

What is Political Science?

Political science focuses on the theory and practice of government and politics at the local, state, national, and international levels. We are dedicated to developing understandings of institutions, practices, and relations that constitute public life and modes of inquiry that promote citizenship.

Political Theory

Political theory is concerned mainly with the foundations of political community and institutions. It focuses on human nature and the moral purposes of political association. To clarify these concepts, political theorists draw on enduring political writings from ancient Greece to the present and on various writings by moral philosophers. Political theory also focuses on empirical research into the way political institutions function in practice. Here political theorists subject beliefs about political life found in important political writings to re-examination in the light of ongoing human behavior. In either case, political theory seeks to ultimately deepen political thinking and to spur citizens to responsible and creative political action.

Comparative Politics

Comparative politics is a broad field with a variety of approaches and goals. Some scholars and researchers compare contemporary political systems in order to judge which types best provide particular values: order, equality, freedom, or economic security and well-being for their citizens. Others suggest that the main purpose of comparative politics is to provide an understanding of how and why different societies develop different kinds of political institutions. Still others use comparative politics as a way of discovering general laws and theories that will explain human political behavior and its variability.

Comparative politics courses are of two basic types. One offers comparisons of a particular set of problems or institutions in a number of different countries. The second type offers in-depth analyses of the basic political institutions and processes of a single country or group of countries in a world region.

International Relations

The field of international relations is concerned with developing an understanding of why states and non-state international actors, like the United Nations and multinational corporations, interact as they do. International relations is a diverse field both in terms of what kinds of behavior are studied and how they are studied. International conflict, particularly war, continues to be an important focus of the field. Why do wars start? Who wins and why? How can wars be prevented? What is the role of international law and organizations? As the world has become more interdependent, scholars have become more aware of the importance of international economic activity. As a result, scholars are analyzing world trade, communications, development, foreign investment, and international finance. How states make foreign policy decisions is another important area of study. National security policy,

nuclear deterrence, arms control and defense spending decisions are typical examples of foreign policy decisions.

American Government and Politics

Students of American government and politics seek an understanding of politics as practiced in the United States. In addition to courses on the American presidency, the U.S. Congress, and the courts, the department offers specialized courses on such topics as the political role of mass media, the politics of race and ethnicity, constitutional law, policy formation, state politics, and American political thought.

Some of the broad questions that concern students in this field are: How and why did American political institutions, ideas, and practices develop as they have? How does one go about evaluating them? Are American political institutions, ideas and practices unique, or are they similar to other societies? How might American politics be improved?

Political Methodology

The subfield of political methodology is concerned with the philosophical bases of political science, social science, empirical research design and analysis, and practical field research experience.

Courses in the political methodology field cover philosophical issues regarding the possibility of a science of politics, the similarities and differences between political science and other social sciences, alternative modes of explanation, and the truth of knowledge claims. They also examine the formulation of experimental and non-experimental research designs for making causal inferences about political processes and behavior and explore the use of statistics, mathematics and computers for the analysis of political data generated by such research designs. Students are also provided an opportunity to conduct individual and group research projects through seminars. The political methodology faculty have current research and teaching interests in such diverse topics as mass media, feminist theory, language politics, political economy, rational choice theory, and public policy