

2015-2016 APSA
DEPARTMENTAL SURVEY
Undergraduate Enrollments & Curriculum

August 30, 2017



Foreword

In the 2015-2016 APSA Departmental Survey, department chairs were asked to detail enrollments in their department, and to further describe the undergraduate curriculum for students at their institutions. This report includes information on degree requirements, state and/or locality requirements, as well as information on whether courses in their departments are able to fulfill general education requirements. The resulting data indicate that curriculum requirements, including state and/or local course requirements, vary somewhat by both the type of department – that is, the highest degree conferred by that department – and by the type of institution that department is located in.

There are several trends among departments responding to the survey: BA-granting departments of all types (departments of political science or government, departments combining political science with one or more other fields, and departments of social science) tend to be at private institutions. 49.6% of departments responding to the survey are private, but of these, 56.1% are BA-granting). PhD and MA-granting departments tend to be at public institutions – 49.8% of responding departments are at public institutions, but 33.3% of departments at public institutions responding to the survey are PhD-granting. For this reason, many differences between public and private departments are more likely to be a function of the highest degree offered by the department than a difference in the institutional environment.

We encourage you to read the report carefully, and we welcome your questions, suggestions, or ideas. Please contact us with any specific questions about the findings. We will aim to fold in some of the broader questions that members bring to our attention through subsequent reports and materials on the American Political Science Association website, www.apsanet.org. You can contact us at surveys@apsanet.org, or by calling the main APSA office at 202-483-2512.

Amanda Meyers
Patrick French
Betsy Super, PhD

Washington, DC

About the Data

The 2015-2016 APSA Departmental Survey was administered to 1,243 departments at 4-year colleges and universities offering degrees in courses in Political Science and Government in the United States. 349 departments responded to the survey for an overall response rate of 28.1%. Departments of social science had a response rate of 11% (n = 23); BA departments combining political science with at least one other field had a response rate of 17.5% (n = 47); BA departments of political science or government had a response rate of 30.1% (n = 146); MA-granting departments had a response rate of 35.7% (n = 56); and PhD-granting departments had a response rate of 58% (n = 76).

Enrollments (Table 1)

Enrollment trends are driven in two parts: primarily by the highest degree offered by the department, and then by the type of institution the department is located in. Larger departments offering graduate degrees, especially PhD-granting departments, report enrollment numbers much higher than smaller, BA-granting departments. When comparing like departments, however, the difference is similarly marked. The average reported enrollment of a public PhD in 2015-2016 was 3,782, while that of a private, PhD-granting department was 2,122. The difference between public and private MA-granting departments is even more apparent: public MA departments reported an average enrollment of 2,972, while private departments reported an average enrollment of 628. Among BA-granting departments, departments of political science at public institutions reported nearly identical enrollments to combined departments at public institutions – 1,400 and 1,398, respectively – while their private counterparts reported between 800 and 1,000 fewer enrollments on average.

Undergraduate Curriculum

Course Offerings & Enrollments (Tables 2 – 5)

Introduction to American Government remains both the course most offered by departments, and the course with the highest mean enrollments, offered by 88.8% of departments. Introduction to International Relations was the second most offered course by departments (84.4% overall), followed by Introduction to Comparative Government (76.9%), Research Methods/Statistics (76.4%) and Introduction to Political Theory/Ideology. Median enrollments for these courses were considerably lower than those for American Government. 64.8% of all reporting departments – distributed roughly equally among department and institution types – indicated that they offered additional courses in political science and government. Course offerings also differed somewhat by the highest degree offered by the department. Smaller, BA-granting departments, including departments combining political science with one or more fields and departments of social science, did not differ a great deal from the average of all departments.

As expected, course enrollments exhibited the same trends as total enrollments. Larger departments offering higher degrees reported higher course enrollments than smaller departments, and departments at public institutions reported higher average enrollments in all courses, regardless of degree offered.

Degree Requirements (Table 6)

Degree requirements tend to be characterized primarily by the highest degree offered by the department. Departments offering a BA as the highest degree offered, whether a department of political science and government or a combined department, tended to have a greater number of requirements for their students to graduate than departments offering a MA or PhD. While 52.6% of PhD departments did not require any of the listed requirements, only 13.7% of BA-granting departments of political science and 8.5% of departments combining political science with another degree indicated their students were not required to complete any of the listed requirements prior to graduation.

The most commonly-reported requirement for graduation with a degree in political science was a capstone course, reported by 54.7% of all departments, regardless of highest degree offered or institution type. 65.8% of BA-granting departments, 63.8% of departments combining political science with at least one other field, and 51.8% of MA-granting departments reported that their students were required to take a capstone course prior to graduation. 34.2% of PhD-granting departments and 43.5% of social science departments required a capstone course for graduation.

22.3% of departments reported that their students were required to complete a senior thesis prior to graduation, most frequently at BA-granting departments combining political science with one or more other fields (38.3%), BA-granting departments of political science or government (27.4%), and social science departments (26.1%). 20.6% required a research presentation from their undergraduate majors prior to graduation, 4.9% required study abroad, and 3.2% required an oral examination. 16.6% of departments indicated that they had other graduation requirements for their students.

24.4% of all departments reported that none of the listed graduation requirements were required for majors in their departments prior to graduation, although a majority of PhD-granting departments (52.6%) at both public and private institutions reported they did not have any of the listed requirements.

General Education Requirements (Table 7)

88.5% of all departments reported that courses in political science fulfilled some of the general education requirements of their home institution. This number was slightly higher among PhD-granting departments (90.8%), and slightly lower among departments combining political science with at least one other field (85.1%) and departments of social science (82.6%).

Departments reporting that political science courses counted toward general education requirements were further asked to indicate which courses offered by their department fulfilled general education requirements. 88.7% of all departments reported that Introduction to American Government was among the courses that fulfilled general education requirements at their institution, followed by Introduction to International Relations (62.8%), Introduction to Comparative Government (52.8%), Introduction to Political Theory/Ideology (41.4%), and Introduction to Politics/Political Science (31.4%). Courses that were reported as fulfilling general education requirements the least were Public Administration (9.1%) and Public Policy (9.4%).

State/Locality Requirements (Table 8)

15.8% of departments reported that their state and/or locality required one or more courses in political science as part of the institutional general education curriculum. These departments were more often private, BA-granting institutions than public departments – 58.2% of these were at private institutions, to 41.8% at public institutions, and 40% were BA-granting departments of political science.

Introduction to American Government was the course most commonly reported as required by a state and/or locality for general education curriculum, with 27.3% of departments who had curriculum requirements from their state and/or localities. 13.8% of all departments reporting to the survey required American Government.

Table 1. Distribution of undergraduate enrollments by highest degree offered and institution type

All						
	n	Mean	Median	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
PhD	60	3395	2923	1855	2923	4385
MA	55	2546	1692	1041	1692	3480
BA	141	824	542	313	542	1038
BA Comb. + Social Science	66	708	271	148	271	640
Public						
	n	Mean	Median	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
PhD	46	3782	3335	2217	3335	4771
MA	45	2972	2109	1265	2109	4421
BA	47	1400	1071	629	1071	1880
BA Comb. + Social Science	21	1398	605	348	605	1915
Private						
	n	Mean	Median	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
PhD	14	2122	2249	799	2249	2691
MA	10	628	456	275	456	1079
BA	93	534	413	273	413	690
BA Comb. + Social Science	45	387	197	141	197	398

Table 2. Core curriculum courses offered by highest degree offered and institution type

		PhD	MA	BA	BA Comb. + Social Science	Total
Introduction to Politics/Political Science	All	33.3%	46.4%	28.8%	37.1%	34.3%
	Public	31.6%	43.5%	35.4%	50%	38.2%
	Private	38.9%	0%	26%	29.8%	30.4%
Introduction to American Government	All	90.7%	87.5%	90.4%	84.3%	88.8%
	Public	87.7%	87%	89.6%	81.8%	87.3%
	Private	100%	90%	90.6%	85.1%	90.1%
Introduction to International Relations	All	88%	78.6%	85.6%	82.9%	84.4%
	Public	86%	78.3%	85.4%	81.8%	83.2%
	Private	94.4%	80%	85.4%	83%	85.4%
Introduction to Comparative Government	All	73.3%	75%	78.8%	78.6%	76.9%
	Public	73.7%	78.3%	79.2%	72.7%	76.3%
	Private	72.2%	60%	78.1%	80.9%	77.2%
Introduction to Political Theory/Ideology	All	70.7%	66.1%	69.2%	75.7%	70.3%
	Public	70.2%	65.2%	75.0%	68.2%	69.9%
	Private	72.2%	70%	67.7%	78.7%	71.3%
Introduction to Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics	All	69.3%	55.4%	62.3%	67.1%	63.7%
	Public	68.4%	52.2%	70.8%	68.2%	64.7%
	Private	72.2%	70%	58.3%	66%	62.6%
Research Methods/Statistics	All	82.7%	76.8%	73.3%	75.7%	76.4%
	Public	78.9%	76.1%	72.9%	86.4%	77.5%
	Private	94.4%	80%	72.9%	72.3%	75.4%

Table 3. Political science courses offered by highest degree offered and institution type

		PhD	MA	BA	BA Comb. + Social Science	Total
State and Local Government	All	57.3%	50%	54.1%	52.9%	53.9%
	Public	57.9%	50%	54.2%	63.6%	55.5%
	Private	55.6%	50%	55.2%	46.8%	52.6%
Constitutional Rights/Civil Rights and Liberties	All	65.3%	57.1%	65.1%	62.9%	63.4%
	Public	63.2%	56.5%	70.8%	68.2%	64.2%
	Private	72.2%	60%	62.5%	59.6%	62.6%
Gender and/or Sexuality and Politics	All	48%	39.3%	39.7%	42.9%	42.1%
	Public	45.6%	43.5%	37.5%	27.3%	40.5%
	Private	55.6%	20%	41.7%	48.9%	43.9%
Minority/Ethnic Group Specific Politics	All	36%	35.7%	25.3%	30%	30.3%
	Public	38.6%	37.0%	27.1%	31.8%	34.1%
	Private	27.8%	30.0%	25.0%	27.7%	26.3%
Regional Politics	All	64%	67.9%	67.8%	61.4%	65.7%
	Public	59.6%	71.7%	64.6%	63.6%	64.7%
	Private	77.8%	50.0%	68.8%	59.6%	66.1%
Public Policy	All	52.0%	57.1%	62.3%	50%	56.8%
	Public	45.6%	60.9%	64.6%	40.9%	54.3%
	Private	72.2%	40%	60.4%	53.2%	58.5%
Public Administration	All	28%	35.7%	32.9%	42.9%	34.3%
	Public	22.8%	39.1%	35.4%	45.5%	33.5%
	Private	44.4%	20%	32.3%	40.4%	35.1%
Other Courses	All	68%	64.3%	63%	65.7%	64.8%
	Public	66.7%	71.7%	58.3%	63.6%	65.3%
	Private	72.2%	30%	64.6%	66%	63.7%

Table 4. Average enrollment in introductory political science courses by highest degree offered and institution type

		PhD	MA	BA	BA Comb. + Social Science
Introduction in Politics/Political Science	All	27	78	43	3
	Public	41	92	91	69
	Private	7	7	16	15
Introduction to American Government	All	712	1073	187	251
	Public	903	1290	372	530
	Private	128	93	95	109
Introduction to International Relations	All	248	133	88	50
	Public	270	140	41	69
	Private	181	101	61	41
Introduction to Comparative Government	All	164	85	54	28
	Public	171	95	87	40
	Private	143	40	38	22
Introduction to Political Theory/Ideology	All	121	86	44	24
	Public	136	99	61	35
	Private	74	25	35	18
Research Methods	All	119	96	31	19
	Public	128	114	42	26
	Private	90	19	26	15

Table 5. Average enrollment in political science courses by highest degree offered and institution type

		PhD	MA	BA	BA Comb + Social Science
Introduction to Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics	All	57	48	23	23
	Public	63	53	36	46
	Private	47	30	17	12
State and Local Government	All	72	163	16	49
	Public	91	197	30	117
	Private	15	10	9	13
Constitution Rights/Civil Rights and Liberties	All	64	49	21	15
	Public	70	56	30	25
	Private	43	20	16	10
Gender and/or Sexuality and Politics	All	32	26	10	5
	Public	39	30	11	8
	Private	8	7	9	3
Minority/Ethnic Group-Specific Politics	All	43	23	10	7
	Public	44	25	19	16
	Private	40	18	6	2
Regional Politics	All	155	71	53	29
	Public	141	75	35	39
	Private	198	51	43	25
Public Policy	All	55	44	22	11
	Public	61	49	18	12
	Private	36	21	15	10
Public Administration	All	12	43	9	8
	Public	15	50	18	13
	Private	0	8	4	6
All Other Courses	All	892	521	176	99
	Public	971	595	296	165
	Private	655	187	117	65

Table 6. Degree requirements for undergraduate majors in political science by highest degree offered and institution type

		PhD	MA	BA	BA Combined	Social Science	Total
Senior Thesis	All	6.6%	16.1%	27.4%	38.3%	26.1%	22.3%
	Public	6.9%	15.2%	18.8%	44.4%	0.0%	16.1%
	Private	0.0%	20.0%	32.0%	34.5%	31.6%	28.9%
Capstone Course	All	34.2%	51.8%	65.8%	63.8%	43.5%	54.7%
	Public	36.2%	50.0%	66.7%	66.7%	50.0%	51.7%
	Private	27.8%	60.0%	64.9%	62.1%	42.1%	57.8%
Oral Exams	All	0.0%	0.0%	4.1%	8.5%	4.3%	3.2%
	Public	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Private	0.0%	0.0%	6.2%	13.8%	5.3%	6.4%
Research Presentations	All	5.3%	14.3%	28.8%	27.7%	21.7%	20.6%
	Public	5.2%	10.9%	25.0%	16.7%	0.0%	13.2%
	Private	5.6%	30.0%	30.9%	34.5%	26.3%	28.3%
Study Abroad	All	1.3%	3.6%	6.2%	8.5%	4.3%	4.9%
	Public	1.7%	4.3%	2.1%	11.1%	0.0%	3.4%
	Private	0.0%	0.0%	7.2%	6.9%	5.3%	5.8%
Internship	All	1.3%	10.7%	19.2%	29.8%	21.7%	15.5%
	Public	1.7%	10.9%	18.8%	27.8%	25.0%	12.1%
	Private	0.0%	10.0%	18.6%	31.0%	21.1%	18.5%
None of the above	All	52.6%	26.8%	13.7%	8.5%	26.1%	24.4%
	Public	51.7%	30.4%	16.7%	16.7%	25.0%	32.2%
	Private	55.6%	10.0%	12.4%	3.4%	26.3%	16.8%
Other	All	14.5%	10.7%	19.9%	17.0%	13.0%	16.6%
	Public	15.5%	10.9%	22.9%	16.7%	0.0%	16.1%
	Private	11.1%	10.0%	18.6%	17.2%	15.8%	16.8%

Table 7. Can political science courses count toward your institution's general education requirements?

		PhD	MA	BA	BA Combined	Social Science	Total
Yes	All	90.8%	89.3%	89.7%	85.1%	82.6%	88.5%
	Public	94.8%	87.0%	93.8%	83.3%	75.0%	90.8%
	Private	77.8%	100.0%	87.6%	86.2%	84.2%	86.7%
No	All	2.6%	3.6%	4.1%	8.5%	0.0%	4.0%
	Public	1.7%	4.3%	2.1%	11.1%	0.0%	3.4%
	Private	5.6%	0.0%	5.2%	6.9%	0.0%	4.6%
Don't Know	All	1.3%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	4.3%	1.1%
	Public	1.7%	0.0%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%
	Private	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	0.6%
Total	All	94.7%	92.9%	95.2%	93.6%	87.0%	93.7%
	Public	98.3%	91.3%	100.0%	94.4%	75.0%	96.0%
	Private	83.3%	100.0%	92.8%	93.1%	89.5%	91.9%

Table 8. Does your state/locality require any political science courses as part of the general education curriculum?

		PhD	MA	BA	BA Combined	Social Science	Total
Yes	All	19.7%	10.7%	15.1%	17.0%	17.4%	15.8%
	Public	17.2%	13.0%	12.5%	0.0%	25.0%	13.2%
	Private	27.8%	0.0%	16.5%	27.6%	15.8%	18.5%
No	All	67.1%	78.6%	70.5%	70.2%	60.9%	70.2%
	Public	70.7%	76.1%	75.0%	77.8%	50.0%	73.6%
	Private	55.6%	90.0%	68.0%	65.5%	63.2%	67.1%
Don't Know	All	7.9%	7.1%	7.5%	8.5%	8.7%	7.7%
	Public	6.9%	8.7%	6.3%	22.2%	0.0%	8.6%
	Private	11.1%	0.0%	8.2%	0.0%	10.5%	6.9%
Total	All	94.7%	96.4%	93.2%	95.7%	87.0%	93.7%
	Public	94.8%	97.8%	93.8%	100.0%	75.0%	95.4%
	Private	94.4%	90.0%	92.8%	93.1%	89.5%	92.5%