

AN INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE AT
SAINT MICHAEL'S COLLEGE

I. The Discipline of Political Science

Political Science in the broadest sense is the study of governments and governing procedures--whether these "governments" are sovereign states, international entities, or sub-units of political cultures. Thus, political science has many facets.

Political scientists are interested in the origins of and the preconditions for governments, the growth and evolution of governments, and the decline of governments. Political scientists are also interested in how governments are structured, how governments make decisions, as well as the content of the decisions, and how governments solve societal conflicts. In addition, true to their oldest academic traditions, political scientists retain their concern with the fundamental question of how governments ought to be constituted.

II. The Value of the Study of Political Science

The study of political science has value in several ways. The Greek word "idiot" was used to refer to one who took no interest in the affairs of his state. Today, no less than twenty centuries ago, it is incumbent upon every useful citizen to learn something about the political system in which he or she will spend his or her life. Any educated person ought to know something of the nature of government even if that person has no professional interest in political science.

More than a minimum knowledge of the function of political systems ought to be acquired by those who expect to have jobs which will make them "representatives" of the political system itself. Thus, anyone expecting to enter a career in law enforcement, teaching, the civil service, or the law has some social responsibility to obtain an education in the nature of governmental processes. This responsibility exists if only because, by virtue of the career chosen, others will perceive that person to be a source of information about the political system and about politics in general.

Finally, there are some careers for which an extensive training in political science can be most useful. This is true especially for those planning to seek careers in higher education, the legal profession, state and local government, urban planning, the federal bureaucracy, journalism, or in any of the proliferating quasi-public organizations which seek to monitor the political processes or to influence the content of public policy.

III. The Undergraduate Study of Political Science and the Job Market

In the next decade it is not going to be as easy for college graduates to find jobs as it was in the preceding two decades. This does not mean, however, that anyone expects prolonged or chronic unemployment for those in our society who have undergraduate degrees. It does mean that, in many cases, the choice range for tomorrow's college graduates may not be as great as it was for their older brothers and sisters.

The Department of Political Science at Saint Michael's is dedicated to the concepts of liberal education listed in the Statement of Aims of the College. It is within such a context that the department helps to prepare its concentrators for the job market, although this is not the department's sole purpose. Such a preparation is general by design and will not equip students with professional competence in any area. Such a design, however, can help develop the basic skills which are of continuing relevance. One's capacity to communicate effectively and think analytically may well be the best possible preparation for

for a job market characterized by wide fluctuations in supply and demand for narrowly specialized professions.

Nonetheless, it is appropriate to discuss some of the specific job and career opportunities that exist for those with a background and interest in political science. The requirements for advanced schooling are treated briefly here; you should pursue your specific interests with your academic advisor and relevant faculty. In addition, a more specific handout on post-graduation options is available from the department. The Committee on Law School (Professors Talarico, Pfeiffer, Kaplan, Kernstock, and Knight) has also prepared a specific handout on law school.

A. Law

(1) The Career: Too often, layment understand the legal profession only in narrow terms. They may be aware that a majority of all lawyers engage in private practice, alone or associated in law firms of two to several hundred lawyers. But a great many lawyers are not in private practice. Rather, they are salaried employees for corporations, labor unions, trade associations, and government. Equally important are the numerous law-trained individuals who apply their skills to other than traditional law practices. Many of these are in corporate management, public administration, or politics. Also, of course, almost all our judges and teachers of law are law-trained.

(2) Undergraduate Preparation: No particular course of study is a prerequisite for admission to law school. Today's law students have undergraduate degrees in political science, English, business, natural science, history, linguistics, and a host of other disciplines. The main guide to undergraduate study should be the student's own interests and talents. Successful study and the practice of law can be based on any of a large number of college backgrounds, so the student should feel free to study hard what interests him or her most and to enjoy the stimulation of undergraduate education. Political Science is one of the fields of concentration most frequently chosen by those who plan to go to law school, but it is far from the only appropriate choice.

(3) The Job Market: The expanding population in the United States and the increasing complexity of government and business have combined to create a strong demand for law school graduates ever since the late 1950's. Despite relatively steady annual growth of law graduates during the 1960's the demand stayed somewhat ahead of supply at least until 1970. However, during the past several years, the number of new lawyers graduated each year appears to have increased more rapidly than the demand for law graduates. As a result, some recent graduates have found it more difficult to find jobs than did their predecessors in the late 1960's.

B. The Federal Government

(1) The Career: The federal governmental structure is so large and varied that it is impossible to catalog briefly the types of job opportunities available. A federal government job can be almost anything: a teacher of government, a junior administrative aide, or a program analyst in the Environment Protection Agency.

(2) Undergraduate Preparation: If the college student chooses an undergraduate major with the thought of eventual employment with the U. S. government, he or she should realize the political science is no better as a marketable education, and no worse, than any number of other majors which might be chosen. The federal government employs people in every conceivable occupation and with every possible variety of educational background. For graduates in the social sciences or the humanities, selection is likely to pivot, not on subject knowledge, but on such indicators as motivations and potential for future development

as government employees.

(3) The Job Market: The federal government hires many hundreds of Americans, and it will certainly continue to do so for the foreseeable future. It would appear, however, that this trend will not reverse itself in the short run.

C. State and Local Government

(1) The Career: State and local governments are being asked to deal with a wider range of social problems. The states are taking increased responsibility in such areas as equal opportunity, consumer protection, highway safety, etc. The attempt to deal with these problems has led to a large expansion of both the executive and legislative branches of state government.

(2) Undergraduate Preparation: It is very difficult to generalize about the relationship of specific courses to specific jobs in the state and local government sector. No one interested in a career in state and local government could fail to benefit from courses in state and local government itself and in urban politics, American intergovernmental relations, and public administration.

(3) The Job Market: Job opportunities in the field of state and local government have been increasing rapidly. During the 1960's, local government employment increased dramatically, from 4.9 million employees to 7.4 million, a jump of over 50%. State government employment rose even more rapidly from 1.5 million persons in 1960 to 2.6 million persons in 1970, and increase of over 70%. These parallel increases in employment opportunities should serve to make this job sector an encouraging one for the political science graduate.

D. Business

(1) The Career: A large number of political science graduates -- some suggest nearly one third -- have traditionally found employment in the business sector of the economy. Many young men and women have chosen careers in the fields of marketing, personnel, advertising, public relations, and banking and finance.

(2) Undergraduate Preparation: A political science graduate seeking a career in business must realize that he or she will be competing with a very large number of college graduates with diversified undergraduate educations. The student should, therefore, take some steps to insure that he or she will not be disadvantaged in the job market. First, all graduates interested in business careers should be certain that they can communicate easily in written English. Second, it is important to be able to analyze elementary statistical data and handle mathematical concepts.

(3) The Job Market: The job market in the business community is as good as the state of the economy. Hiring patterns fluctuate as business organizations expand and contract. In general, however, the U. S. Department of Labor projects that there will be good opportunities for employment in the next decade in bank management training programs, in marketing research, and in personnel work. Public relations opportunities are not expected to be plentiful and neither are new job opportunities in advertising.

E. Journalism

(1) The Career: Today's "global village" has an insatiable appetite for news. Every aspect of human behavior, social, political, and economic, is a potential reportorial subject. What is reported defines the environment of large masses of people, and the way journalists analyze what they report shapes the understanding of the world.

(2) Undergraduate Preparation: The basis of good reporting lies in the ability to write, the ability to comprehend the significance of events, and the ability to translate that comprehension quickly and with clarity into written words. A necessary prerequisite for good reporting is an understanding that grows out of the depth and width of a person's educational experience.

(3) The job market in journalism today is very tight and highly competitive. There is little expansion at the present time in either newspapers or in the news facilities of radio and television stations. This fact, along with the increasing number of journalism school graduates, makes the task of finding a first job placement difficult.

F. Pre-Collegiate Education

(1) The Career: In elementary and secondary schools, political science shares its place in the curriculum with a wide variety of courses in social studies. Social studies professionals tend to have multi-disciplinary backgrounds and minimal commitments to any single subject area of specialization. Where general education is the goal, there is often too little room in the social studies curriculum for a political science emphasis.

(2) Undergraduate Preparation: Successful preparation for careers in pre-collegiate education requires multi-disciplinary training and flexibility in pursuite of job opportunities.

(3) The job market: The market for social studies teachers is marked by a relatively limited demand. Only about 50% of the trained social studies teachers find placement in elementary and secondary schools.

G. Political Science as a Career

(1) The Career: For those who wish to pursue a career in political science itself, most of the available jobs will continue to be, as they are today, in colleges and universities. An advanced degree in political science is virtually a prerequisite for any of these positions. Other job opportunities that are available for professional political scientists also require advanced degrees in almost every instance.

(2) Undergraduate preparation: Traditionally, graduate schools of political science required, or at least strongly preferred, undergraduate majors in political science. This situation has changed somewhat today; many graduate schools look with equal favor upon undergraduate majors in other social and behavioral sciences.

(3) The Job Market: The job outlook for professional political scientists is not very good. With 75% of all political science PhD's employed by educational institutions, the job market is directly related to the growth and expansion of colleges and universities. In the late 1970's and the 1980's there is little growth anticipated, in fact there will be a recution in hiring levels. The job market for the foreseeable future is very tight, and many young PhD's are faced with the prospect of unemployment.

IV. The Department of Political Science at Saint Michael's.

A. Staff

William E. Wilson, Chairperson
Sullivan Hall 104, Ext. 466
PhD (Fletcher School, Tufts University) International organization,
comparative politics, American foreign policy

George Olgyay
Sullivan Hall 14, Ext. 433
PhD (University of Notre Dame), international politics, comparative
politics, political theory

Elwyn Kernstock
Sullivan Hall 101, Ext. 463
PhD (University of Connecticut) American government, political
behavior

Ellen Cannon
Sullivan Hall 102, Ext. 431
PhD (University of Massachusetts) American government, political
theory, women's studies

Susette Talarico
Sullivan Hall 103, Ext. 245
PhD (University of Connecticut) Research Methods, legal studies

B. The Curriculum. The curriculum for political science concentrators has been developed from the best judgment of the members of the department. Course requirements have been designed to provide a minimum acquaintance with the scope of the discipline in both substance and methodology. The following curriculum is required of political science concentrators in addition to the requirements of the college for graduation.

1. Political Science: A total of 11 semester courses (33 credit hours) is required in the discipline. There are seven required courses:

- PO101 Introduction to Politics
- PO103 Research Methods and Methodology
- PO201 Introduction to American National Government
- PO221 World Politics
- PO301 Constitutional History and Law
- PO341 History of Western Political Thought
- PO410 Senior Seminar

In addition the department requires four elective courses to bring the total requirement to 11 courses.

2. In order to insure some cross-disciplinary work the department also requires that four semester courses (12 credit hours) be taken from among the fields of humanities, history, sociology, psychology, business, and economics.

3. Because it is the judgment of the department that language skills are an essential part of a liberal education, the department requires two years of language study or passage of an EQUIVALENCY EXAMINATION. This requirement may be waived in individual cases by the department chairperson.

4. The department also requires that each concentrator take English 101 or 105 (College Writing).

C. Alternative Education. The department has no formal alternative education programs at this time. On an individual basis, the department considers and supports the use of internships, foreign study, and other experience related endeavors which will enhance the goals of liberal education at Saint Michael's. In the past students have studied in Italy, Nepal, Guatemala, and participated in internships in Washington.

D. Standards and Practices. While the conduct of courses is at the discretion of the individual professor, there are certain expected minimum standards and practices throughout the department.

1. All out of class written work is expected to follow high standards of English and scholarly style. Footnotes should be used whenever necessary. The department standard for all work is Kate L. Turabian's A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973). An additional helpful guide for style is The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White (New York: Macmillan, 1959). It is strongly advised that all concentrators purchase these books for reference. Professors may impose penalties for deficiencies in either English or scholarly style.

2. Plagiarism and cheating are grave ethical offenses and will not be tolerated by the department. Department policy on these matters is detailed in a separate memorandum which is posted and available from your academic advisor.

3. Class attendance is the individual responsibility of the student. Classes will be held on all scheduled class days, and professors may impose penalties for absences.

4. All academic work is required on due dates, and professors may impose penalties for lateness.

D. Academic Counseling. The department places a high priority on the role of academic counseling. The members of the department and your academic advisor in particular are available to help you in two major areas, the decisions governing your academic life at St. Michael's and your choice of a career or further schooling after graduation. Your advisor is available to you to provide help, but the decisions you make regarding courses and the concentration are ultimately our own. All members of the department hold regular office hours or are available by special appointment.

F. Political Science Club. The Political Science Club is open to all students. It serves to stimulate interest in political science beyond the classroom through the use of debates, films, lectures, and informal discussions.

G. The Student Role in the Department of Political Science. The department encourages student interest and input in developing the policies and curriculum of the department. Students should feel free to discuss all department academic matters with their instructors, academic advisor, or the chairperson. In addition, an open student-invited department meeting is held at least once a year under the auspices of the Political Science Club.

NOTE: Much of the material on careers and the discipline has been excerpted from Careers and the Study of Political Science: A Guide for Undergraduates, Mary H. Curzan, ed. (Washington: American Political Science Association, 1974).