

Graduate and Professional School Options for Political Science Majors

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Do I have to go to law school?

No

Many options

- Masters / professional programs
- PhD programs
- Get a job (!)
- Job then grad school (surprisingly attractive)
- (Don't discount law school. About 1/3 of the alums of this department eventually go to law school.)
- Joint MPP with law, public health, etc.

There is a grad program for everyone

- Not limited only to the top students
- A wide range of programs for various interests
- Don't think only of the prestige programs
- The key is what kind of career you want to be involved in
- Do not even think about grad school if you don't like school now. Get a job and think about it later, after you are motivated.

Masters Programs

- MA in Political Science. Your dumbest choice.
- MPP
- MPA

- Joint programs with JD, MPH, other degrees
- Other MA-level programs as well

Additional Masters Programs

- Masters of International Studies, International Affairs, etc.
- Masters of International Development, other specialized programs.
- You'd be surprised how many diverse MA programs there are.
- Each may lead particularly to a given field.
- MPP, MPA are much more general-purpose

Overseas MA programs: a serious option to consider

- Interested in international affairs?
- Maybe get an MA or specialized Masters overseas
 - England, Canada have good programs
 - You have to pay anyway
 - Tuition is cheaper there
 - International experience is helpful
 - You'll get in. Not many Americans apply.

Masters Programs

- Professional, not graduate school
 - Practical training, how to do stuff, including manage people, reach conclusions, give advice, hire people, follow rules of government procedures, implement successful policies, work with people.
 - Not theoretical training. That's grad school.
- You pay
- It doesn't take long. 15 to 24 months.

Masters Programs

- Financial aid is limited
- Top programs can be extremely expensive. Worth it if you can get in because of the subsequent career paths.
- Other programs also offer *limited* financial aid.
- Professional programs: idea is that it's your own professional training. So you pay.

Joint Programs

- JD-MPP programs
- Lots of these programs abound in the big universities. It may not be necessary. However, it can be a good plan. Essentially you do one year of the MPP, then law school. It takes 4 years and is pretty hard. You can get a great job afterwards. (From that school you might have gotten a great job anyway!)

Regional or National Programs?

- Where do you want to work?
- Best job, anywhere? Go to a national program.
- Harrisburg? No need to go to Berkeley for that. Other schools may have excellent networks leading to great jobs in a given region.
- (Same is true for law schools, btw)

Doctoral Programs

- It's hard
- It's not really very practical
- It leads 80% of the time to being a professor, doing research and teaching
- It is not necessary to get a PhD if you want a job in government or in a policy making environment
- It's a way to stay in school forever, if you like that.
- You should be able to get **full financial aid**

Doctoral Programs

- You take classes for 2-3 years, take *really hard exams*, then write a dissertation.
- Takes about 6 years, on average.
- You work ½ time as a research assistant or as a teaching assistant during the time you are in grad school.
- They pay you.
- You don't make *much* money, but you can survive on it. PSU: tuition and about \$1,300 per month, vaguely, for 9 months

Masters or PhD?

- PhD applications can be straight from the BA; no need to get an MA first.
- If you aren't happy with your GPA because you partied a little too much in college, switched majors, weren't motivated, or whatever, and you want a PhD, you can get an MA, do really well, and then get into a better PhD program. This happens more than you might think.
- Remember, it's a career choice, not a hierarchy. PhD is *different from*, not *better than*, an MPP / MPA / other professional masters programs.

Can you get in?

- Wide range of programs.
- Top 10 programs, it's hard. But we get people into those each year from PSU.
- There are over 100 doctoral programs, however. Talk to your professors. If you did not ace the GRE, there may be ways to make up for it. Strong letters, research experience can help.
- Consider getting a masters and “moving up” based on excellent performance.
- Get the best degree you can. You'll have it forever.

General considerations for any type of grad / professional programs

- Why go right away? Schools look favorably on applicants who have been working for a couple / few years
 - Do not sack groceries for 2 years
 - Get *any* job in the vaguest way associated with a career you may be interested in
 - Ask around, look around, in particular at the people above you doing neat things: what degrees do they have? Get that degree.
 - Find out what degree your boss has.

Applications

- GRE. GRE. GRE. Study. It matters.
- GPA. It matters.
- Letters. They matter.
- They need to be by professors who can say they: 1) know you well and 2) can evaluate your writing and reasoning ability. It makes no difference if they like you or if you babysit for their cat. Get to know your professors. Impress them. Work hard.

Letters of Recommendation

- Usually you need 3 letters
- Professor's letter needs to say they actually know you well.
- How can you make this happen?
 - More than one course from that professor?
 - A seminar, where they really saw your participation, or read lots of your writing?
 - A class where you wrote a very strong paper?
 - Volunteer or work for pay on a professor's research project?
- Unusual to have 3 letters that are that strong.
- Or, if you work in a related field, get a letter from your boss (not a congressman!; someone who knows you in detail).
- But do whatever you have to do to have at least one. That means, get to know some of your professors. Go to their office hours. Tell them what you are interested in. Get their advice.
- Some are ogres, it's true. But find some who will talk to you.
- TA's are ok, professors in other fields, as well. But the gold standard is a professor in your field who knows you well.

Letters of Recommendation

- Help your professor write a good letter:
- Provide:
 - Current resume or CV (and get his advice on it)
 - Your writing sample (ditto)
 - Your cover letter (ditto)
 - A full list of the schools to which you are applying (ditto)
- It is no good if the professor says: “Sally is particularly motivated for the study of poverty policy and therefore for your program” if you actually changed your mind and in your personal statement you say you want to study immigration!
- Keeping at least one professor in the loop will allow them to get to know you, and that can only be helpful.

Applications

- Writing samples and essays
 - Essay has to explain what you are looking for.
 - Should be tailored to why you think *this* program is the right program to get you into the career track you seek. Tailoring is more to the general type of program (MPP, MPH, PhD) from the general type of school (DC-area, Big-10, small, big), not so much to the particular department.
 - No grammatical mistakes. This looks sloppy.

Applications

- Writing samples (not always required)
 - Should be on a topic relevant to your field
 - Does not need to be super long or complicated
 - Can be “improved” from the version you handed in in class
 - Use a term paper from a class and revise / improve it.
 - Ask the professor who is writing your letter to help you revise it.

Applications

- Want to get into the top PhD programs?
- Take tougher courses. Stats, more econ, math, research and statistics skills.
- Work on a research project here on campus.
- Get to know your professors, at least one or two very well.

Applications

- Want to get into an MA program in International Studies?
 - Learn a language, study abroad, do an internship abroad, get some relevant experience
- MPP? Do an internship in government. Work on a writing sample relating to a policy question.
 - Get a recommendation from a professional in the field
- No single route. Depends on which program you want to get into.
 - Recommendations, statement, relevant experience depends on the program.

Applications

- Where can you get in?
- PSU people get in everywhere.
- GRE, GPA matter, they set some parameters. Look at the books – they will tell the averages schools are looking at. Note that $\frac{1}{2}$ are below the average!
- Work, get experience, then get in somewhere better.

Applications

- Schedule: January deadlines, you hear in Feb / March; you decide by April 15, you enroll in August
- Take the GRE early
- Talk to your faculty mentors
- That reminds me: Get a faculty mentor.

Some useful web sites

- University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) provides a nice brochure of tips and advice for applying to graduate programs in political science (that may be especially helpful for those interested in the Big Ten). The brochure has a focus on minority candidates, but what they say applies to all applicants:
http://www.cic.uiuc.edu/programs/FreeApp/documents/ApplyingtoGradSchool_000.pdf
- Whittier University also provides a good, general overview of what to consider when considering grad school:
http://www.whittier.edu/career/students_tips_gradschool.htm

Some useful web sites

- GradSchools.com
(www.gradschools.com/programs/political_science.html)
- This website offers listings of grad schools with PhD programs in political science, organized by region. Each listing includes contact information for the admissions director, and links to individual program websites.
- For folks interested in related social science disciplines, simply replace 'political science' with your field of interest (i.e.,
<http://www.gradschools.com/programs/sociology.html>)

Some useful web sites

- GlobalMPA (www.globalmpa.net)
- The GlobalMPA web portal is created and maintained by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), a non-profit organization that represents 253 U.S. university programs in public affairs, public policy, public administration, and public management. On this page, you can find information about:
 - the professional degrees (MPP, MPA and PhD in Policy, Planning or Administration)
 - careers and jobs available to MPP/MPA graduates
 - tips and advice for finding the right school/program for you, applying to graduate school and scholarships, grant opportunities and financial assistance

Some useful web sites

- The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (www.naspaa.org)
- NASPAA serves as a national and international resource for the promotion of excellence in education and training for public service. In the 'For Students' section, you can find:
 - FAQ's about the grad school search, application and matriculation processes
 - A clearinghouse of online courses offered at NASPAA member institutions and available to students anywhere
 - A database of member schools that offer grad degrees in public affairs and administration that is searchable by degree, specialization, state or accreditation

Some useful web sites

- **Financial assistance, Scholarships and Grant Opportunities**
- University of California, Riverside has one of the most comprehensive lists of external funding sources for graduate study:
<http://www.graddiv.ucr.edu/Admiss/HowFindMoneyNew.html>

Some useful web sites

The Penn State Division of Undergraduate Studies maintains this resource page for those considering **law schools**

<http://www.psu.edu/dus/prelaw/index.html>

One last thought (before questions)

- Don't go to grad school just because you feel like you have to.
- Work for a while (Maybe you'll like your job. Lucky you!)
- Don't get used to the money (yet). Be prepared to live the student life again, within the first 5 years. This involves no new cars, being poor.
- Go back to school early, not late, in your career. Just a couple years of experience will make a huge difference in your chances to get into a good grad school and how you do when you get there.