

Political Science Majors' Handbook

Department of Political Science
Rockefeller Hall 110

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I. A Student Overview of the Department of Political Science

The Department of Political Science is considered among the most challenging departments at Vassar, and the political science major is one of the most popular majors on campus. The rigor of the courses, the quality of the teaching, the large degree of freedom the department allows majors, and the variety of educational opportunities the department offers both inside and outside the classroom appeal to students.

Although the subject matters vary greatly, each course requires that students read carefully, think independently, and express themselves clearly in both speech and writing. The department's professors take time to ensure that students master these skills. Individual courses are demanding, but the major has only a few requirements. It is, therefore, possible for majors to create their own programs of study that may focus on any aspect of the political science curriculum. Majors may choose to concentrate in one of the four basic sub fields of political science (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Politics, or Political Theory), or they may develop a program of study that draws more heavily on multiple subfields. Although specialization is permitted, it is not required and is never formally declared.

The department offers a broad range of courses, but students' choices are not limited to the course offerings listed in the Vassar College catalogue. The department encourages students to pursue their individual interests outside of the classroom as well. Fieldwork offers a wide variety of opportunities away from campus for those interested in learning through a combination of theoretical reading and first hand experience. Independent study allows students to tailor course work to their specific interests and to work with professors on an individual level. Many political science majors take part in Junior Year Abroad or exchange programs, especially those students interested in American, Comparative and International Politics. The senior thesis is optional for senior political science majors, but a thesis of distinction is one of the requirements for departmental honors in political science.

II. Requirements for the Major in Political Science

Requirements for Concentration: 10 units, including one of the introductory courses (i.e., a 100-level course in political science); 1 unit at the 100- or 200-level in each of the four major fields of political science (i.e., American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Politics, Political Theory); 2 units of graded 300-level work, including one 300-level seminar (i.e., a course with a number in the 340s, 350s, 360s, 370s or 380s). Intensives are not required, but students can count up to 1 unit of intensive towards their major requirements. Students are required to take 1 unit at the 100-level in political science, and are allowed to count up to 2 units at the 100 level in political science toward the major. After declaring a major, no course in political science may be elected NRO.

Transfer students and students taking academic leaves of absence: A minimum of 6 graded units in the political science major must be taken at Vassar.

Senior Year Requirement: One 300-level seminar (i.e., a course with a number in the 340s, 350s, 360s, 370s or 380s).

Recommendation: Political Analysis (207) is highly recommended to all majors, because it deals specifically with a basic methodology of political science.

III. **How to Declare a Major: The Advising Process**

A. What does a major advisor do?

Broadly defined, the major advisor is the person who helps you work out and complete a course of study leading to graduation with a major in political science. That person's signature appears on your declaration of major form and on all future forms requiring an advisor's permission. When you are a senior, it is your advisor who is responsible for confirming to the Registrar that you have completed the requirements for a major in political science.

Specifically, the major advisor is the person whose permission you have to secure in order to take the courses you want to take each semester. He or she holds regularly scheduled office hours each week during the academic year and is also available by prior arrangement for other scheduled meetings with you in case of schedule conflicts. During every pre-registration period, you must visit your advisor and acquire either his or her signature or your PIN number in order to register. The signature or PIN number indicates to the Office of the Registrar that you have followed the College's mandated procedures for being advised before you register. The same is true for NRO forms, drop/add forms, and Field of Concentration cards, as well as for any special forms that may involve transfer credit or other leaves and privileges.

Different departments may handle registration and advising differently. In the Department of Political Science, no faculty member is authorized to sign any type of advising form for any other faculty member. The Chair of the Department or your Class Dean (at the Dean of Studies' Office) will do so only in emergencies, such as circumstances that require your advisor to be away from the campus for a protracted length of time. The Department Administrative Assistant may sign forms only with the prior, explicit permission of the advisor. Therefore, whenever you have advising deadlines to meet you must make sure that you consult your advisor on a timely and responsible basis.

B. Who can be an advisor and how do I get an advisor?

In the Department of Political Science, every faculty member who has taught at Vassar for more than one year is eligible to be an advisor. You are free to select your own advisor in political science. Simply figure out whom you would like to ask to be your advisor, and then go ask him or her. Most faculty members will agree to advise you, though occasionally some faculty may have a particularly large number of advisees or there may be some scheduling conflict (like an upcoming leave of absence) preventing the faculty member from saying yes immediately. In that case, ask him or her for alternative suggestions.

C. What criteria should I use to choose an advisor?

Students select advisors for different reasons. For example, you may want as your advisor someone who specializes in your area of interest, or someone with whom you have already had a class or two, or someone with whom you feel comfortable. It is up to you to decide which criteria are important to you and pick an advisor with whom you will be able to work well. If you are not sure whom you would like, you can always ask the people you know - such as your pre-major advisor, other faculty or students - for advice in helping you decide. In cases involving transfer students or other people equally unacquainted with the Department, an advisor can always be assigned, but the Department encourages you to choose your advisor.

IV. How to Declare a Major: The Paperwork Process

A. What form(s) do I need to declare?

In order to declare a major, you need to pick up the Declaration of Major form and three copies of the Field of Concentration card from the Office of the Registrar. This is the procedure no matter which major you want to declare.

B. How do I formally declare?

Fill out the top section of your Declaration of Major form. (Keep in mind that "College Address" means your box number, not your room number.) Under "New," on the right side of the form, write "Political Science" in the "Field or Program" space. Then take the form and visit the person you want to be your advisor in political science. If he/she agrees to be your advisor, secure his/her signature in the space on the lower right-labeled "Faculty Advisor."

Once you have properly filled out your form and secured your advisor's signature, you should also complete the "Field of Concentration" card (see next section) and then take all the forms to the Department Chair. The Declaration of Major form requires the Chair's signature, although the Department Administrative Assistant may on occasion sign on his/her behalf.

After you have gotten the signatures of advisor and chair, you must drop off the form at the Registrar's Office in order to be officially declared as a political science major.

C. The Field of Concentration Card and course planning

Following your decision to major in Political Science, the most important part of the declaration process consists of a discussion with your new major advisor about your overall course planning for the rest of your time at Vassar. This is where the Field of Concentration card comes in. The card can be mystifying, but it does have a logic. The card is divided in two ways. Horizontally, the card is divided into four rows corresponding to the four years of your Vassar education; vertically, the card is divided into columns that define the three major areas of Vassar course work:

- I. Work taken in the Major (first two left columns);
- II. Work taken outside Political Science but within the Division of Social Sciences (Anthropology, Economics, Education, Geography, History, Philosophy, Religion, Sociology);

III. Work taken outside the Major Division, i.e., courses in the Divisions of Arts, Foreign Languages and Literatures, and the Natural Sciences. (<https://catalogue.vassar.edu> The Vassar College Catalogue for a detailed listing of Departments in the four curricular divisions).

Fill in the Field of Concentration card by listing in the appropriate rows and columns all the courses you have taken so far. Then pencil in the courses that you would like to take in the future, being sure to meet all major and college requirements. Pay special attention to the rule that 25% of your course work must be taken in areas of study outside the major division, i.e., outside the social sciences. Discuss your plans with your new major advisor. With your advisor's signature on three copies of the Field of Concentration card, keep one copy for yourself, submit one to the Dean of Studies, and leave the third with your advisor. This step will complete the Declaration of Major process.

Please remember that the specific course selections that you indicate on the Field of Concentration card are not written in stone. They simply represent what you and your advisor see as a reasonable course plan for the time being. Depending on your interests, course, and faculty availability, JYA plans, and later consultation with your advisor, you may in fact take other courses than the ones identified. Still, careful thought at this stage of the declaration of major process is an important step toward the achievement of a balanced and well-rounded liberal arts education at Vassar.

D. Can I ever change advisors?

Sometimes a change of interest, or a change in faculty at the College may prompt you to want to change to a new advisor in the Department. You can change advisors at any time during your career as a political science major. You need only to fill out a new Declaration of Major form, writing "Change of Advisor Only" across the top. Then you get a signature from your new advisor, and turn the form in to the Registrar's Office. It is as simple as that.

V. Where to Get More Information

If you find yourself in need of more information about something related to the major in political science, you can look in any of the following places:

- the Political Science section of the Vassar College Catalogue (some of this information is available on the web site);
- the door of the Political Science office, Rockefeller 110, which has a copy of the department's master schedule with faculty schedules, office hours, room assignments, and office extensions (this information is also available on the web site);
- the wall just inside the political science office door, Rockefeller 110, where you will find paper copies of several different departmental policies and procedures (much of this information is also available on the web site);
- the departmental web site: <http://politicalscience.vassar.edu>

If you cannot find what you are looking for in any of those places, you can always ask questions of the Department Chair, the Department Administrative Assistant, or any other member of the department.

VI. Departmental Policy on Credits toward the Major in Political Science

A. The Non-Recording Option

Once a student declares a major in Political Science, she/he may not take any courses in the department under the Non-Recording Option (NRO). This policy specifically applies to any case in which a student might be able to meet the departmental requirement of ten units of Political Science coursework without counting the proposed NRO unit.

One unit of Non-Recording Option introductory work, taken before a student declares a major in Political Science, may be counted toward the major. Additional units of NRO work and/or any units above the introductory level that are taken before declaring a major may not be counted toward the major.

B. Ungraded and Junior Year Abroad Credits

No more than four units of ungraded work may count toward the major. This includes all JYA work, transfer credits, fieldwork, and POLI 298 and 399 work.

At the discretion of the Department, 300-level credit in political science may be granted to students for JYA work. The only undergraduate courses that can be considered for 300-level credit are those taken at the most advanced level for undergraduate work offered by the institution. In order to gain such credit, the student must petition the Department in writing. In addition to specifying the request for 300-level credit, the petition must include a description of the course. A syllabus for the course in question must accompany the petition, along with samples of the written work done for the course.

C. Advanced Placement and Transfer Credits

All AP and transfer credits count as ungraded work and are subject to departmental limitations on the number of ungraded units which may be counted toward the major.

College level courses in political science taken for credit at other institutions must meet all the Departmental standards for transfer credit before such credit can be granted. Your major advisor can approve all transfer credits, except when there are ambiguities or questions about how those transfer credits fit with your major requirements. In such cases, the Chair must be consulted for approval. College level courses in political science taken for credit at other institutions are subject to the departmental limitations on the number of introductory 100 level courses that may be counted toward the major.

No AP credit may fulfill the major requirement of one unit of 100-level work; transfer credit for work taken as an undergraduate at another college may fulfill the major requirement of one unit of 100-level work, subject to the decision of your advisor and/or the Chair (see paragraph above).

No AP credit may fulfill any part of the major requirement of one unit in each of the four subfields of Political Science (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Politics, and Political Theory); transfer credit for work taken as an undergraduate at another college may fulfill part or all of the major requirement of one unit in each of the four subfields

of Political Science, subject to the decision of your advisor and/or the Chair (see two paragraphs above).

D. High School Advanced-Placement Courses

No student will be granted credit in the Department of Political Science for any high school Advanced Placement course; credit is only granted for a score of 4 or 5 on a CEEB Advanced Placement Exam.

E. CEEB Advanced Placement Exams

One unit of un-graded AP credit in Political Science will be given for each score of 4 or 5 on a CEEB Advanced Placement Examination in Political Science (whether in American Government or in Comparative Government).

F. The Exploring Transfer Program

A single course taken in the Exploring Transfer Program may count as a graded course "taken at Vassar" for purposes of the major, if your advisor and/or the Chair (see section C above) determines that the course is substantially a political science course. No more than one ET course may be counted toward the major.

No ET course may fulfill the requirement of one introductory course in political science. At the discretion of the advisor, an ET course may partially fulfill the distribution requirement of one course in each of the four subfields of political science.

VII. How Courses Taken on Academic Leave from Vassar Can Fit Your Political Science Major

A minimum of six graded units in the political science major must be taken at Vassar.

If you are thinking about taking a semester or year of study away from Vassar and receiving credit toward your major in political science, you need to be aware that credit for such work must be discussed in advance with the JYA office and the Chair of the Department of Political Science. A great many such opportunities exist, at educational institutions on every continent in the world, and the JYA Office makes available information on many programs at other institutions.

You should let your advisor know as soon as possible if you are interested in such plans. He or she can then help with your curricular plans. Unless there are ambiguities or questions concerning how your JYA courses fit with your major requirements (see section VI C above), your advisor may also approve credit for the courses that will transfer into your major.

VIII. Field Work and Internships

Internships, whether locally or nationally based, can offer majors a unique opportunity for first-hand experience in the political world which surrounds us. Most internships for political science majors are arranged through the Office of Field Work with academic credit arranged through a faculty supervisor in the Department of Political Science. Some other internship programs, including

the Washington Semester Program, are arranged through the JYA Office or the Center for Career Development. Credit for these programs may be arranged through a faculty supervisor, the student's major advisor, or the Department Chair, depending on the program.

The hands-on experience gained through the internship, combined with theoretical reading related to the field placement, provides department majors with a rich, cross-experiential education and the chance to become involved with communities outside of Vassar's gates. Each year about one-fourth of the political science majors benefit from internship work. Among the many internship possibilities in the Poughkeepsie area are placements in law offices, courts, public interest groups, Scenic Hudson, the Catherine Street Center, battered women's shelters, and other public service organizations. Further afield are such options as the New York State Attorney General's office, Amnesty International, UNICEF, International Women's Tribune Center, Human Rights Watch, and various Washington, D.C. placements.

Departmental requirements for field work can be found in the departmental office or on the department's web site.

IX. The Thesis Process

Writing a senior thesis is not a requirement for political science majors. Roughly one-third of all political science students, however, decide to write theses. Recently the Department queried thesis writers about their views of the thesis process.

A. Why Write a Thesis?

Reasons for writing theses can vary. "I wrote a thesis," explained one student, "because I wanted to synthesize my JYA experience with my academic experience at Vassar." A few students have said that they decided to write a thesis because they wanted the experience of undertaking an undergraduate thesis before having to do a masters or doctoral thesis. "For someone who is moving on to graduate school, writing and researching a longer paper is really important," advised one student, while another said simply, "I don't know if I would have had the confidence to write a graduate thesis had I not first written an undergraduate thesis." Other students thought writing a thesis "should be a part of the college experience." As one student put it, "I wanted to have a body of work that I could refer to as complete and as something representative of my highest academic achievement."

For most thesis students, eligibility for departmental honors consideration was also an important motivation behind their decision to write a thesis. Some students cautioned against writing a thesis, however, if departmental distinction was the only motivation. "Personally, I would not recommend writing a thesis if honors is the only reason. You've got to have something that intensely interests you, something that will keep you going when you're running out of steam. Honors will not necessarily do that and, besides, it's too much work for only a grade, or recognition."

B. How do I choose a thesis advisor?

Choosing an advisor is an important part of the thesis process. As several students have noted, a student's relationship with the advisor can greatly influence the quality of the overall experience of writing a senior thesis. A few students complained that their thesis

advisor did not provide enough feedback during the writing process. As with any other problem, students should discuss the desire for more feedback with their advisor. While all of the students agree that it is important that the thesis advisor be knowledgeable in the subject area of their thesis topic, some also said it was just as important that the student know his or her advisor previously. "You must also feel you have a good working relationship with your advisor, someone who you know will bounce ideas off with you, who has the time and shows the interest."

All of the thesis students were glad that they had undertaken the thesis process, "I learned a lot about myself," said one student, "in terms of how to write and do research." Another explained, "I'm glad I did it in the sense that I completed it, and it is something which I can be proud of." Everyone felt a sense of accomplishment and pride that he or she could take on and complete such an endeavor. One student added, "it put a whole new perspective on my Vassar education." And, for many, "the process became just as important as the product. I learned about myself, how I approach my work, what I can do, and can't do, my strengths and weaknesses -- as well as, of course my topic."

X. Student Academic Honors

A. Requirements for Graduation with Departmental Honors in Political Science

- The writing of a senior thesis for one unit, the thesis to have received (in addition to a letter grade) the grade of "Distinction" from both the first and the second readers. The grade on the thesis must be an A- or above in order for the thesis to merit distinction.
- The thesis also must have met all senior thesis guidelines and deadlines. In exceptional cases the department may accept an educational project comparable in value to the writing of a thesis; the project must also receive the grade of "Distinction" from two faculty members.
- At least a 3.60 cumulative grade-point average in Political Science coursework. This average includes work done in the spring semester of the senior year.
- The completion of an oral defense based on the thesis or educational project.
- Final approval of the department.

B. Departmental Internships in Political Science

The Department of Political Science participates in the College's academic internship program. Each year the Department selects two to four interns in September from among the senior majors in political science, on the strength of their work in political science. For their service the College pays the interns a wage comparable to most other student jobs on campus.

The interns hold office hours in the department lounge and serve as tutors for students in introductory political science courses. Sometimes they also perform other tasks; for example, the interns from academic years 1994-1995 and 1995-1996 participated in the drafting of this majors' handbook. More recently interns have helped to maintain and update the Department's web site.

C. Departmental Funding in Political Science

Due to the generous support of an anonymous alumnae/alumni donor, the Department offers limited funding (up to \$250) for students who wish to participate in an academic conference or to conduct thesis research. Majors must complete the Alumnae/I Fund Request form found in the Department office, and the Chair must approve the request. The application form requires a brief description of the project and the signature of the major or thesis advisor sponsoring the request. Please see Darcy Gordineer for the form.

D. Academic Prizes in Political Science

Several academic departments at the College are endowed with funds for academic prizes that are awarded to students at the end of the academic year. Senior recipients of academic prizes are honored at a special public assembly the day before Commencement. Receiving an academic prize is not only a great honor: it comes with a small financial award as well. Political Science is fortunate to have several prize funds.

- The Julia Flitner Lamb Prizes are awarded to a junior major and a senior major for overall excellence in political science.
- The Ida Frank Guttmann Prize is awarded for the best thesis in political science which meets the deadline for final drafts of theses.
- The Marjorie Lynn Gluck VC '84 Prize is an all-campus prize awarded by the department for an outstanding thesis on issues related to women, public policy and politics at the global, national, or local level.

XI. The Political Science Faculty

Richard J. Born, Professor: B.S., Massachusetts Institute of Technology; M.A., Ph.D., Stanford University. Richard Born's research interests lie within the area of congressional elections. At present, he is doing a study of how the environmental and political factors involved in the redistricting process affect House members' reelection safety. His course offerings at Vassar include *American Politics*, *The American Presidency*, *Congress*, *Political Parties and Public Opinion*, *Political Analysis*, and *Seminar in Congressional Politics*.

Andrew Davison, Professor: B.A., Lafayette College; M.A., University of Delaware; Ph.D., University of Minnesota. Andrew Davison's scholarly work addresses topics of secularity, borders, modernity, ideology, coloniality, otherness, conversation, and datafication from the perspective of hermeneutic political inquiry. His recent advanced courses include *Interpreting Politics*, *Reconsidering Western Political Thought*, and *Seminar in Political Theory*

Katherine Hite, Professor: B.A., Duke University; M.I.A., Ph.D., Columbia University. Katherine Hite teaches courses on Latin American politics, comparative politics, the politics of modern social movements, and the politics of coming to terms with violent pasts and ongoing violence. Her research focuses on politics and collective action across the Americas, including the U.S., and on the legacies of violence for politics and society, including the politics of memory, memorials, and

commemoration.

Taneisha N. Means, Assistant Professor: B.A., John Carroll University; M.A., Ph.D., Duke University. Her research and teaching interests are in Racial and Ethnic Politics, Judicial Politics, and American Political Behavior and Identities. She combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer research questions at the intersection of race and judicial politics. Her current research projects examine the political identities and behaviors of 21st century black U.S. judges.

Himadeep Muppidi, Professor: B.A., Nizam College, Osmania University; M.A., M.Phil., Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU); Ph.D., University of Minnesota. Himadeep Muppidi's research interests are in the areas of globalization, critical international relations, postcolonial politics and global political thought. He teaches courses on international politics, globalization, decolonization and subalternity in the international system.

Samson O. Opondo, Associate Professor: B.A., Moi University; M.A., Keele University; Ph.D., University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Most broadly, Sam Opondo's research is guided by an interest in colonialism, race and the mediation of estrangement. With an emphasis on violence, ethics and diplomacies of everyday life, he engages the problematics of humanitarianism, the politics of redemption and popular culture in urban Africa. He teaches courses on comparative politics, settler colonialism, postcolonial diplomatic cultures and African cities.

Sidney Plotkin, Professor: B.A., M.S., Ph.D., City University of New York. Teaches courses on power, public policy, the politics of capitalism and the military in American Politics. His research and writing have centered on the U.S. national and sub-national political economy, with a focus on land use and fiscal politics. He has also written on urban political movements. His current scholarly interest centers on the political and social ideas of the early 20th century American radical thinker, Thorstein Veblen. From 2004 to 2010, he served as President of the International Thorstein Veblen Association. His latest books include *The Anthem Companion to the Thorstein Veblen* (2017) and *Veblen's America: The Conspicuous Case of Donald Trump* (2018)

Stephen R. Rock, Professor: A.B., Miami University; M.A., Ph.D., Cornell University. Stephen Rock's research interests include the origins of great power reconciliation and the efficacy of inter-state influence strategies, especially deterrence and appeasement. His most recent work has focused on the views of U.S. Christians and Christian organizations concerning international issues and their influence on the foreign policy of the United States. Mr. Rock teaches courses on international politics, U.S. foreign and defense policy, the causes of war and peace, and justwar theory.

Claire Sagan, Assistant Professor: B.A., M.A., Universite Rennes I; Ph.D., University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Claire Sagan teaches courses in political theory, particularly environmental political thought (EPT), feminist theory, and feminist science studies. She is especially interested in temporality (the conception and experience of time) as it relates to normativity and to ecology, utopia in relation to environmental and feminist thought, and Nietzsche's concept of eternal return.

Fubing Su, Professor: B.A., Nankai University, Tianjin, China, M.A., Nankai University (Political Philosophy); M.A., Ph.D., University of Chicago (Political Science). Fubing Su's teaching interests include comparative politics, political economy, East Asian Security, Chinese politics, game theory, and statistical analysis. Some of his courses are cross-listed with the Asian Studies Program.

Mallory Whiteduck, Assistant Professor: B.A., University of Ottawa; M.A., Carleton University; Ph.D., University of Michigan. Professor Whiteduck is an interdisciplinary scholar who teaches courses on *Indigenous Political Thought*, *The Secret History of Political Theory* and *Everyday Acts of Sovereignty*. Her scholarship looks at Indigenous theory, rez aesthetics and everyday Native American politics.

Arpitha Kodiveri, ML, European University Institute; ML, University of California-Berkeley; BL, BS, Indian Law Society's Law College; PhD, European University Institute. Arpitha Kodiveri is an international and comparative environmental law scholar and assistant professor of political science at Vassar College. Her work focuses on the role of environmental law in the context of forest governance in South Asia. Her previous research examines land conflicts and legal mobilization by forest-dwelling communities in India. She has worked as an environmental lawyer supporting Adivasi and forest-dwelling communities in India. She is the recipient of the Hans Kelsen Fellowship at the EUI and the Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship.