

# Majoring in . . . .

## Political Science

### Description of Political Science

#### What is political science?

Political science is the study of the nature and functioning of the political process and government.

#### What do political science majors study?

Political science students learn about the relationship of the individual to civil society. They study different forms of government and their underlying philosophies, structure, and policies. Political scientists consider political processes, public law, international relations, and concepts of freedom, power and justice.

#### What skills are important for a political science major?

Political science majors should be able to:

- Conduct thorough research and analysis;
- Express themselves orally and in writing;
- Understand statistical data, charts, and graphs; and
- Show an interest in public service.

#### What else do political science majors study?

Political science is considered a liberal arts major. This means that students take a variety of courses in addition to those required in the major. These courses help develop knowledge and skills that are applied throughout one's lifetime.

Liberal arts courses provide a background to strengthen critical thinking; problem solving; written, oral, and interpersonal communication; quantitative, analytical, and reasoning skills. These skills are considered very important for future success in the workplace. A strong liberal arts background also provides the foundation of an educated person.

### **Course Requirements**

**General education:** About 60 credit hours of general education courses are required. These courses give a broad range of knowledge in foreign languages, science, math, writing, arts, ethics, human behavior, civilization, literature, and urban environment.

**Major courses:** A minimum of 33 credit hours of political science courses are required. Political science majors take courses such as:

- Black political thought
- City politics
- Comparative politics (required)
- Constitutional law
- Government and politics of Africa
- International relations (required)
- Latin American governments and politics
- Parties and elections
- Political theory (required)
- Politics of the civil rights movement
- Politics of race, class and gender
- Senior seminar (required)
- U.S. foreign policy
- U.S. government (required)
- U.S. presidency

A 12 credit hour optional concentration in public management includes courses on public policy, relations between federal, state and local governments, organization theory, and public budgeting. .

**Electives:** About 24 credit hours are required.

Many political science majors choose to use their electives toward a minor (18-21 credit hours) to give them an additional area of specialization.

## Careers in Political Science

The political science major provides a good background for entry to any number of occupations. Some of these careers include:

- Administrative assistant
- City manager
- Environmental worker
- Foreign service officer
- Government relations
- Legislative aide
- Lobbyist
- Non-profit agency director
- Policy evaluator
- Public relations specialist
- Research analyst
- Retail manager
- Sales representative
- State and federal government administrator
- Survey researcher

Further training, including graduate school, is required in order to work in these areas.

- Attorney
- Elementary or social studies teacher
- FBI/CIA agent
- Librarian
- Political science professor

An internship can increase the chances of finding a job in this field. An internship provides opportunities to relate theory to practice through observation and actual experience in the legislative, executive or judicial branches of government, or in interest groups or political party organizations.

## Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a political science major at VCU, consider doing each of the following things. Check them off as you complete each step.

- Check out the VCU School of Government & Public Affairs webpage.
- Take an introductory political science course.
- Read about the political science major in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*.
- Review the political science major graduation worksheet with an academic advisor.
- Talk to one or more upper-level political science students about their major experience.
- Discuss the major with one or more political science professors.
- Go to the Career Center to read about careers in political science.
- Go to the VCU bookstore and browse in the political science textbook section.
- Explore internship possibilities through the Career Center and the School of Government & Public Affairs.

- Check out the American Political Science Association's (APSA) website at [www.apsanet.org](http://www.apsanet.org) for information on topics related to the study of political science.

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