

Advice to Students from Students

In the Winter 2001, the University of Michigan Department of Political Science conducted several surveys of students. In one, it asked open-ended questions of approximately 200 undergraduate students. One of those questions asked, What advice would you give other students who are deciding to major in Political Science?

Students expressed a very high degree of consensus about how to get the most out of the program. Their responses generally fall into the following categories.

1. Sample each sub-field, but then take several courses in the area you think you like best. By specializing it is possible to develop enough familiarity with a part of the field that what it means to think like a political scientist becomes clear. Pick one area and work it, said one person.
2. Choose cognate courses outside the department that show you how people in another discipline think about the same kinds things you are studying in your political science courses. Take as many classes as you can in fields that are related to political science but are not in the department. This will give you a better-rounded view of political science, besides what you learn in your political science classes.
3. Take at least one seminar. One person captured others views well: Take as many junior/senior seminars as possible. One can really learn and converse better with the other students and the professor.
4. A lot of students suggested that it is helpful to choose courses for the instructor, as much as for the subject. Get to know the professors and which ones you learn the most from and who teach in a style you enjoy most. But a few students cautioned that the people and subject matter that others like may not be what you like. Take classes that interest you, said one person, not those that others find interesting. Shopping around is helpful: If in the first two weeks of class you feel uncomfortable or the course seems boring, switch to something that interests you.
5. There was near-unanimity on the importance of attending all lectures and keeping up with the reading. A lot of people said that the lectures provide structure and highlight important points. Miss a lecture, and you miss the highlights. Listen to the lectures! They make the class. But one person added, Don't feel bombarded or overwhelmed by the large amount of information. Take in the main points of the reading and the lectures.
6. Another common piece of advice was to get to know your professors and GSIs. People say that going to office hours is really helpful for learning

about resources, getting access to information, and enjoying a course. Try to get to know at least one professor per term. (At the very least you will get to know professors to ask to write letters of reference in your senior year.)

7. Talk in class. Ask questions. You will feel more engaged, and you'll enjoy your classes more.
8. Frequent the political science department to get advice and learn more about the department, said one person. Get to know your adviser ASAP, said another.
9. Read *The New York Times*. Over 60% of the majors in the department read at least the internet news each day. Knowing something about current events helps in classes.