

Careers for Political Science Majors

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Finding employment with a political science degree is similar to doing it with any other liberal arts degree: The options are endless. Unless a position calls specifies scientific or technical requirements, liberal arts majors are qualified for just about any entry-level position in the market. This is because liberal arts majors cultivate communication, research, and analytical skills needed in most jobs, rendering the new employee easier to train. In addition, liberal arts majors acquire knowledge of our history and culture, which helps their employer deal more successfully with the challenges posed by contemporary American society.

As a political science major, you will study a variety of topics that will assist you in most jobs you may consider after graduation. Some of the topics you will study include: American government, comparative politics, international relations, constitutional law, and political theory. The wide range of topic you will be exposed to should assist in doing well in both the public and private sectors. For a specific listing of political science courses at the University of West Florida (UWF) you will want to check with the Department of Government at www.uwf.edu/govt.

The most obvious career path political science students consider is in the government itself, where there are a variety of career options at the federal, state and local levels. At the federal level, some possible “dream” jobs may include White House advisor, civilian consultant to the Department of Defense, researcher for the Congressional Research Service, intelligence specialist for the CIA, legislative assistant,

and member of the secret service. While many jobs with the federal government are located in Washington, D.C., it is not necessary to live there. Since the federal government is so large, most jobs are located not only throughout the country, but also throughout the world.

If you are interested in working for the federal government, it is best to develop your analytical skills by taking classes in mathematics and statistics beyond what is needed to fulfill UWF's general studies requirement. You will also want to develop both written and oral communications skills as much as possible. Also, it is best to have a general knowledge of how the three branches of government operate, and how they interact with political parties, interest groups, the media, and the bureaucracy. An advanced degree in political science, public administration, or public policy may help in being considered for certain positions, but it is not required and can always be earned while you are working for the government.

If you are looking for information regarding available federal government jobs, the best place to begin is the Office of Personnel Management. Most civil service employees are hired through this agency. Their web site (www.usajobs.opm.gov) lists available positions. However, since most agencies have their own personnel office, it is also a good idea to look at their individual web sites as well. This is especially true with independent agencies and commissions, as well as with the intelligence community and the Department of State. It is important to remember that some jobs in the federal government are filled through political appointments. This is especially true with positions in the executive and legislative branches. If you are interested in working in the White House or in Congress, you may want to begin volunteering with your local political party and on election campaigns.

One of the best ways to discover if you are interested in working for the government, be it federal, state or local, is through internships. To learn more about internships within the

Department of Government at UWF, please visit www.uwf.edu/govt/intern/index.htm.

Internships will allow you to learn about the various agencies and jobs available. They will also provide you with invaluable experience. Since some jobs available through the government are considered highly competitive, it is best to gain every advantage possible.

If you are interested in working for a smaller government agency, then working for a state or local government should be a consideration. Among the career opportunities in state and local governments, there are the following: assistant to the governor or county or city manager, staff member for legislative committees or city councils or county commissions, director of a state's welfare-to-work program, city planner, and urban planner. Most of your course work will remain the same as for the federal government, but you will also want to include courses in state and local government, as well as public administration.

Searching for local jobs can sometimes be frustrating. The best course of action to take for state government positions is to search that state's individual web site. For local governments, you may want to either search for a web site or contact the specific department directly. While residency is usually not a requirement, it definitely improves the chances for any entry-level position. For any state or local government position you will want to learn as much about the job requirements and employing agency as possible. The more you are able to demonstrate your abilities for a specific position, the greater the chances of receiving an employment offer.

Campaigns and elections are probably one of the more obvious career choices by political science majors, although many do not go into this field. If seeking a job on a political campaign, it is best to be familiar with American government, political parties, interest groups, and campaigns and elections. Traditional campaign jobs are generally found through individuals and

local parties. The smaller the campaign, the less likely there will be professional staff, but these are the best places to begin a career in campaigning. Volunteering for a campaign or a local party will get your name known for the next campaign, when you may be offered a paid position. Careers in campaign management are cyclical; they come and go every other year, but there are opportunities for year-round employment with consulting and polling firms. You may also want to consider working for a political action committee of a corporation or interest group.

Another career option for political science students is the law. Political science is the most popular major for law school applicants. With a law degree a person can decide to go into private practice, but there are numerous opportunities for lawyers in both the public and private sectors. Some of these may include careers as consumer advocate, university president, judge, chief of staff, criminal attorney, district attorney, corporate legal counsel, and media pundit.

If you are interested in attending law school, you will want to prepare by acquiring certain knowledge and skills during your undergraduate career. You will want to learn about American government, history, political theory, and ethics; to think critically; to do research; and to communicate effectively the results of your research. To enhance your reading and writing abilities, it is advisable to take courses in both English and American literature and history. You may even want to consider minoring in one or the other. You will also want to consider a variety of extracurricular activities to supplement your academic studies with experience working with or leading groups. We are confident that the Pre-Law option for political science at UWF will provide you with the basics of what it takes to succeed in law school. To learn more about this major, please visit our web site at www.uwf.edu/govt/pre-law/index.htm.

Careers in the private sector are just as numerous as those in the public sector. In fact, many persons who work in the public sector began their careers in the private sector and vice

versa. In Washington, D.C., there is a revolving door between the public and private sectors. If you are interested in working *with* the government at any level, but not *for* the government, you may want to consider working for a nonprofit organization as a lobbyist. Some possible positions with nonprofits can include: director of governmental relations, executive directors, research analyst, political director, and manager of grassroots organizations.

While it is not necessary to have an advanced degree to become a lobbyist, it is something you may want to consider. Either a Master's degree or a law degree is useful, but there are entry-level positions which only require a strong background in political science and policymaking. The Master's program at UWF will provide you with the necessary background for many positions, since you will be required to take courses in the various fields of political science, including political theory, comparative politics, political economy, international relations, research methods, and American government. The program at UWF will challenge any student interested in any or all areas of political science. If you are interested in receiving more information on the Master's program in political science at UWF, please visit our web site at www.uwf.edu/govt/masters/index.htm.

To secure employment as policy analyst or lobbyist, whom you know can be as important as what you know. Networking through an alumni association or any other organization with political or public policy interests can lead to possible job opportunities. Again, an internship may be helpful. If you are interested in working for or with a specific group or cause, you will also want to check out their web sites. Many have an employment/internship page.

Those who major in political science may also be attracted to the business world. Those going into business have pursued careers in marketing, personnel, advertising, public relations, banking, and finance. Political science majors work well in the business world because they are

able to understand organizational complexity, the importance of good leadership and sound management, and the need for keeping abreast with public opinion and dealing skillfully with the media. If you are interested in this field, you must understand that you will be competing with a large number of students with various degrees. To stand out, you will want to develop your written and oral communication skills to the fullest, and have an understanding of mathematical and economic concepts. It is important to note that the job market in business is only as good as the state of the American economy.

Careers in the international arena are always of interest for those majoring in political science. These careers can be in any field: government, nonprofits, or business. Political science students are sought in the international world because many of the social and economic problems are increasingly dealt with through political means. If you are interested in a career in the international arena, you will want to take courses in comparative politics, international relations, political development, and interest group politics. Fluency in a foreign language is a must, even if you want to work in an American office. Lesser known languages are just as important as those widely spoken. Since the international arena is highly competitive, you will want to distinguish yourself in any way possible. This can be done through extracurricular activities, such as participating in international clubs or a model United Nations club or class (www.uwf.edu/govt/internationalstudies/modelUN.cfm). You will also want to consider a summer or semester abroad (www.uwf.edu/intered/). Note that if you are interested in government, there are various agencies at the federal, state and local you may want to consider. Courses in international relations and the various levels of government will help to prepare you for careers at any level of government.

Job searches for business in the international arena can be done through the internet. Business magazines will offer lists of companies with international interests. Going directly to their web sites can offer you insight into the company and may include a link to available jobs. Many foreign corporations have U.S. branches that you will want to contact. The UWF career center and job fairs they hold will also be useful sources of information. For more information regarding the career center at UWF, please visit their web site at www.uwf.edu/career/.

The media is another popular career choice for those whose undergraduate degree is political science. This can mean working in radio, network television, cable television, and the Internet. A major in political science prepares a journalist to cover American politics, public policy, and international relations. If you are interested in working in journalism, you will want to develop your written and oral communication skills. Enroll in literature courses where you will be required to read and write about the best prose that has ever been written. Also, take advantage of any opportunity to write papers and essays, including taking workshops at community centers and other for-profit centers, that will improve your writing and editing skills. Also, basic reporting classes offered by the communication arts department will build up your journalistic writing abilities. Experience is the key. Writing for a college newspaper, such as *The Voyager* (www.uwf.edu/voyager/), is one of the best ways to gain experience; you should also consider interning with the local newspaper, *The Pensacola News Journal*, or a local television station, such as WEAR-TV Ch. 3, UWF-TV, or WUWF, the local National Public Radio affiliate. These opportunities may lead to a part-time job, which would be invaluable, since it will provide practical experience and allow you to create a portfolio.

Teaching is another popular profession for liberal arts majors. Skilled teachers are in demand across the country. Middle- and high-schools are the primary market for those with a

political science degree. Civics, social science and American government are the basic areas of study in precollegiate education. If you are interested in teaching you will want to contact the education department at UWF (www.cops.uwf.edu/copsweb/teacherred.cfm) early in your college career. They will be able to explain Florida's state requirements and let you know what courses you will need. Demand for teachers varies depending on local needs, but you will find that some states offer incentives to join the faculty at their schools. If you are interested in education administration, you will want to receive a graduate degree in a specialized area. The College of Professional Studies at UWF offers a variety of Master's programs for students interested in pursuing this field of study (<http://.uwf.edu//education/programs.cfm>). If you find you are interested in teaching after you have received your degree or shortly before you graduate, you may want to look into teacher certification programs available at many smaller colleges and universities.

If you are interested in teaching at the collegiate level, you will need at least a graduate degree. A junior or community college may require a Master's degree and a university will usually require a Ph.D. Those with a Master's or a Ph.D. do not always go into teaching, but are involved in all other career fields, such as lobbying, public policy analysis, media pundit, and legislative assistant or other government careers. The Master's program at UWF will prepare you to pursue any of these careers.

The final area to consider is that of public service, in an elected or appointed capacity. The number of elected offices in the United States, particularly at the local level, is very large, so there are various positions available if you are interested in this career field. You should know that the hours are generally long and the pay is minimal. For these reasons, many stay-at-home moms have become increasingly active in politics after their children have entered school. If you

know you are interested in running for an elected office, you will want to consider being active in campus politics and student government. Volunteer on local campaigns and with political parties to meet those also interested in politics and intern in an elected official's office. These opportunities offer not only practical experience, but also contacts you will need throughout a political career.

In sum, a political science major, like any liberal education, opens the door to many opportunities for life after college. You are limited only by your imagination and determination to succeed and make a positive contribution to our country and our posterity.