

Career Options

- Blogger
- Business Manager
- Campaign Manager
- City Planner
- College Professor (Ph.D. required)
- Elected Official
- Environmental/Consumer/Public Interest Lawyer (J.D. required)
- Government Affairs Representative
- Government Lawyer (J.D. required)
- High School Teacher
- Issues Director
- Legislative Aide
- Multinational Marketing Analyst
- News Analyst
- Non-Governmental Organization Manager
- Peace Corps Volunteer
- Policy Administrator (M.P.A. preferred)
- Policy Analyst
- Public Affairs Reporter
- Public Opinion Analyst
- Regulatory Analyst
- Web Designer

What is Political Science?

“What is government itself,” asked James Madison, “but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?” As human nature is imperfect, so is government. Yet we demand that it be strong enough to protect us against foreign powers, domestic criminals, and all sorts of misfortunes. At the same time, we insist that it respect our rights and liberties, and not take so much of our property that we cannot use it to create a good and comfortable life for ourselves and our families. The never ending struggle to achieve a proper balance among these competing purposes helps to shape our lives, our communities, and our world. Political science provides students with an understanding of the multifaceted ideas, institutions, and processes of politics.

Occupational Opportunities

The study of politics helps students to acquire habits of critical and creative thinking about public issues, to enlarge their knowledge of their society and the world, and to hone their skills in analysis and communication. Those tools aid students who choose political careers, but they are also advantageous in business and the professions generally. In today’s economy, ambitious people must be intellectually nimble, for no longer can they assume that they will spend their entire career with one employer or even that they will always do the same kind of work. Political science offers students skills, knowledge, and habits of thought that will help them take advantage of unforeseen opportunities and adapt to unforeseen challenges.

Skills & Abilities

One of the critical abilities required in this field is being able to critically and creatively analyze and evaluate diverse issues, situations, or problems. Systematic thinking, adaptability, excellent communication skills and the ability to speak authoritatively are also valued. The skills developed in writing essays and research reports, evaluating the arguments of others and representing one’s point of view in classroom discussion lead to careers requiring clear thinking, well documented analysis, and forceful expression. These abilities may be applied to job responsibilities in a variety of sectors and occupational groups. For example, while an urban policy planner, an international lawyer, and a Foreign Service officer might have very different responsibilities, each might use the skills of interpreting issues and data and communicating these ideas persuasively on a daily basis. Those who work in this field tend to be people oriented with a focus on leading and influencing. A sampling of representative skills and abilities follows:

Research Methods

- Collects data
- Develops research designs and models
- Programs and systems analysis
- Utilizes survey research methods
- Compares/contrast ideas and information

Planning and Development

- Makes projections
- Organizes people/ideas
- Logistical thinking
- Conceptualizes/implements projects
- Decision-making

Analysis

- Interprets issues/data
- Understands complex problems
- Offers differing perspectives
- Synthesizes themes from complex issues

Communication

- Presents ideas and data clearly
- Influences/persuades people and groups
- Mediates/negotiates conflicts
- Public speaking
- Listens critically

Career Snapshot: Legislative Aide

While legislators assume ultimate responsibility for representing constituents and passing laws, they are heavily dependent on their aides and often delegate many tasks to them. Typically, aides have prior legislative experience as interns or legislative correspondents responding to mail inquiries or have worked in the legislator's campaign. Many aides find their work fast paced and exciting, and welcome the opportunity to impact politics or policy. Excellent communication skills and a capacity to analyze and synthesize material quickly are invaluable assets. Strong interpersonal skills are also essential, as aides are expected to work effectively with a wide variety of people, frequently in high pressure situations. For the most part, aides work in Washington, in state capitals, or in city halls. The position may be temporary, in the sense that it may lead to a permanent position in government, business or the non-profit sector; aide positions may also be long term, as the individual rises in responsibility and influence.

Career Snapshot: News Analysts

News Analysts gather information, prepare stories, and make broadcasts that inform the public about local, State, national, and international events; present points of view on current issues; and report on the actions of public officials, corporate executives, interest groups, and others who exercise power. They are also called newscasters or news anchors, who examine, interpret, and broadcast news received from various sources. News anchors present news stories and introduce videotaped news or live transmissions from on-the-scene reporters. News correspondents report on news occurring in the large U.S. and foreign cities where they are stationed.

Additional Resources

U.S. Government's Occupational Outlook Handbook
<http://bls.gov/oco>

American Political Science Association (APSA)
www.apsanet.org

American Academy of Political and Social Science
www.aapss.org

Institute for Humane Studies – supports students interested in principles of a free society. Stipends and intensive workshops are available.
www.TheIHS.org

Human Rights Tool
jobs.humanrightstools.org

Pre-Law Student Services: Internet Legal Research Group
www.ilrg.com/pre-law.html

Careers in Government - a clearinghouse of information, resources and jobs available in public sector organizations in America and abroad.
<http://careersingovernment.com>

Make the Difference
www.makingthedifference.org/federalcareers

U.S. Department of State Careers
careers.state.gov