

CHARTER FOR THE MAJOR IN POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Politics & Government major provides students with an intellectual grounding in **modes of making and implementing public decisions**, the **role of states and institutions**, and the **characteristics of political life** at **local, national, European, regional and international** levels, by means of a comparative-historical approach.

These central themes, in which **law** and **political science** play an important role, are approached in the context of an **ongoing multidisciplinary exchange** within the social sciences.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Politics & Government major enables students to acquire the fundamental principles of analysis and interpretation, permitting them to:

- Gain introductory knowledge of the particularities of **legal reasoning**, both in written and oral forms,
- **Find their bearings in the different contemporary institutional environments**,
- Become familiar with the tools needed to understand the **representativeness, legitimacy** and **effectiveness** of public decisions.

ACADEMIC FORMATS

The Politics and Government major is taught in the second year, and is comprised of two types of learning formats:

- **Core courses**, designed for all students of the major, addressing fundamental areas of inquiry in the major,
- **Methodological workshops**, in small groups, aimed at advancing students' technical capacity to engage with issues relating to the major.

These courses are supplemented by seminar courses, one during the autumn semester and three during the spring semester.

Core courses

The core courses of the Politics and Government major comprise:

- An **advanced law course** (Fall semester), 48 hours
- An **advanced political science course** (Fall semester), 48 hours
- A **multidisciplinary course** (Spring semester), 24 hours.

Advanced law course (24 hours of lectures + 24 hours of discussion sections - 6 ECTS credits): Constitutional Law

In continuation of the introductory law course, this course will use a comparative approach to **study the institutions of the Fifth Republic**, drawing upon the history of law and via an introduction to legal technique. In addition to studying the creation of the 1958 Constitution, the course will examine the establishment of current institutional balances. It will therefore look at changes in the constitutional model introduced by the Fifth Republic, which has gradually incorporated new democratic requirements (participatory democracy), new ideas of sovereignty (the construction of Europe), and new actors (the increase in the power of judges).

Advanced political science course (24 hours of lectures + 24 hours of discussion sections - 6 ECTS credits): Comparative Politics

The advanced course in political science is a comparative politics course designed to develop students' understanding of comparative methods and objectives in the field of political science. The course aims to expand and enhance students' understanding of the contemporary political arena in all its diversity. The course builds upon the first-year introduction to political science by studying a region (e.g. Europe, Latin America, the Middle East) and its comparison with a selection of extra-regional cases.

Multidisciplinary course (24 hour lecture course - 3 ECTS credits)

The multidisciplinary course occupies a specific role within the major, enabling a cross-fertilisation of disciplinary perspectives to develop through enquiry into transversal objects of study. In this context, for example, one course consists of an introduction to the analysis of public policy. Its objective is to open the black box of public policy-making to allow students to move beyond a functionalist vision of government policy (i.e. a government provides the most effective response possible to a clearly defined problem) to grasp the complexity of the mechanisms at work. The aim is to gain an understanding of the different phases of the construction of public policies, their implementation and evaluation, by identifying the weight of institutions, the role of ideas and the influence of the different actors in these processes.

Methodological workshops

The methodological workshops provide students with the opportunity to gain practical experience and learn **valuable technical skills** in relation to the themes of the Politics & Government major. These skills emphasize the importance of developing a **capacity to work independently and in student groups**.

In addition, the workshops provide students with the necessary tools to **place political subjects at a sufficient critical distance** to permit them to be understood in all their complexity.

Four different methodological approaches are explored within the major:

- **Cartography** workshops
- **Empirical study** workshops,
- **Legal study** workshops
- **Simulation** workshops.

Definition of the various types of methodological workshops

Cartography workshops

Cartography is now an essential element of social science research. Moreover, “[w]e live in a world of images, the number of which and their dissemination are rapidly increasing (the internet/social networks revolution, the growth of big data, more accessible applications, etc.)”¹. The cartography workshops introduce students to “graphic data processing”, defined as “all the operations that transform information that is read (texts, numbers) into seen images (maps, diagrams, graphs)”² and aim in particular to cast a **critical regard over the images produced and the interpretations of reality, as well as the representation choices** that they convey.

Empirical study workshops

These workshops allow students to work on practical, real-life research questions over a period of one or two semesters. These questions may, in some cases, arise from work commissioned by outside institutions seeking expertise in a given field of study, in relation to their own area of activity. The workshops are divided between:

- **Qualitative research workshops:** research in the humanities and social sciences is used to introduce students to the key issues of the major. This provides the students with the opportunity to conduct qualitative research in the field. The objective is to study public policy implementation within the framework of an approach similar to a sociology of public policy implementation or through a historical analysis of the institutions responsible for its application. By taking the administrative reality as the basis for their enquiry, students will be able to identify impacts and the interplay between stakeholders, both of which are inherent to any design or implementation of public policy.

Examples of different approaches include: prosopographic work, interview work, archive research and internet-based research.

Examples of research topics: the creation of a blog to provide alerts and inform readers about a specific subject in relation to the theme of the major, the conducting of a survey of the professional profiles of Sciences Po Alumni, etc.

¹ <http://www.sciencespo.fr/cartographie/lire-faire-cartes/>

² Idem

- **Quantitative research workshops:** these workshops continue to familiarise students with research techniques in the humanities and social sciences, including fieldwork. They are intended to form a progression from the first year statistics course. The aim is for students to use the quantitative tools required for processing and modelling data on a large scale to conduct a practical study of the effects of a particular public policy or a phenomenon that has an impact on public policy.

Examples of approaches: using social networks for research, creating and using a database.

Examples of topics: analysis of the impacts of changes in secondary school zoning and teacher placement on the behaviour of individual actors; assessing the effects of corruption on the implementation of regional or national territorial planning and development policies.

Legal studies workshops

The legal studies workshops provide students with an introduction to **legal interpretation and reasoning techniques**, and **legal writing**. They are based on case studies and legal texts (e.g. case law research). Their purpose is to encourage students to begin thinking about the **specificity of law in its application**. These workshops also offer an **introduction to oratory practice** in a legal context.

Simulation workshops

Students work on given **situations from the field of study in the major**, and are collectively guided towards identifying **robust responses to these given situations**. Politics is an arena for debate and for confronting reality and, as such, it is particularly important that students majoring in Politics & Government have the opportunity to learn negotiation techniques (e.g. modelling international negotiation in the framework of the COP21). In the context of these simulations, particular attention is paid to realistic modelling of the various constraints to which the different actors involved are subject.