

Course Offerings and Requirements for Undergraduate Political Science Majors

Source: APSA Departmental Survey, 2012-13

Summary: In the APSA 2012-13 Departmental Survey, department chairs were asked about course offerings and requirements for their undergraduate political science majors. The data indicate variability in program offerings and requirements with some interesting differences among types of courses that may have implications for future graduate studies should undergraduates choose to pursue advanced degrees in the discipline.

Course Requirements: The most common course offering among responding departments is American Government, offered frequently in 70% of programs and required for majors in 61% of programs (Table 1). IR, Research Methods/Statistics and Comparative Politics are all required by a plurality of programs, although methods/stats courses are offered less frequently than the other two. Political Theory is offered more frequently than Methods/Stats, but is required by fewer programs. And while theory and methods/stats are notable for how often they are *not* offered (about 16% of departments), it is Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics that is reported least often as a primary part of the political science undergraduate curriculum. Only 15% of programs reported offering the course frequently, while 22% reported not offering it at all and only 7% reported requiring it for majors.

Undergraduate Methods and Statistics Courses and Prep for Doctoral Study: Among responding departments, 42.9% indicate requiring some training in research methods for their undergraduate majors (Table 1). While half of programs offering a BA in political science as their highest degree require such training, just over a third of programs offering a PhD as their highest degree report requiring their majors to take a course in methods or statistics. Sixteen percent of departments offer no courses in methods or statistics at all. At the same time, more than half (60%) of PhD-granting programs (and two-thirds of the largest of these programs) prefer that their entering PhD students have undergraduate training in statistics; nearly a third of those prefer that this course be taught in a political science department.

About the Data: The data are from the 2012-13 APSA Departmental Survey administered in December 2012. The overall response rate was 26.5% (n=331). The response rates by department type were: PhD 55.1% (n=75); MA 33.1% (n=55); BA (political science degree only) 28.8% (n=141); BA combined (political science combined with another field) 17.7% (n=47); BA Social Science (political science major in a general social science department) 6.9% (n=13). Departments in public institutions responded at a rate of 31.7% (n=165) and those in private institutions responded at a rate of 22.8% (n=166).

Citation: American Political Science Association. 2013. "Course Offerings and Requirements for Undergraduate Political Science Majors."

Course Offerings and Requirements for Undergraduate Political Science Majors

Source: APSA Departmental Survey, 2012-13

Table 1. Courses by Program Type*								
Highest Degree Offered	American Government							
	Offered Frequently		Offered Occasionally**		Not Offered		Required	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PhD	52	69.3	7	9.3	1	1.3	36	48.0
MA	40	72.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	35	63.6
BA (Political Science Only)	105	74.5	13	9.2	3	2.1	95	67.4
BA (Poli Sci + Other Field)	28	59.6	11	23.4	0	0.0	31	66.0
BA (Social Science)	6	46.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	38.5
Total Responding	231	69.8	31	9.4	4	1.2	202	61.0
	International Relations							
	Offered Frequently		Offered Occasionally		Not Offered		Required	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PhD	48	64.0	8	10.7	3	4.0	26	34.7
MA	25	45.5	9	16.4	5	9.1	21	38.2
BA (Political Science Only)	65	46.1	50	35.5	6	4.3	79	56.0
BA (Poli Sci + Other Field)	13	27.7	25	53.2	1	2.1	21	44.7
BA (Social Science)	0	0.0	4	30.8	2	15.4	1	7.7
Total Responding	151	45.6	96	29.0	17	5.1	148	44.7
	Research Methods/Statistics							
	Offered Frequently		Offered Occasionally		Not Offered		Required	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PhD	33	44.0	22	29.3	5	6.7	26	34.7
MA	21	38.2	12	21.8	7	12.7	23	41.8
BA (Political Science Only)	38	27.0	56	39.7	26	18.4	71	50.4
BA (Poli Sci + Other Field)	4	8.5	20	42.6	16	34.0	18	38.3
BA (Social Science)	0	0.0	5	38.5	1	7.7	4	30.8
Total Responding	96	29.0	115	34.7	55	16.6	142	42.9

Table 1 continued ->

Course Offerings and Requirements for Undergraduate Political Science Majors

Source: APSA Departmental Survey, 2012-13

Table 1 (continued). Courses by Program Type								
Highest Degree Offered	Comparative Politics							
	Offered Frequently		Offered Occasionally		Not Offered		Required	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PhD	47	62.7	12	16.0	1	1.3	26	34.7
MA	28	50.9	8	14.5	4	7.3	23	41.8
BA (Political Science Only)	64	45.4	45	31.9	13	9.2	73	51.8
BA (Poli Sci + Other Field)	5	10.6	26	55.3	8	17.0	16	34.0
BA (Social Science)	0	0.0	4	30.8	2	15.4	3	23.1
Total Responding	144	43.5	95	28.7	28	8.5	141	42.6
	Political Theory							
	Offered Frequently		Offered Occasionally		Not Offered		Required	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PhD	33	44.0	18	24.0	8	10.7	22	29.3
MA	18	32.7	13	23.6	9	16.4	23	41.8
BA (Political Science Only)	53	37.6	42	29.8	25	17.7	65	46.1
BA (Poli Sci + Other Field)	6	12.8	21	44.7	10	21.3	16	34.0
BA (Social Science)	0	0.0	4	30.8	2	15.4	1	7.7
Total Responding	110	33.2	98	29.6	54	16.3	127	38.4
	Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics							
	Offered Frequently		Offered Occasionally		Not Offered		Required	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PhD	17	22.7	27	36.0	15	20.0	1	1.3
MA	11	20.0	18	32.7	10	18.2	5	9.1
BA (Political Science Only)	20	14.2	66	46.8	34	24.1	10	7.1
BA (Poli Sci + Other Field)	3	6.4	25	53.2	11	23.4	7	14.9
BA (Social Science)	0	0.0	3	23.1	3	23.1	0	0.0
Total Responding	51	15.4	139	42.0	73	22.1	23	6.9

Survey Question: For each of the following course offerings, please check how often your department offers this kind of course and whether it is required for undergraduate majors in your department.

*Not included in this table are "Don't Know" responses, so proportions for each program type and total respondents do not add to 100.

**"Offered Occasionally" is a combination responses "Once/Year" and "Infrequently."

Course Offerings and Requirements for Undergraduate Political Science Majors

Source: APSA Departmental Survey, 2012-13

Table 2. Doctoral Program Preferences for Undergraduate Statistics Preparation

Size of Program	Undergraduate Statistics Course Preferred?		Course Preferred From Political Science Department		Course Preferred From Any Social Science Department		Course Preferred From Any Discipline	
	n	%*	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 – 10 Faculty	1	4.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0
11 – 20 Faculty	10	19.6	3	30.0	5	50.0	2	20.0
21 – 30 Faculty	12**	42.9	3	23.1	6	46.2	4	30.8
30+ Faculty	10	43.5	5	50.0	3	30.0	2	20.0
Total	33	44.0	11	33.3	14	42.4	9	27.3

Survey Questions: (1) Does your department or program prefer that doctoral students have undergraduate statistics training? (2) Is undergraduate statistical training in political science preferred to training in other disciplines?

*Row proportions. A total of 75 PhD-granting departments responded to this survey.

**Does not equal the sum of responses to Question #2 because one department did not respond to Question #1.