonical writers such as Marx, Weber, Schumpeter, and Smith. The capstone seminar requires a significant paper based on student research which, in most cases, animates a key question of political economy emanating from the theoretical debates in the field. All four versions of the capstone require that this paper focus on a hypothesis developed by the student and tested using empirical data.

(3) Global knowledge of political economy

Because the concentration involves the international as well as the U.S. political economy, students must divide their middle-division and elective course choices between two areas: American Public Policy (APP) and World Trade and Development (WTD). These build on instruction in the gateway course, which incorporates the two areas. Students are then asked to “specialize” in one of these two areas by taking two of their electives in one of these areas and a single elective in the other area. Some emphasis is given, particularly in the WTD area, to expose students to the political economy of developing countries (e.g., ECON 240 and 241, POSC 322 and 362, SOAN 244 and 312). A list of courses with a focus on advanced capitalist countries is also available, including courses from three Carleton off-campus programs (e.g., ECON-Cambridge, POSC-Maastricht, and POSC-Beijing). The Carleton off-campus program in Washington, D.C. (POSC) supplements courses in the APP area during years it is offered.

(4) Cross-disciplinary learning within the social sciences

Instruction in POEC covers three social science disciplines: sociology, political science, and economics. Students are required to select electives from at least two of these disciplines. Because political science and economics courses are required, it is possible for a student to avoid sociology, though more courses are being offered in this discipline each year that satisfy elective requirements. SOAN 220 Class, Power, and Inequality in America was recently added to the list of APP middle-division requirements that satisfy the requisite in that area. In the capstone, students are expected to research and produce a significant paper. Students employ methods primarily from one discipline, but they are encouraged to show their awareness of how differences and similarities across the social sciences can produce new insights in data gathering and analysis.

(5) Public speaking

The ability to present one’s own research to an audience of peers has become a staple of the capstone seminar in the political economy concentration. POSC 360 and 364 both contain significant public speaking opportunities as well as instruction in the skill area. POSC 364 includes a two-week workshop on public speaking that doubles as a workshop on the substance of student research projects. POSC 360 involves a group presentation to a business client usually located in the Twin Cities. POSC 362 and 366 are also being designed to satisfy this learning goal.