



Cal Poly Pomona  
Department of  
Political Science

# STUDENT HANDBOOK 2024-2025

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<https://www.cpp.edu/class/political-science/>

# Political Science Student Handbook

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## *Table of Contents*

I. How to Succeed in College.....	Page 2
II. First Year.....	Page 5
1. Coursework.....	Page 5
2. Getting involved on campus.....	Page 6
3. Career planning.....	Page 6
III. Second Year.....	Page 7
1. Coursework.....	Page 7
2. Getting involved on campus.....	Page 7
3. Career planning.....	Page 7
IV. Third Year.....	Page 8
1. Coursework.....	Page 8
2. Getting involved on campus.....	Page 9
3. Career planning.....	Page 9
V. Fourth Year (and to completion).....	Page 10
1. Coursework.....	Page 10
2. Graduating.....	Page 11
3. Getting involved on campus.....	Page 11
4. Career planning.....	Page 11
VI. After Graduation.....	Page 11
VII. Resource List.....	Page 12

## I. How to Succeed in College

First, congratulations on making it to Cal Poly Pomona! We know it took you a lot of hard work to get here, and we know that you will be able to earn your bachelor's degree, learn a lot, and prepare yourself for your future career with some planning and attention to the requirements of college.

As a Political Science major you're part of a special community of learners. Think of the department as your academic home. The department office is in Building 94, Room 303, where the department coordinator, Beatriz Garcia ([beatrizg@cpp.edu](mailto:beatrizg@cpp.edu)), department chair, Professor Mario Guerrero ([mag@cpp.edu](mailto:mag@cpp.edu)), have offices. They are available to answer questions about the major and help direct you to other university offices as needed.

Please take some time to read this handbook to help you create a plan for college. There is also a lot of useful information on the Political Science website:

<http://www.cpp.edu/class/political-science>.

**Professors:** University professors are not like high school teachers because they have significant research and service work beyond teaching responsibilities. For you, this means that your professors will be available during class and during office hours, and each will give you specific instructions for contacting them outside of those times. Usually it will involve email.

It is very important to take advantage of class time and office hours to get to know at least a few of your professors. For any class, it is a good idea to go to office hours to ask questions about the course material. Take a list of questions to clarify and explore the concepts from class. These conversations will help you do well in the class and begin the advising relations you want with your professors. Letters of recommendation from professors who know you *and your hard work* are very important for graduate school and job applications.

**How to address Faculty Members:** Most PLS instructors have a PhD and can be called Dr. (the D in PhD stands for Doctor), but every instructor can be called Professor, regardless of their rank: "Professor Dinwiddie," or "Dr. Dinwiddie," are polite forms of address, as appropriate. Hint: If you approach a faculty member whose name you don't know or can't remember, "Professor" stands alone perfectly well: "Excuse me, Professor, but could you tell me where to find the Library, please?"

**Advising:** Every Political Science major is provided an academic advisor who is a faculty member in the Department. You should make a point of getting to know your advisor—go by their office even if you *don't* have a form to sign or a curricular question to ask. Since your instructors will change from semester to semester, your Advisor is the faculty

member you have more regular ties to, and is a good prospect for a letter of recommendation, especially if you take a course or two from her. Once every year the Department will place an academic hold on your registration, *requiring* your advisor's attention, but we hope you'll have much more contact than this minimum.

You also have access to the advising at the College of Letters Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) Student Success Center in Building 5, Room 228 for additional help, especially with academic policies, such as withdrawals and grade appeals.

**Coursework:** In college, there are many fewer assignments that are turned in regularly than there were in high school. This means that you have to keep yourself on top of the readings, lecture notes, due dates and exams for each class. The professors may assume that if an assignment is in the syllabus, that is all the communication students need about the assignment. Treat your syllabi as contracts with the professors. So, make sure to look at the syllabus for each course regularly so you don't miss readings and due dates.

***Attend all your classes!*** If you know that you have a hard time getting up early, try not to sign up for 8am classes in your first year. The fastest way to get behind and do poorly is to miss your classes. If you must miss class for an illness or family problems, get in contact with your professors immediately, and if you must miss more than one class, contact your advisor in the Political Science Department for advising.

To graduate, you must have at least a 2.0 GPA (C average) for your PLS courses, as well as your CPP GPA and your overall GPA. If you struggle with getting the grades you want in your first year, seek help from advisors, professors, and even the Library's University Learning Center. There is still time in your first and second years to raise your GPA, after that, it gets much more difficult. If you hope to attend graduate school or law school, your GPA should be significantly higher than 2.0.

**Take charge of your learning:** People have different learning styles and will absorb and understand course material best with different reading and studying techniques. If you are having a hard time concentrating and understanding course material, you might try taking a learning styles inventory exam, visit the Disability Resource Center for an evaluation (<https://www.cpp.edu/drc/>). You can also check out the Campus Counseling Services in the Bronco Bookstore Building 66, Room 116 (<https://www.cpp.edu/caps/>). They have stress and time management workshops that could be just what you need. Additionally, you can check out Student Health Services in Building 45 (<https://www.cpp.edu/health/>). They provide a range of services to help students identify and overcome obstacles stemming from financial, emotional, social, or family situations. You can also start by talking with your advisor in the department or the CLASS Student Success Center (<https://www.cpp.edu/class/student-success-center>).

**Feeling distressed and don't know what to do?** In college, it is extremely common to feel overwhelmed. There might be unexpected life events that throw off your progress. Most frequently, these events happen with regard to financial situation, work, or even family issues. If you are at a loss for next steps, the CPP Care Center (<https://www.cpp.edu/carecenter>) is a great place to get an assessment of available campus resources. They might be able to plug you into emergency grants, housing assistance, or off-campus partners that have handled your issue before.

**Getting Involved:** Often students who get involved in on campus groups and activities have an advantage over students who don't because they build support networks of students and advisors. These support networks share information about opportunities on and off campus and can help out if the student runs into difficulties. These networks of people and activities also make college more fun and engaging. And last, by getting involved you can develop a range of skills, such as interpersonal, team-building, and leadership, that are important for your future success. Start by going to the Political Science Club meetings. Everyone is welcome and the students there know about many of the other activities on campus. They meet on Thursdays from 12:00-1:00pm in Building 5-138.

**Communication and Technology:** The University and your professors expect you to keep up with your Cal Poly Pomona online accounts. This includes your CPP email, but also BroncoDirect and Canvas. You should memorize your Bronco username, password and ID number. Get into the habit of checking your CPP email account and Canvas dashboard on a daily basis. The department and your professors send regular, time-sensitive emails throughout the term. Remember to follow basic norms of professionalism when communicating with your professors over email (always include your name).

**Career Planning:** Don't leave career planning until your senior year. The school year and especially the summers are the best time to be exploring graduate school and/or career paths to find the one that best fits your values, skills, and interests. Work with other students and your advisors to find these opportunities and figure out how to fit them into your schedule.

**And finally - When things go wrong – get help!** There are many resources and people on campus who want you to succeed. Asking for advice and help when it is needed is a critical part of making good decisions and solid plans - for everyone, including the most experienced adults. Students too often believe they should be able to handle their challenges alone, but this can result in the creation of bigger problems. Your advisors may be able to help you figure out how to manage the challenges that you will face during your time in college. Ask for advice!

#### **Quick Tips for Success**

- Go to class!

- Go to office hours.
- Know your syllabi.
- Create a calendar of due dates.
- Read your CPP email carefully.
- Check Canvas daily.
- If something happens that interferes with school, talk to an advisor about **withdrawing** from one or more classes!
- **How long will it take to graduate?** For transfer students, some will only take two years to graduate. For freshmen, especially with outside responsibilities, will take five or six years to graduate. **Students take on a number of different timelines to graduation.** We encourage you to make steady and significant progress to graduation at a speed that allows you to do well in school, minimize school loans, and manage other demands. Please be aware that financial aid may become more difficult to get after the fourth year of school. You can compress or stretch the following guide to fit your schedule.

## II. First Year

### 1. Course work

**General Education:** In the first two years of college, try to complete the lower division GE courses. That is everything but the GE synthesis courses, which are Areas B5, C3, and D4.

**Math:** Area B4. We strongly recommend that you take Statistics 1200 in your first year because it will prepare you for the Political Science research courses: PLS 2051 and PLS 3055.

**English:** In your first year, complete the three Area A requirements. There are specific *sections* for the Area A2, the written communication courses, for multilingual students. Please check with the English Department to find those sections.

**Political Science:** In the first semester, take PLS 1011 Resources in Political Science. This course is an introduction to the whole major. It will help you with library research, the expectations of the major, and to start thinking about career planning. This will also count as a GE Area E course.

Also in the first year, take three to five of the other Political Science introduction courses PLS 2010 through 2080. These do not have to be taken in order because each is an introduction to the different subfields and upper division courses in Political Science. For example, PLS 2010 Introduction to American Government is the course you should

take before the upper division American Government courses, e.g. PLS 3210 and PLS 4250; PLS 2030 Introduction to International Relations is the introduction to the upper division courses, e.g. PLS 3520-4580. The point is that you should work through the 2000 level courses in your first two years and before you focus on the upper division courses. [Usually the second digit in the course number indicates the subfield: 0=Public Law, 1=Public Administration, 2=American Government, 3= Political Theory, 4=Comparative and 5=International Relations.]

**Go to your professors' office hours** with questions about the course material. Get used to speaking one-on-one with professors. Going to office hours gives you many advantages: 1. you increase your understanding of the class material and what the professor expects you to know, 2. you signal to your professor that you are a serious student who is willing to put in the extra effort to do well, 3. you start to build relations with professors who can be helpful in career advising, academic advising, and writing letters of recommendation for scholarships, graduate school, and jobs.

## 2. Getting Involved on Campus

In the first year, your main concern should be learning how to do well in your courses. But you will need a group of friends/contacts on campus, and it is important to get to know students in your major. So join the Political Science Club. The club meets on Thursdays from 12:00-1:00pm in Building 5, Room 138. They have pizza, discuss current political events and problems, have speakers, and take tours of law schools and explore other career opportunities. They also have social events and do some community service as well. It is an easy and fun way to start your involvement on campus and the club members tend to be very active and successful as they move into their later school years.

## 3. Career Planning

In the first year, take PLS 1011, visit the Career Center (<https://careercenter.cpp.edu>) to see what resources they have, and meet with your advisor to discuss career options and your interests. If you need to work, you may want to start looking for entry level jobs in offices related to political science, like your mayor's office, a city or county government office, campaign jobs, or non-profit organizations that do work in your community that you care about. Work experience on your resume will be very important for getting that first job in the field of your choice.

If you don't need to work, look for internships in areas that you are interested in. There are internships in elected officials' offices, courts, campaigns, and non-profit organizations. Take advantage of your first summer to explore your career interests.

The Career Center has workshops on creating your resume and on how to do informational interviews. These can help you get the jobs and internships.

### III. Second Year

#### 1. Course work

Think of your second year as the year you will really start to focus on figuring out what you are most interested in doing after college. Think about what classes interest you most and what sorts of careers are related to those classes. Speak to advisors about the kinds of jobs that are out there and what kinds of training or education are needed for them. Look for general education courses that help you explore areas outside and/or related to Political Science. You don't have to decide in your second year, but you want to start taking advantage of all the opportunities to explore.

In the second year, finish up the introductory level Political Science classes 2010-2080 and the lower division GE courses. Transfer students should complete the PLS 2010-2080 requirements by the end of their junior year.

#### 2. Getting Involved on Campus

Become a regular and active member of at least one group on campus. Pick a group that is involved in issues you care about and has people you get along with. There are a lot of groups on campus - spend some time exploring them - visit club meetings to see what each is up to. The traditional ones for Political Science students (<https://www.cpp.edu/class/political-science/>) are the Political Science Club, Mock Trial, Judicial Internship, Model UN, Model OAS, Study Abroad or Study Away, and ASI Student Government (<https://asi.cpp.edu>), which has many opportunities like Bronco Advocates. But it may be that you have other areas of interest as well - maybe you are concerned about the environment, and so The Green Team or the Food Justice Club might interest you, or maybe you want to be more involved in one of the Cultural Centers such as the African American Student Center or the Pride Center. There are a lot of options.

In your second year, get involved but don't take on too much! Be an active and reliable member of the group(s) you choose, but don't try to be an officer of three different groups. This can have a very negative effect on your GPA. This is a good time to perfect your time management skills!



### 3. Career Planning

It's time to get serious about thinking about life after college. You don't have to decide this year, but put yourself in classes and work environments where you get a taste of what different careers are about. For example, maybe you love doing research and data analysis. If so, talk to your professors about what classes you should take next to explore this further and what kinds of work and graduate school will allow you to build on these skills.

The summer after your sophomore year, you should be, at least part-time, in a job or internship that will help build your resume, your work experience, and help you decide about the future. If you decide you hate the work you end up doing, don't see that as a mistake; instead, think about why you hated it and use that information to help guide you towards work you will enjoy. These kinds of lessons are very valuable as you learn what you are good at and what kinds of environments and work motivate you.

**Possible Internships:** The kinds of internships our students get include: campaigns - phone banking and going door-to-door for candidates; district offices of California State Assembly or Senate or US Congress and Senate - constituency services, taking phone calls and keeping track of voters' interests, organizing events for representatives; city and county government offices - visit your local city office and websites for internship opportunities; Justice Corps and Neighborhood Legal Services - assist low income litigants with their court cases in the Self-Help Centers in most of the Los Angeles Superior Courts; public defenders and district attorneys offices; and non-profit organizations like those working with foster youth, health care, education. See the internship lists on the Political Science website under advising.

## IV. Third Year

### 1. Course work

In your third year, focus on Political Science in the upper division courses. The curriculum sheet explains how to select the required upper division courses. Overall you will need to take 8 upper division 4-unit courses or 40 units of upper division Political Science courses, and the 2 classes for Senior Thesis **or** Senior Internship.

Upper division courses are usually offered once a year or every other year. Check the Proposed Schedule of Classes on the Political Science website to create a plan to complete the upper division requirements. The Proposed Schedule will change, but it should be relatively close to what will be offered.

The two Additional Political Science courses allow you to focus on your primary interests in Political Science and can come from any PLS subfield or the non-subfield related courses in PLS. For example, if you have decided that you are very interested in political theory, you can fulfill the two Additional course requirements with political theory (if enough are offered when you need them.).

As you gain expertise in an area using these courses, you are also preparing to write a Senior Thesis paper or Senior Internship paper (senior project). As you complete the upper division courses, think about potential topics for your senior project, talking with professors in your junior year about potential topics is a good idea.

If you're a Community College Transfer you'll probably have some of the PLS 2000 level introductory courses to complete. You can also start taking the upper division synthesis courses in the GE.

## 2. Getting Involved on Campus

If you haven't gotten involved, give it a try! This is especially important if you are not working in an area that you want to pursue after school. It is also time to develop leadership skills in your extracurricular activities. Get elected to an office of one of the clubs, start a new club, or initiate a program for one of the clubs or for the department. For example, you might work with the Political Science Department to start a new program. There are many ways to show that you are energetic, engaged, and have strong leadership abilities; and these are great to be able to demonstrate for job and graduate school applications.

If there is one area that you are particularly interested in, such as juvenile law, international relations, etc., focus most of your attention in these areas. People like to see commitment and engagement to specific areas of policy or public organizations because it demonstrates awareness, maturity, and motivation. If you are not sure, that is okay too, but engage in activities to show that you are engaged and responsible.

Again, make sure you are not taking on so much that it affects your GPA.

## 3. Career Planning

In your third year, it is time to start building a network of people in the field you want to pursue. For example, if you are interested in law school and have a particular interest, such as public defense criminal prosecution, or family law, then internships and classes in these areas should connect you to people who know something about practicing these kinds of law, can advise you about what steps to take, and potentially write letters of recommendation about your abilities and commitment to this specific work.

**Graduate school?** In your third year, it is also time to decide about graduate school. Although work in an area related to your graduate education (work in Congress for a year before going back for graduate work in American politics) is a great idea, we know many of you will want to go straight into a graduate program. If so, you will need to study for and take the graduate exams in the summer before your last year. You also want to take the time to research graduate programs, admission requirements, and deadlines.

For law school the exam is the LSAT and other graduate programs the GRE. *Study for these!* Good scores on these exams can result in much better financial aid packages, often with large grants.

For graduate school planning, it is time to talk with advisors about how to research different programs and make decisions about which are right for you. This is a different process from choosing an undergraduate school!

**Senior Project Choices:** Because your choice of senior project can really help with career pursuits, take it seriously! In the spring of your third year, decide whether you will take Senior Thesis or Senior Internship. Go to the advising sessions and ask professors about the requirements. In Senior Thesis students spend two terms selecting, researching, and writing a 30-40 page research topic in political science or public administration. In the Senior Internship course, the student finds an internship related to the major, gets it approved by the department and completes 200 hours in the internship by the end of the fall term of their last year. They spend the spring term writing a research/reflection paper that uses their experience in the internship to inform and analyze current scholarship related to the internship.

## V. Fourth or Last Year

### 1. Course work

In your last year, you must be enrolled in either the first course of Senior Thesis or Senior Internship *in the fall*. The courses are only offered once a year, so you must be in one of the classes in the fall in order to graduate that year. If you have not taken all the 2000 level courses but can still finish your degree this year, consult with the professor of the Senior Thesis or Senior Internship class for guidance.

Finish all your upper division Political Science courses, synthesis GE courses and make sure that you will have 120 units by the time you finish.

Enjoy your classes! You should realize that you are becoming experts in some of the political science areas - particularly in relation to your senior project topic. This expertise is something that will help you understand a great deal of the world in the future and can be used to help with all your applications for work and/or graduate school. *To be able to develop a mastery of one area of knowledge is evidence of your ability to develop masteries in other areas.*

## 2. Getting Involved on Campus

In your last year, you may be at the peak of your involvement in leadership roles of one or two organizations, or you may be ready to taper off your involvement (if you have done quite a bit already) in order to focus on your senior project, study for graduate school exams, or work in the internship that will help you land that dream job when you finish. Make time to focus on the next step after college.

## 3. Career Planning

At this point, you may be choosing between one or two directions, or you may be focused on one path. If you find yourself completely unsure about your next goals, meet with an advisor to discuss how to use the next few years after college to continue to build on your degree. Right after college is not the time to work *only* at a fast food restaurant for very long, unless you plan on developing a long-term career in restaurant management.

Start meeting with professors who might be willing to write letters of recommendation for you. Whether you need these right away or not, find those professors who know you and will be able to write strong letters. If you never spoke up in class and went to office hours, then you may still be able to go to office hours and talk with professors about what you have been doing outside of class and your long-term goals. If your grades in that professor's classes were good, then you might be able to get reasonably supportive letters. It is not a good idea to ask a professor for a letter of recommendation if you are not sure the letter will be good. It is okay to ask if the professor feels they can write a supportive letter. If a professor agrees, remember to provide as much information about your application as possible, including your deadline. Try and give at least a month notice before your application is due.

Go to the Career Center and take advantage of everything they offer, such as career fairs, workshops and handouts on how to interview, design an effective resume, conduct informational interviews, and more.

## VI. After Graduation

After you graduate, stay in contact with your professors and the growing network of CPP Political Science alumni. We hope that members of this network will be able to help each other and future students, as well as the department by keeping us in touch with the shifting needs of employers and employees in fields related to the major. Email and visit your professors to check in with them and update them with your continued success!

## VII. Resources

List and links to CPP Academic and Support Services

<https://www.cpp.edu/academics/academic-resources/>

CPP Career Center

<https://careercenter.cpp.edu>

CLASS Student Success Center

<http://www.cpp.edu/class/student-success-center>

Student Health and Wellness and Counseling Services

<https://www.cpp.edu/caps/>

Survivor Advocacy Service

<https://www.cpp.edu/survivoradvocacy/>

Disability Resource Center

<https://www.cpp.edu/drc/>

Learning Resource Center (tutoring and writing)

<https://www.cpp.edu/lrc/>

Broncos Care Center

<https://www.cpp.edu/carecenter/>