



PRINCETON POLITICS

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

Information for Prospective Politics Majors

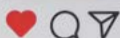


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📍 PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



Senior Thesis



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CHAIR'S WELCOME



Professor Kristopher Ramsay
Department Chair

Welcome to the Politics Department!

My role as Department Chair is to provide general oversight for all our tracks and policies, manage the Department's finances, and oversee all personnel (faculty, preceptors, staff).

As you will see, we have a lot of information we want to share with you about the Department. First, though, I would like to share with you three reasons why I think Politics would be a good choice of major:

1 With almost 60 faculty members, we are an unusually *large* department, both by Princeton standards and by standards of political science departments around the world. This might not seem like a very interesting or exciting fact, but from the point of view of an undergraduate it is actually quite significant. Because of our large size, our faculty/student ratios are very favorable for students, and many of our lectures and seminars are quite modest in size. I think you'll find you get a lot of attention from faculty and staff.

2 A second point concerns the *quality* of the department. Princeton Politics is consistently ranked among the top three departments in the country and is renowned for the deep and rigorous education we provide our students. Many faculty members are prominent voices in national and international conversations about pressing political issues, and all are leaders in their scholarly fields. I don't need to tell you that the world is facing several significant and complex political challenges. Political science seeks to understand the fundamental forces driving these phenomena – from persistent inequalities to the politics of climate change, to U.S. relations with China and Russia, to name just a few. Our faculty experts can help you think rigorously and knowledgeably about these and many other critical issues.

3 Finally, the third point I would note is about the intellectual *breadth* of our undergraduate curriculum. In a sense, our program is a microcosm of a liberal arts education in which you are encouraged to sample from several different approaches to knowledge, and to specialize to some extent in one or two of them. Our courses cover a wide spectrum of different styles of political science, from country and area-specific studies based on history and language; to sophisticated quantitative analysis; to economics-style formal modeling; to intellectual history and political philosophy – and everything in between. So if you're anything like me when I was your age – and you're still exploring what you want to do after graduation – studying political science in the Politics Department is a good way of keeping your options open while getting a rigorous education at the same time.



Thank you for your interest in the Department of Politics at Princeton University.

This brochure provides a range of information including, but not limited to, the following: prerequisites, course requirements, departmentals, independent work, and different tracks. We hope prospective Politics majors find this useful.

WHY STUDY POLITICS?

What will you learn as a Politics major?

At the most basic level, studying Politics offers a deeper and more systematic understanding of the contemporary world. Many of the world's most pressing challenges – from climate change and poverty to war and terrorism, as well as human rights and democratic governance – require solutions that are sensitive to politics. Without understanding local, national and global politics, economic analyses and scientific solutions are unlikely to succeed in addressing core problems. As leading researchers in their academic fields, our faculty apply sophisticated concepts and tools to better understand such problems, and they share their approaches and analyses in the classroom.

We offer courses that are geared towards providing students with concepts, tools, and methods that are useful for understanding a range of issues in (and beyond) political science. These tools will help you to analyze information about the political world in ways that are more sophisticated and nuanced (and ultimately more effective) than the analyses you might get from journalists, political pundits, and social media influencers. Moreover, these tools – including but not limited to normative frameworks, statistical techniques, game theory and qualitative analyses – are helpful not only in academic pursuits, but also in real world settings.

You will gain a deeper understanding, for instance, of how firms interact strategically with governments over environmental regulations; how race, gender and socioeconomic status influence voting and other political behaviors in the U.S. and abroad; how

geopolitical shifts affect the prospects for war, trade and global governance; or how political parties attempt to appeal to voters and interest groups. Many of our students apply their academic knowledge during their summer jobs, which have ranged from legal work for the American Civil Liberties Union or Human Rights Watch to internships with members of Congress, at the U.S. Department of State, or at the Belgrade Center for Security Policy. Many of our students also intern in the private sector, at places like Morgan Stanley. This diversity of options is also reflected in the post-graduation career paths of Politics majors; these have ranged from jobs at the State Department, the U.S. Court of Appeals, the Pew Research Center, and The Wilderness Society; to analyst careers at top investment banks and consulting firms; and to the pursuit of graduate degrees (including JDs, MPAs and PhDs).

What are differences between POL and SPIA?

While there is a fair degree of overlap between the Politics Department and the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA), there are two key differences. First, SPIA is much more focused on the policy side of things, whereas in the Politics Department policy implications are just one facet of our approach to studying politics. Second, SPIA is explicitly multi-disciplinary, and requires courses in several disciplines besides Politics; the Politics Department encourages you to explore a greater variety of topics and methods within Politics. Our curriculum also covers certain areas of the political science discipline that often receive less attention in the SPIA curriculum, such as political theory, law and judicial politics, and formal methods.



WHAT TO EXPECT AS A POLITICS MAJOR

To declare Politics as your major, prospective students must have taken for a grade any two Politics courses by the end of their sophomore Spring semester. Students may still choose Politics as their major even if they have not taken any 200-level introductory Politics courses. More information about [prerequisites](#) can be found on our website. [NOTE: Students who are unsure about declaring Politics or have not taken the required number of prerequisites should contact the Director of Undergraduate Studies.]

When signing into the Department, you will be asked to designate a primary field from the following: [American Politics](#), [Comparative Politics](#), [International Relations](#), or Political Theory. Please be aware that in choosing your primary field, you must be prepared to take three courses in that field and also will need to write your senior thesis on a topic related to that field. You may opt to change your primary field no later than January of junior year, however.

Politics majors must take eleven departmental courses, which includes two prerequisites and POL 300 (a required course that must be completed Fall semester of junior year).

Three courses must be in the primary field, two in a secondary field, and one in a tertiary field; referred to as the 3-2-1 field distribution requirement. Learn more about [departmentals and field distributions](#) on our website, where you can also view courses by subfield.

All Politics majors are also required to take a course that satisfies the [analytical requirement](#) no later than the Fall semester of junior year.

For the remaining three departmental courses, students may opt to take only Politics courses and/or seek approval for up to two cognates. [Cognates](#) are courses outside of the Department that are not cross-listed with Politics but have substantial political science content of more than 50%. To seek cognate approval, students must do so from the Cognate Approval Adviser, no later than the last day of classes within the semester they are taking the course. Courses taken in the First-year or Sophomore year cannot be designated as cognates.

Junior Independent Work

All Politics juniors are required to take POL 300 (Conducting Independent Research in Political Science) for departmental course credit. In addition, students will be assigned to a Junior Practicum in which they will both learn more about a specific topic and write a Research Prospectus (roughly 12-15 pages). Students will need to block out the time that POL 300 is offered in order to complete this requirement. The current [list of Junior Practicums](#) can be found on our website. Instructions on how to select practicum preferences will be sent soon after the sophomore declaration period and students will need to take their practicum selections into account when choosing the subsequent Fall semester courses.

In the Spring of junior year, every Politics major will write an independent research paper under the supervision of a faculty member. A Junior Paper (JP) is an essay of roughly 20-35 pages that is clearly focused on one — or a few related — political questions, problems, or issues. Some students may even opt to use their Research Prospectus as a starting point to expand upon ideas in their JP.

More information about the [Fall and Spring junior independent work](#) requirements can be found on our website.

Senior Thesis

During the senior year, each Politics major writes a thesis. The [Senior Thesis](#) is expected to make an original contribution to broader knowledge in the field in which the student is working. The length of a Senior Thesis is generally between 80-100 pages. Details surrounding the Senior Thesis requirement are available on our website.

Senior Thesis Poster Session

Seniors must also submit and present a professional poster describing their thesis research. Learn more about the [Senior Thesis Poster Session](#) requirement on our website.

HOW TO CHOOSE A PRIMARY FIELD

Once you have taken a few Politics courses, you will probably have an idea of what topics and world regions interest you most and are ready to choose a primary field.

The Department organizes its undergraduate teaching into four primary fields:

- **American Politics**

The AP sub-field focuses on the U.S political system and includes the study of the development of the American system of governance, American political institutions, the attitudes and behaviors of U.S. residents, and the relationship between institutions and people.

- **Comparative Politics**

The CP sub-field focuses on the similarities and differences in patterns of politics around the world with attention to what happens within states regarding representation, economic development, violence, and effective government.

- **International Relations**

The IR sub-field focuses on the study of politics among nations and non-state actors in world affairs including subjects such as the causes of war, the role of international law and institutions, economic interdependence, and cooperation to advance common goals for human rights and environmental protection.

- **Political Theory**

The PT sub-field focuses on the nature of justice, democracy, power, and other key ideas, and encourages students to develop frameworks for thinking evaluatively about pressing issues of politics and public policy of the day.

Politics majors will take at least three classes in their primary field (but can of course also take as many in another field). Additionally, the senior thesis will be written on a topic related to the student's primary field.

More information about each field can be found on our website.



WHY DEPARTMENTAL TRACKS MIGHT BE A GOOD FIT FOR YOU

The Department of Politics offers four optional [departmental tracks](#) that provide more focused guidance to students who wish to address themes that bridge the sub-fields.

The departmental tracks include the following:

- **American Ideas and Institutions**
- **Political Economy**
- **Quantitative and Analytical Political Science**
- **Race and Identity**

Only Politics majors are eligible to pursue these departmental tracks. Students should inform the Undergraduate Program Manager of their intention to pursue a track during the sophomore declaration period, and no later than February 1 of their junior year. Students who select a track will still need to fulfill the requirements of a Politics major. The tracks provide additional guidance for structuring the program of study as a Politics major, but students are not required to select a track to graduate with a degree in Politics. Courses may simultaneously fulfill both the track requirements and the Politics major requirements.

Details about the specific tracks, including prerequisites (*where applicable*) and the requirement to incorporate track content into the senior thesis, can be found on our website.

All courses that meet the requirements for each departmental track are listed on the respective departmental track webpage(s). Courses not listed on the departmental track webpage(s) can only count as satisfying the requirement of a track with the approval of the relevant track adviser.



Here you will find a brief synopsis about each track:

1 The **Track in American Ideas and Institutions** (AIIP) is available for students who have a particular interest in the three branches of the American government and the ideas, principles and laws that undergird them. This specialized track within the Politics major easily meshes with American Politics as a primary field. The track helps students navigate through this subject matter by specifying a set of courses that meet this requirement. Students are expected to take a total of five courses from the designated list, with at least one course in each of four topic areas: the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, the Constitution and the Courts, and American Political, Legal and Constitutional Thought. More information about the AIIP track can be found on our website.

2 The **Track in Political Economy** (PE) is a cross-disciplinary field for students who wish to further their understandings of social phenomena and individual behavior by combining the perspectives of its two constituent disciplines. The track allows and encourages students to use analytical tools from game theory, microeconomics and statistics to study political behavior, and to incorporate a thorough analysis of politics and collective decision-making into economic analysis. More information about the PE track, including prerequisites, can be found on our website.

3 The **Track in Quantitative and Analytical Political Science** (QAPS) is designed for students who wish to deepen their understanding of quantitative and analytical methods to study key questions in political science. More information about the QAPS track, including the prerequisite, can be found on our website.

4 The **Track in Race and Identity** (RI) provides students with a deeper understanding of the politics of race and identity. Completion of the track attests to a student having successfully taken a range of courses examining the role of race and identity in politics. The track offers courses dealing with moral, ethical, and legal issues relating to race and identity in the United States and around the world, such as hate speech, discrimination, and civil rights. This track also encompasses courses in International Relations and Comparative Politics focusing on human rights, ethnic conflict, and social movements. More information about the RI track can be found on our website.

Politics majors who successfully complete a track's requirements will receive a departmental attestation on Class Day. [Please note: The degree will read A.B. in Politics and, unlike University minors, the departmental track will not appear on the transcript.]



STUDY ABROAD



The Politics Department encourages students to consider [studying abroad](#) during the Spring semester of junior year and/or the Fall semester of their senior year in any of the programs approved by the Office of International Programs.

NOTE: Students may not study abroad during the Fall of junior year, when they are expected to be on campus to take POL 300.

Here are what we think are the top five reasons to study abroad:

- #5 One can only learn so much in the setting of a classroom.
The abroad experience is far more enriching;
- #4 Cultural immersion and experience;
- #3 Enhance second/third language;
- #2 Establish and maintain new collegial and professional networks;
- #1 Fun!



With pre-approval from the Study Abroad Adviser, a student may receive departmental credit for up to two, Politics-related courses in a given semester. More details about the Department's study abroad policy are available on our website.

Additional information about the Politics Undergraduate Program can be found on our Department website (<https://politics.princeton.edu/undergraduate>).

Feel free to contact Undergraduate Program Manager, Gayle Brodsky, with any questions via email (gbrodsky@princeton.edu) or by phone (609-258-4770).