First-Year Graduate Curriculum

In 2003, UCSD's Department of Political Science instituted a major reform of its graduate program to include a first-year core curriculum required of all PhD students. This curriculum is composed of two quarters of courses in the Principals of Politics (200B-C) and three quarters of Research Methods (204A-C) courses.

The ambition of this reform is to unify the curriculum and provide all incoming graduate students with a common base of knowledge from which to analyze the enduring issues of politics, regardless of substantive specialization and background. A hallmark of our program is the willingness and ability of both faculty and graduate students to work across sub-disciplinary boundaries. We as a department believe that political science is a coherent discipline, not four subfields loosely grouped under an umbrella. We seek to break down traditional barriers and build bridges across all the subfields in the discipline.

Accordingly, we offer a set of six first-year courses that emphasize common problems of politics across fields, as well as the similarities (and differences) in how different subfields and approaches address them. These core courses are co-taught by faculty from different subfields and perspectives, and each teaching team is responsible for the actual syllabus used in each course. Course summaries and a typical first-year course plan are provided below.

Our graduate program is a unique statement about the discipline of political science. No similar attempt to unify the curriculum has been undertaken in any other department in the country. We expect that our students will not only have a broader command of the discipline as a result of this first year curriculum but will be able to see problems of politics in their more specialized areas of study through new and, we hope, clearer lenses. We also anticipate that the first-year curriculum, and especially the co-teaching of the principles courses, will invigorate the intellectual environment of the department, highlight the distinctive nature of a UCSD graduate education, and keep us at the frontiers of the discipline.

Principles of Politics

200B - Democracy

This course provides an overview of the normative and positive issues associated with modern democracies. It is focused around two questions: (1) Why is democracy imaginatively appealing? (2) How do the social, political, and economic arrangements of democracies actually work?

200C - States and Markets

This seminar provides an overview of the normative and positive issues associated with decentralized (market) and centralized (political) mechanisms of allocation. It is motivated by two questions at the heart of the discipline: (1) What is the appropriate role of government in the economy? (2) How do we explain the actual role of government in the economy?

Research Methods

204A - Research Design

This course provides a solid introduction to the principles of research design and social scientific research. There is no single orthodoxy in the field or in the structure of this course. Nonetheless, we focus on issues that are common in all strands of research in political science and highlight factors that condition the choice of alternative research methods

204B - Quantitative Methods I

This course introduces students to the rudiments of decision theory and game theory. Emphasis will be placed on modeling and solving games.

204C - Game Theory I

This course introduces students to the use of quantitative methods (particularly multiple regression and its extensions) in political science. The emphasis is on understanding the methods and using them in political science applications.

Typical First-Year Course Plan

Fall
- 200B Democracy
- 204A Research Design
- Field Requirement or Skills Course*

Winter
- 204B Quantitative Methods I
- Field Requirement or Skills Course*
- Field Requirement or Skills Course*

Spring
- 200C States and Markets
- 204C Game Theory I
- Field Requirement or Skills Course*

Key Objectives: Complete nine courses and to start writing a seminar paper.

*Skills courses refer to game theory/formal modeling, econometrics, foreign languages, or electives (lower division foreign language courses do not count toward PhD credits)