

## **Example: Rationale**

Excerpt from the Political Science proposal (April 2017) to modify the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.

### ***A. Current Requirements***

The current Political Science major is a 12-course major. Except for relatively small changes (such as the addition of PSC 202), the major has not changed much in the last 40-50 years. Requirements emphasize exposure to the traditional subfields of political science in three courses, required courses in data analysis and argument, and little structure for the seven remaining courses. Additional provisions limit the number of courses students can take outside our department or from non-tenure-track faculty (i.e., a limit on “associated courses”). Our major does not require students to develop a concentration or specialization or reward students who do.

Specifically, political science courses are currently categorized into five fields: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, positive theory, and political philosophy. Students are required to take three courses spread across these fields: one course in American politics; one course in *either* comparative politics *or* international relations; and one course in *either* positive theory *or* political philosophy. Our rules state that these courses must be fulfilled with courses in our department taught by tenure-track faculty.

In addition to PSC 202 (Argument in Political Science) and a course in data analysis, both of which are required, and the three distribution courses, students select seven more courses. These may come from any of the groups listed above or from History, Economics, or Philosophy. These seven courses are subject to a limit of 3 non-PSC courses; a limit of 3 courses taught by non-tenure track faculty (though, as we note, this rule is no longer consistently followed); and a limit of 3 transfer courses. There is also a requirement of one upper-level-writing course.

### ***B. Problems Identified with the Current Major***

The committee agreed that the major’s emphasis on breadth across three of five traditional subfields is not relevant to the political problems our students care about or to gaining a background useful for careers other than graduate school in political science, which few of our undergraduates pursue. Further, the structure of the major does not encourage specialization. This limits students’ ability to conduct research or to take on substantive internships by the time they are juniors and seniors, which is increasingly important for students landing jobs after college. The structure of the major is also not conducive to recruiting undergraduates because the traditional subfields give little indication what the subject matter of various courses is or how that subject matter connects to real politics.

There is also an administrative problem caused by the current restriction placed in the major on the number of courses taught by non-tenure-track faculty (called associated courses). In practice, this distinction has already broken down because of courses that are taught by regular and non-regular faculty – visitors, adjuncts or graduate students – at different times (e.g., PSC 202; Introduction to American Politics; Introduction to International Relations; many upper-level courses). Also, given that the regular faculty is small and specialized, this cap is also a limit on students’ ability to study important topics, such as international law or race and ethnic politics.

### ***C. Overview of Proposed New Major***

Our aim is to structure the Political Science major as a combination of required training in analytical skills and an opportunity for students to study a substantive topic in some depth. In addition, we are proposing to add a “team learning” component to satisfy the student demand for research opportunities and experiential learning. We would also like to encourage faculty to develop a 100-level Introduction to Political Science course that can be team taught. One vision of this is laid out in the *Chronicle* article that profiles Stanford, but there are many different ways that this could be approached.

*Tracks.* Very much along the lines of the recent Stanford undergraduate curriculum reforms that encourage depth of study—as well as similar structures in place in many other majors at Rochester (ranging from Biology to English to History)—we are recommending that courses instead be organized into tracks. Students will be required to take at least five courses in a chosen track. The tracks reflect how our course offerings connect to the real world of politics, social problems, and public debate. They also highlight our strengths as a faculty. The proposed tracks are:

Data and Modeling Elections and  
Government Philosophy, Law,  
and Public Policy Political  
Economy and Development War,  
Violence, and Cooperation

The names of the tracks are intended to be as non-technical and descriptive as possible. We arrived at this list of tracks inductively, by sorting the courses the department is likely to offer in future. Our grouping of classes was based on titles and course descriptions; some courses may need to be reclassified.

From the faculty’s perspective, the tracks are a regrouping of existing offerings. From the students’ perspective, the structure of the major is changing quite a bit, from a requirement that they take three courses from five “fields” to a requirement that they take a set of courses in a field that they choose. The new major will be more structured than the old major—with two tools courses, five courses in a major track, two outside the major track (for breadth), and three electives—but here the structure will reflect students’ particular interests (and advertise those interests with one of the five “names” of the major).

All of the tracks include courses taught by non-tenure-track faculty, and we are recommending that the major no longer limit the number of a student’s courses that may be taught by non-tenure-track faculty.

*Tools of Political Analysis.* In addition to the tracks, we will require that all Political Science majors take at least two courses in tools of political analysis. These analytical skills include statistical analysis, formal modeling, and argument. This restructuring of the existing major requirements allows students more choice than in the current version, where PSC 202 and PSC 200 are required of everyone. The proposed list of tools courses is:

PSC 107: Introduction to Positive Political Theory  
PSC 200: Data Analysis I. (Students may *not* enroll in this course if they have earned credit and a letter grade for ECO 230, PSC 205, PSY/CSP 211, STT 211, STT 212, STT 213, STT 214, or any other course in statistics,

or if they have received a score of 4 or 5 on the Advanced Placement exam in Statistics.)

PSC 202W: Argument in Political Science

PSC 205: Data Analysis II. (Prerequisite: Any basic course in statistics. This includes PSC 200, ECO 230, PSY/CSP 211, STT 211, STT 212, STT 213, STT 214, a score of 4 or 5 on the Advanced Placement exam in Statistics, or equivalent preparation.)

PSC 281: Formal Models in Political Science

PSC 288: Game Theory

*Team Learning.* To meet the growing undergraduate demand for research experiences and opportunities to connect classroom knowledge about politics to policy, we propose requiring that every political science major complete a credit-bearing experience that entails taking a seminar, engaging in supervised teaching, participating in an independent study, designing and conducting original research, or learning via direct participation in politics, policymaking or civic engagement.

During the first year of operation of this new curriculum, students will be able to fulfill this requirement by completing any one of the following—all of which are already offered by the department:

Data and Modeling Elections and  
Government Philosophy, Law,  
and Public Policy Political  
Economy and Development War,  
Violence, and Cooperation

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Washington Semester Program (PSC 396)

European Political Internship (PSC 397)

The Public Defender, District Attorney or Individualized Internship (PSC 394)

Senior Honors Seminar (PSC/IR 389W)

Innovation in Public Service (PSC 233)

Research Practicum in Criminal Justice Reform (PSC 242)

Existing small courses taught seminar-style (such as PSC 206, 241, 253, 259, and 276)

Supervised Teaching (PSC 390)

Directed Research (PSC 395)

Independent Study (PSC 391)

Senior Honors Thesis (PSC 393W)

Based on our current number of majors, we anticipate that the demand will be roughly seventy students per year (i.e., 300 divided by 4). We expect the first four of these options to accommodate approximately 20 students per year, and the remainder easily to accommodate the rest. While we already offer several small research seminars, this new requirement will, we hope, encourage other faculty to do so.

The department will also work closely with Stu Jordan and CETL to develop and offer an additional course—tentatively titled “Social and Political Entrepreneurship”—which will be taught in collaboration with local, national and international non-profit organizations that attempt to influence governments and directly address social needs. More broadly, we will work with CETL and Stu to continue to build a network of partners in governmental and non-governmental organizations that can help mentor our students, connect our students to summer (not-for-credit) internship and work experiences, and assist them in developing career paths after graduation. We will also collaborate with these partners in the development of research and service projects that provide meaningful co-curricular experiences for undergraduates.