WHY POLITICAL SCIENCE?

Political science is a broad and inclusive discipline. Some political scientists want to understand the political behavior of individuals – or why they act the way that they do. Others study institutions such as legislatures, courts, and bureaucracies. Still others examine the causes of war (and peace), foreign political systems, and how the public sector really works. This list does not exhaust the specialties and areas of interest included in this diverse discipline. Amid this diversity lies a common concern with anything “political,” including issues, political institutions and behavior, power, and public goods. All political scientists are concerned in one way or another with promoting the goal of understanding politics.

Political science is the only major where you can obtain practical knowledge and at the same time gain insights into the great issues of our age. What, for example, are the causes and institutional forces behind a conflict between the President and leaders of congress? If nations are threatening armed confrontation, what lies behind the conflict? What is the individual’s place in the political system? With a degree in political science you will be able to answer these and many other politically oriented questions. The knowledge and critical skills gained from the study of politics will enable you to be a more informed and rational citizen, a more constructive participant in public affairs, and a better professional.

Political science is actually one of the more popular majors for university students, as can be seen in the chart below:

![Pie chart](chart.png)
With a degree in political science your career prospects are extremely bright. A student who majors in political science acquires skills in writing, communications, and analysis that are critical to a liberal arts education. This prepares you for a variety of careers by emphasizing the acquisition of skills in communication and analysis; and by encouraging independent thought, tolerance, and informed interest in current affairs. The ability to define a problem and contribute to its solution is highly valued in a variety of employment settings, as are skills in writing, research, and evaluation. These are the very elements that characterize a liberal arts education.

Finally, as a political science major you can expect a reasonably bright future with regard to earning potential. While not at the top of the list of highest earning majors, political science ranks above the median in this regard. See the chart below.
CAREERS WITH A POLITICAL SCIENCE DEGREE

Today’s graduate can expect to change jobs a number of times, and even to have more than one career, and political science is excellent preparation for the flexibility required in this modern employment market. The most obvious career paths for someone with a political science degree are in law, government, political consultancy, and lobbying. In addition, political science helps with many private sector careers, because government affects so many activities, and the analytical and communication skills acquired with a political science degree are highly valued by virtually all employers.

More specifically, the study of political science provides background for careers in government at the local, state, and national levels; in international organizations; political campaigns; interest groups and lobbying organizations; journalism; business; and law. Below are data showing the wide variety of career tracks that political science majors have taken over the years and a description of several career tracks a political science major might take.

Federal Government
Numerous career opportunities exist in the federal government. These jobs are quite varied and include positions in federal departments, agencies, and commissions; the intelligence community; national defense; foreign service; the White House; the U.S. Congress; and the federal courts. Most jobs in the federal government offer competitive entry-level salaries, comprehensive benefit packages, and generous retirement programs for long-term employment. Current job listings, including summer employment and internships for students, are available at: https://www.usajobs.gov. Women and minority students may
also find internship opportunities through the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities’ National Internship Program, Minority Leaders Fellowship Program, and the Women in Public Policy Internship Program.

Local And State Governments
Much like the federal government, numerous career opportunities also exist in state government, especially for students interested in public policy and public administration. State government departments and agencies handle a number of important responsibilities that include public education; transportation; industrial development and urban planning; consumer protection; environmental protection; and various social services to assist those in need. Current job listings for positions in state and local government are available at: http://www.govjobs.net.

Nonprofits, Think Tanks, Interest Groups, And Lobbying Firms
There has been a dramatic increase in recent decades in the number of groups and organizations with an interest in government policy. Estimates indicate that there are now as many as 200,000 interest groups in the United States. Of these groups, about 50,000 organizations and businesses have lobbyists, with approximately 46,000 paid lobbyists who are officially registered in the fifty states. Although salaries can vary greatly from group to group and among positions based on experience, the median annual salary of a professional lobbyist in the United States is a respectable $100,206 (see http://www1.salary.com/Lobbyist-Salary.html). NGOs (non-governmental organizations) are often looking to hire skilled researchers and organizers as well. For opportunities, please visit http://www.idealist.org.

Businesses
Many political science majors have found employment in the business sector. For those interested in pursuing private entrepreneurship, a political science degree can prepare graduates for employment in large-scale businesses and small business. The interaction of private enterprise and government regulation is a reality in America, and very few majors explore this connection more closely than political science. For more information on business employment opportunities, please see the Wall Street Journal’s Career Journal at http://www.careerjournal.com or visit http://www.careers-inbusiness.com.

Campaign Management And Political Polling
Virtually all serious campaigns for federal, state, and even local public office now rely on a team of professionals. Campaign managers, pollsters, fundraisers and finance experts, speech-writers, press secretaries, mass marketing experts, and volunteer and grassroots coordinators are all a part of today’s modern campaign operation. Most campaign professionals are political science major who break into this field by first volunteering on a
campaign at the local or congressional level. In time, this can progress to a paid position with a statewide or national campaign. Volunteer work for a political party or interest group during an election can be another excellent way to enter the world of professional political consulting. For more information on a career in political consulting and polling, see the website for the American Association for Public Opinion Research at http://www.aapor.org and the website for the American Association of Political Consultants at http://www.theaapc.org.

**Law**

One of the most common employment paths for a political science major is a career in law. Indeed, political science is the most popular major of choice for applicants to the most select law schools in the United States. Many political science majors go on to become private practice attorneys; however, many others find work as attorneys for corporations, labor unions, trade associations, interest groups and NGOs, government, and even political campaigns. For more information about a career in law and the law school application process, please visit the website of the National Association for Law Placement at http://www.nalp.org.

**Journalism**

Political science can be a natural fit for a career in journalism given that news coverage is dominated by stories related to politics, public policy, and government. Indeed, many publications and networks are devoted exclusively to politics and government, such as Congressional Quarterly, the National Journal, and C-SPAN. For internship and job opportunities, please visit the website: http://www.journalismjobs.com.

**Education**

A degree in political science can be used for a career in education. In some states, middle-schools and high-schools are now required to offer classes in civics. Likewise, advanced placement classes in political science are now being offered in some high schools throughout the nation. Teacher qualifications require “field-specific” training and skills, making political science an ideal major for a job as a social studies or civics teacher. Students looking for a job as social studies teacher in North Carolina, should visit the website of the Department of Public Instruction at http://schooljobs.dpi.state.nc.us/Jobs/Search. Other teaching opportunities may be available through the Teach for America program (see http://www.teachforamerica.org). For a position as a college or university professor, a graduate education involving the completion of a doctorate degree is typically necessary. For information about earning a graduate degree in political science, the American Political Science Association provides information at http://www.apsanet.org/content_6911.cfm.
International Careers
Students with the desire to work abroad will find opportunities available with a degree in political science. Because almost all nations face social and economic challenges, knowledge of public policy and government is an important skill in almost any part of the world. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs), international business firms, and other international organizations are often looking to hire political science majors. Opportunities exist in organizations such as the UNICEF, the World Bank, and Amnesty International. Job listings for employment opportunities abroad include http://overseasjobs.com and http://internationaljobs.org.