

Undergraduate Student Learning Goals in Political Science

As part of the Undergraduate Student Learning Initiative (USLI) [see <http://vpapf.chance.berkeley.edu/usli.htm>], the Political Science Department has identified and articulated a series of learning goals for the major. The USLI is a campus-wide initiative to support departments in formulating educational goals and evaluation procedures for all undergraduate programs. The objective is for faculty and students to have a shared understanding of the purpose of the major and the knowledge and skills that graduating seniors are expected to have acquired by the end of their course of study. The initiative is in keeping with the fundamental principle at Berkeley that the evaluation of student achievement should be locally defined, discipline-specific, and faculty-driven.

The Political Science Department has two main sets of learning goals. The first is the acquisition of specialized knowledge in the field of political science. The second is the development of general skills that will serve students regardless of their future course of study or employment. In addition, the Department has established a set of procedures for evaluating progress toward these learning goals.

I. Specialized Knowledge in the Discipline of Political Science

A. Exposure to the core subfields of political science:

- 1) American politics
- 2) Comparative politics
- 3) Political theory
- 4) International relations

B. Opportunities to explore areas that cross-cut traditional political science subfield boundaries:

- 1) Political behavior
- 2) Public law and jurisprudence
- 3) Public policy and organization
- 4) Empirical theory and quantitative methods

C. Specialization in one subfield of political science - Minimum of three courses taken in either one of the four core subfields (American politics, comparative politics, political theory, international relations) or one of the other departmental areas that generally cross-cut traditional subfield boundaries (political behavior, public law and jurisprudence, public policy and organization, empirical theory and quantitative methods).

II. General Skills

A. Methodological skills:

- 1) Ability to understand and deploy the methods that political scientists use to answer questions about the operation of politics: causal inference, qualitative analysis, statistical analysis, experimentation, game theory, and modeling.
- 2) Capacity to use critical thinking and evidence to understand and evaluate rival theories.

B. Research and Presentational Skills:

- 1) Writing skills - Ability to formulate a well-organized argument, supported by evidence.
- 2) Oral presentation skills - Ability to present a compelling oral argument, supported by evidence, to a group or public audience.
- 3) Research skills - Ability to conduct political science research, using materials such as primary, secondary, and online sources or databases, in support of an original argument.

III. Evaluation Procedures: How Does the Department Evaluate Whether It Is Achieving its Goals?

A. Assessments of student progress:

- 1) Student papers, ranging from one-page reading responses to original research papers and honors theses.
- 2) Student oral presentations.
- 3) Exams.

B. Assessments of departmental performance:

- 1) Student evaluations: Political Science Department course evaluations, University of California Undergraduate Experience Surveys (UCUES), exit surveys of graduating seniors.
- 2) Feedback from GSIs who supervise discussion sections.
- 3) Tracking of number of courses that require original research papers, oral presentations, and/or development of new methodological skills.