




Compassion Forum, Messiah College

Career Planning for Politics Majors



Preparing you for a future of meaningful work

This tool is intended to assist you in effectively managing your career exploration, planning and decision making. In order to prepare for success after graduation, it is essential to take initiative, be intentional and have goals in mind. Through exploration and “testing out” ideas of interest, your plan may shift or change—that’s completely natural! Stay flexible and take advantage of the rich resources and support persons who are ready to walk with you on *your path to purposeful work*.

This is a joint production by the Department of Politics and the Career Center

Assess

Assess, articulate and develop your strengths, interests and values. Begin to explore options that are congruent with your awareness of self.

Explore & Engage

Purposefully engage in opportunities and pursue resources that will set you on the path to personal and professional development. Target opportunities where you can apply and further develop your skill sets, grow your experience base and explore areas of interest.

Experience

Enhance critical professional competencies to successfully connect your professional goals with real world opportunities. Take your experience to the next level by participating in meaningful opportunities that will differentiate you from the rest.

Transition

Synthesize your collective experiences from your academics, internships and other experiential learning, service, leadership and cocurricular involvement. Begin to articulate a plan and take action to translate your skills and experiences into meaningful post-graduate opportunities.

“My professors had very high expectations for me and pushed me to always take it to the next level, both academically (i.e. taking on some rigorous paper topics), professionally (applying to myriad internships, fellowships, etc.) and in terms of leadership in the community (suggesting volunteer work or other invaluable opportunities).”

—*Jamie Davies, '05,*
Policy & Research Analyst, Thomas B. Fordham
Institute (Columbus, Ohio office);
Master in Public Affairs, Princeton University

Message from the Chair: Robin Lauermann



Warmest blessings and welcome from the department of politics! As you explore your vocation through the politics major, this planning guide provides some important questions and resources which you should engage right from the start

of your Messiah College journey. There is a wide range of possibilities for politics majors—a fact which brings much opportunity but which may feel overwhelming at times. Your coursework in our rigorous program provides you with important skillsets and knowledge; however, your experience at Messiah will be enriched through collaboration with your advisor and other important centers on campus, as well as cocurricular and extracurricular activities. With all of these opportunities at your disposal, you have the ability to author your own unique path in living out God’s calling for you.

The faculty in the politics department is dedicated to assisting you as you explore and engage your passions and talents. Personal reflection is the key to unlocking how your Messiah experiences can help shape your future. This process is ongoing and requires you to be proactive—to take intentional action and reach out to others with questions. Our graduates have gone on to serve in numerous ways in the public and private sectors, including but not limited to: attorneys, government agency analysts, international development workers, program directors in non-profit organizations, foreign service officers, government relations managers, as well as positions in business, campaigns and media. Ralph Waldo Emerson wisely noted, “Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” A politics major offers a wealth of opportunity—come and see who you are called to be!

—Robin Lauermann
Chair, department of politics

Assess

Where am I going / Who am I now?

There are several options available to assist you in the process of assessing and developing your strengths, interests and values related to your field of interest. Identify resources from the list below to begin building this important foundation to decision making.

What tools are available?

- **Self-assessment inventories** are available through the Career Center to help you begin narrowing down your interests, strengths and values.
- Begin to construct an **electronic portfolio** where you can begin to store artifacts, including papers, projects, research and other accomplishments from your classroom work and out-of-class activities.

How can I find relevant opportunities?

- Connect with the resources through the American Political Science Association (apsanet.org). See the **Career** tabs for specific information.
- Peruse the “**Careers**” section of the **politics department’s Resources page**; also see what Politics alumni are doing with their degrees: messiah.edu/departments/politics/resources.html. You may also consult FalconNet, Messiah’s alumni directory (ask the Career Center for directions).
- Visit the “**Explore Career Options**” section on the Career Center’s website (messiah.edu/offices/career). Check out “**What Can I Do with a Major in Politics?**”
- Explore options for **involvement** outside of the classroom through offices such as Student Involvement & Leadership Programs, the Agapé Center for Service & Learning, the EpiCenter for Off-Campus Study, College Ministries and Residence Life.
- Attend the “**Opportunities in Politics**” chapel in September to learn more about careers in the discipline and more ways to explore them at Messiah.
- Attend the annual “**Career Conversation in Politics**” to learn about opportunities within areas of the major.

What resources should I be accessing?

- Visit the Career Center early and start constructing a **customized career and professional development plan**.
- Evaluate options described in the APSA “Careers in Political Science” booklet apsanet.org/content_6466.cfm.
- **Get to know your advisor and politics faculty** beyond the classroom. Take advantage of office hours and department activities. Become familiar with the politics department’s website: messiah.edu/departments/politics/faculty.html
- Create a first draft of your **résumé**; what gaps exist? Use this as a guide to start constructing an action plan that includes relevant, sought-after experience.
- Become familiar with the “**transferable skills**” you are learning (messiah.edu/offices/career/liberalarts.html) as well as competencies important to politics-related fields: messiah.edu/departments/politics/documents/CompetenciesofPoliticsMajors.pdf These skills are very marketable to employers and graduate schools, so be intentional about developing them.

ReflectionQ’s

- How would I describe my skills, interests and values?
- Considering past and present experiences, what energizes me most? Be specific!
- How are these aspects of myself shaping my decisions about a career related to politics?
- What options for involvement outside the classroom might allow me to gain experience while further developing my transferable skill sets?

Explore & Engage

How do I choose?

Don't just become involved. **Intentionally** choose activities that will allow you to grow personally and professionally. Target opportunities and experiences where you can apply and develop transferable skill sets while exploring potential areas of interest. Consider the following options to stay on track.

Who can help?

- Meet with a **Career Center** professional to discuss where you are and any adjustments that should be made to your customized career and professional development plan. Brainstorm ideas for complementing your classroom learning with relevant experience to start filling the gaps in your résumé.
- Take the initiative to **build relationships** with your academic advisor, politics faculty members and residence director. Discuss and gain ideas about potential career interests and plans to gain experience. Invest in faculty members with whom you share specific interests/passions. Consider seeking a mentor.

How do I choose from so many options?

- Strategically choose cocurricular activities that will allow you to gain experience and further develop your skills. **Employers and grad schools value quality over quantity**, so invest in meaningful opportunities. Seek feedback from your supporters noted above and check out the options on the politics department web page: messiah.edu/departments/politics/resources.html
- Begin talking with your advisor, the Career Center and/or the Internship Center about experiential learning opportunities (internships, professional development experiences (PDE), job shadowing, etc.). **Data shows that employers highly value relevant experience!**
- Visit: messiah.edu/departments/politics/documents/InternshipsinPolitics.pdf for examples of past **internships**.
- **Get to know a senior in politics** and ask them about their experiences – what was helpful and what wasn't.

- **Other options for involvement may include:** fellowships, research opportunities, work study options, study abroad programs, student clubs and organizations, volunteering or service learning, a work study position and summer or part-time work.
- Attend the annual “**Career Conversation in Politics**” and learn more about an in-depth area related to the major.

What can I do to test out my career interests?

- Conduct an **information interview** or initiate a **job shadowing** experience with a professional in your field of interest.
- Review APSA “**Careers in Political Science**” book. Keep it with you throughout your time at Messiah!
- **Research** career fields of interest to you. What is the nature of the work and work environment? What skills and experiences are highly desirable? What are some of the behind-the-scenes tasks?
- Use FalconNet, the alumni directory, to **connect to alumni**; ask them which experiences have brought them to their current position
- Begin thinking of how you will spend your summer. What experiences – paid or volunteer – will help you **build on your experience** and continue to development marketable skill sets?

ReflectionQ's

- What experiences might be valued to a prospective employer or graduate school?
- How can I apply what I'm learning in the classroom while developing meaningful experience?
- Am I focusing on quality rather than quantity?

Experience

How can I differentiate myself?

It's time to take your experience to the next level! Increase your marketability and uniqueness through investing in your experience base. Consider the options below as you develop and enhance your "brand". If you're not thinking of pursuing a career traditionally related to politics, research the field(s) you're considering. Think about how your politics background will prepare you for making unique contributions to your field of interest.

What constitutes "relevant experience?"

- **Every professional field is unique.** Research and talk with professionals who share your career interests to know what is valued in your targeted field.
- Virtually all employers are looking for candidates with **relevant experience**. This may be gained through research experience, an internship (visit the Internship Center), international experience, or volunteer positions. Talk with your advisor about how this fits into your schedule.
- **Think creatively** about how your experiences, politics major and the skills you're demonstrating might be transferable to your targeted field. How are you conveying this on your **résumé**?

What professional competencies are important?

- Refresh your understanding of the **skill sets** and **competencies** relevant to politics majors: messiah.edu/departments/politics/documents/CompetenciesofPoliticsMajors.pdf
- **Learn how to effectively market your qualifications** through your résumé and cover letter. Stop by the Career Center during drop-in hours or schedule an appointment to receive personalized feedback.
- Strengthen your **interviewing skills** by scheduling a mock interview in the Career Center.
- Practice your **networking skills** with faculty, alumni and at Career Center events.

- Build a **professional web presence** through vehicles such as social networking sites (ex. LinkedIn) and e-portfolios. Document your experiences in your electronic portfolio as a way of showcasing your skills and accomplishments.
- Consult Diane Schmidt's "*Writing in Political Science, 4th ed.*" It's good for more than papers and other assignments—it's a keeper!

What tools and resources will help me to get connected professionally?

- Attend **job and graduate school fairs** and other career-related events throughout the year. Start early; remember, you don't have to be in the job-seeking phase to attend!
- Attend the annual "**Career Conversations in Politics**" (focused on an in-depth career area) to learn about valuable resources and network with alumni in the field.
- Connect with **professional associations and conferences** in your field, such as the American Political Science Association: (apsanet.org) and others (links available at apsanet.org/content_2686.cfm.) Ask faculty members for ideas of other associations and conferences in your field.
- Develop "**networking cards**" with basic contact information and a summary of your goals and qualifications. Have these available as you meet new contacts who may serve as critical resources in the future.
- Stay on top of current events, trends and hot topics in your field through journals, magazines and the news.

ReflectionQ's

- What specific experiences are highly desirable in my targeted field?
- Have I tested out my area of interest to know it's a good fit?
- How am I practicing the skills that will be marketable to my target?
- What will set me apart from the average candidate in my chosen field?
- Have I considered stepping into a leadership position?

Transition

Am I ready?

Whether it is graduate school, employment, a gap year or full-time service, transitioning to post-graduate life includes many aspects. Keep in mind that career development is a lifetime process. That said, consider it your “first destination.” As a steward of your strengths, consider carefully what you have to contribute to your next step.

What are my transition goals?

- **Research and clarify your top occupational or graduate school choices** which are congruent with your skills and interests.
- If you are thinking about graduate or professional school, **read the literature** in that topic area to determine your interests (subject, potential faculty collaboration, etc.). Also, consult rankings and explore specifics of program specialization. Graduate programs are much more narrowly tailored than undergraduate degrees.
- **Stay active in the process** by engaging your network of personal and professional contacts. Communicate your goals and ideas about what might be next for you. Reach out to additional contacts through the alumni directory, FalconNet, and your social networks such as LinkedIn.
- Stay on track for accomplishing your goals by devising **strategies and timelines** for making them happen. Consider doing it with a friend and holding one another accountable.

What do I have to offer?

- Reflect on the **totality of your experiences** both inside and outside of the classroom. What knowledge, skills and abilities do you have to offer a prospective employer or graduate school? In what practical ways have you demonstrated these strengths? Write them down! This will be the basis of your **personal marketing campaign**.
- Remember to consult the “**Politics Skill Sets**” messiah.edu/departments/politics/documents/CompetenciesofPoliticsMajors.pdf.
- Refine and tailor your application or admissions materials, including your résumé, cover letter, essays and interview responses to include **specific examples** and stories from your experience.

- Secure employment or graduate school **references** from those who can speak to your proven strengths and potential. **Ask** individuals who have had significant opportunity to see your work or who can speak to your ability to respond well to challenges. Don't wait until the last minute. Provide at least a month's notice.
- Consider building a **professional portfolio** (i.e., *yola.com*) which incorporates a bit about you, your résumé, transferable skills and experiences and anything else that might be important to your field of interest.

Where can I find opportunities?

- Use an eclectic mix of resources. View job opportunities posted exclusively to Messiah students through **FalconJobs** (*messiah.edu/offices/career*).
- Participate in career events related to important transitional topics.
- Attend **job and graduate school fairs** locally and in your geographic area of interest.
- Attend the annual “**Career Conversations in Politics**” to connect with alumni.
- Consult career and graduate school resources on the **Career Center** and **politics department's website**.
- Connect with job boards through **professional association websites**.
- Remember to **follow up**, say “thank you,” and track progress.

ReflectionQ's

- What are my top strengths I have to offer an employer or graduate school?
- Does my résumé accurately reflect my transferable skills and experiences?
- How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target?

Politics alumni from 2004-2010

12% of alumni attend law school.

Sample of attended law schools:

University of Pittsburgh,
Dickinson College,
Duke University and
Georgetown University

26% of alumni attend graduate school.

Sample of attended graduate schools:

Ohio State University,
Princeton University,
Shippensburg University of
Pennsylvania and the London
School of Economics

Alumni have pursued various types of graduate degrees including, but not limited to:

MS in Political Science
MS in International Relations
Master of Public Administration (MPA)
Master of Public Policy (MPP)
Master of Homeland Security
Master of Business Administration

72% are professionally employed in a major-relevant field.

29% Government

Alumni are working for:

- U.S. agencies, like the Department of Homeland Security
- state agencies, like the PA Department of Aging
- U.S. Military
- U.S. Congress
- The PA General Assembly
- Various political campaigns

29% For-profit

Alumni have careers in:

- marketing
- finance/investment
- media
- economic development
- human resources
- communication
- lobbying
- private consulting

20% Non-profit

Alumni work for:

- unions
- think tanks
- faith-based organizations
- media outlets
- various international groups

8% Law

6% Education

Alumni teach, perform research and are administrative assistants at:

- institutions of higher education
- high schools

6% Service-related

Alumni enter organizations like:

- Teach for America
- the Peace Corps
- AmeriCorps

3% Professional Internships

Alumni currently intern for:

- international non-profit organizations
- U.S. Congress

90% of all graduates are in related fields or schooling.