

Political Science Department — Year-by-Year:

To Maximize PSC Student Success

The purpose of this document is to provide students and advisors with general reminders, caveats, and general information so students optimize their WCU Political Science experience.

First Year

- 1) Welcome to WCU and the Political Science Department!
- 2) Are you aware of the 3 different tracks offered? Do you think you are in the right one? If not, you may change from one track to another. There is a “Change of Concentration” form required if you change (so Dept. can match you with an advisor knowledgeable about your track – *essential if Social Studies Teacher Ed. track.*)
- 3) The requirements of the PSC major are such that it is possible to double-major, or complete one or two Minors and/or Certificates if you strategize carefully as you choose your courses. Consider and choose courses in areas where you might be interested in perhaps adding a second major, a Minor or Certificate. More on this below.
- 4) In your first year it is generally best to focus on completing Gen. Eds. & PSC Core courses. Best to take PSC 100 and 200 sooner than later (by end of sophomore year if possible).
- 5) Be careful to promote/protect your GPA from the start!
 - a. Are you aware that you can drop a class up until Week 9 of the given semester without penalty?
 - b. You can only take a class Pass/Fail if it is an *elective*.
 - c. If extremely extenuating circumstances make it difficult or impossible to adequately complete a class, a “No Grade” option exists to discuss with your professor, so you can make up the work by a deadline amenable to you and your professor (or by the 9th week of the following term).
 - d. If you typically have “trouble” taking tests, **now** is the time to contact WCU’s Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) (Rm. 223, Lawrence Center, x2564, to make an appointment) to determine if you qualify for special test-taking options, such as extended time, a separate, quiet, individualized space in which to take the test, a different test format than your professor offers (i.e. essays instead of multiple-choice, etc.). In many college classes, tests are often weighted more heavily than they were in your high school studies, so you want to make sure you can do your best starting now!
 - e. Second Semester: Note – the more grades accumulate, the longer you are here, the harder it gets to radically improve your GPA. So take action now to do the best you can. Don’t wait until it’s too late!
- 6) Are you interested in participating in short or long-term study-abroad programs at some point in your studies? Which region or country? (Inquire about Dept. or other Depts.’ colleagues with those specialties, and/or to the Study Abroad office – or to the Chair if you aren’t sure). If so, you might want to start planning for it now – to organize extra finances, coursework, applications, visas, etc.
- 7) Do you want to participate in the department-based Political Science or International Affairs clubs? It’s great to get involved –apply learning, network with other majors and professors.

- 8) Second Semester: Do you know if you want to double-major or take a Minor in a given area? When you decide, your advisor will need to sign an “Add a Minor” form, which is available in the PSC office or from the Minor’s department. There are also multiple “Certificate” programs on campus, which usually require fewer credits than Minors. Be sure to peruse the WCU Catalog to see if you would like to take advantage of any of these opportunities. It can strengthen your resume and enhance your job potential.

Sophomore Year

- 1) How is your GPA?
 - a. What do you want/need it to be?! Are you considering law school or graduate school after WCU? If not, remember that the higher the GPA the better for getting a job in any field. It might just give you an edge over your competition!
 - b. Do you need extra help for particular classes, tutoring, Learning Assistance and Resource Center (LARC) support? Find out what is available!
www.wcupa.edu/ussss/larc or just stop by the LARC, 2nd floor, Lawrence Center (note: Need a part-time job? Tutors working at the LARC are paid!).
 - c. If you failed or received an unsatisfactory grade for a course, you can overcome it by repeating the course. If the instructor’s teaching style and your learning style were not so compatible, try to plan a retake with another instructor (if possible). This may require a little advance planning since professors do not necessarily teach the same courses every year.
 - d. Take fewer courses per semester.
- 2) How are you progressing through your Gen. Eds.? There are many strategies for “double-counting” courses for PSC major, or Minor(s), which you advisor can point out or affirm for you, as you figure them out.
- 3) Are you considering going to Law School? You might want to participate in the WCU Pre-Law Society, which meets on a regular basis and provides support for LSAT preparation, visits with representatives of local law schools, and occasionally trips to local law schools. Contact Dr. Sandra Tomkowicz for details.
- 4) Have you taken any “Writing Emphasis” courses yet? Try to space them out so you don’t have an overload of writing in one semester. Also NOTE on the Guidance Sheet – one of these 3 courses *must be at the 300 or 400 level*.
- 5) Figured out and/or added the Double Major, or any Minor(s) or Certificates?
- 6) Are you on the PSC track that most interests you? If you want to make a change, sooner is easier than later (if you are trying to graduate in four years!).
- 7) Are you involved in any campus organizations? There are over 100 on campus! This is a good way to meet other students with common interests, and of course, to bulk up your resume.
- 8) If you want more “hands-on” (applied) experiences, consider taking courses offering Service Learning opportunities as part of the course. Then you get credit, experience and a new line for your resume! The PSC Dept. offers a few of these courses, and a list of such courses is available at the Office of Service Learning and Volunteer Programs,
[http://www.wcupa.edu/ services/stu.slv/](http://www.wcupa.edu/services/stu.slv/)
- 9) Summer Plans? If you are able, consider jobs or volunteer opportunities that will enhance skills in your field (working/volunteering with a local politician, at an issue-oriented non-profit organization that interests you, at a law firm, travel internationally, etc.). It doesn’t

have to be for the whole summer, or full-time, but even 3 hours/week shows commitment, interest and you will learn about a professional environment you might want to work in (or decide you *don't* want to) down the road.

- 10) If you are planning on studying abroad your Junior year (most typical model), research the details NOW – so you can plan for application deadlines (many require recommendation letters from profs – who prefer at least 2-3 weeks to get them done), get your passport in order, figure out any visa requirements and their timelines, etc. Talk to your family/support systems well in advance so they can get accustomed to the idea too.

Junior Year:

- 1) How is your GPA? See above for ideas to improve it.
- 2) Which Senior Seminar will you choose? Plan carefully.
- 3) Any more clarity on adding Minors or Certificates? Get to it. It will likely be too late next year.
- 4) Have you fulfilled most of your Gen. Ed. and Political Science requirements? As much as possible, map out the rest of your coursework, so you know how you will do it.
- 5) If you are in the Applied/Public Policy track, have you considered doing WCU's 4-5 year MPA program? Contact Dr. Laurie Bernotsky for details (LBernotsky@wcupa.edu).
- 6) How is your resume coming along? Consider what you want it to look like upon graduation, and take action if you think you need new, different or additional experiences that you want and want to be able to report. Advisors and your peers may have ideas for improvements.
- 7) Are you getting any leadership experience in your organizations? Step up!
- 8) Are you preparing for GREs, LSATs or PRAXIS exams? Take a pre-test to figure out if you want to invest in a formal preparation course. Try to plan the date of your exam at a time when you are least stressed with other academic and work demands.
- 9) Would you like to do a PSC Internship? Eligibility to do an internship is a GPA of 2.5, and approval by the Internship Director and Chair. You can do up to 15 credits of Internship (PSC 412) total over the time of your major (so you could split this up and do different internships in different semesters). Consider this a stepping stone to a job, so plan your placement carefully.
- 10) If you go on a Study Abroad program, you have priority scheduling. Be sure to be in touch with your advisor via email before your scheduling date.
- 11) Are there any Academic Awards or Scholarship you might qualify for this year? Figure out which, note their deadlines, and prepare in advance as much is possible (including request for your recommendation letters). Note: some Minors have scholarships too, so inquire about this with your Minor advisors also. (i.e. PSC Dept. Mayo Scholarship offered every Spring; for Latin American Studies \$1500. Pan-American Scholarship, etc.).
- 12) Have you written a research paper that may be worthy of submission to the WCU Research Day contest held every Spring semester? You might want to contact the professor with whom you had the class or advice on revising it before you submit it.
- 13) Did you apply for graduation?
- 14) Again, summer plans? Carefully consider your summer plans and what experiences you want to have to prepare you as some type of professional in Political Science. Keep your eyes open for dept. announcements (via email, on-line, or flyers posted on the first floor of Ruby Jones).

Senior Year

- 1) Beware of senior slump! Your GPA is not completed yet! Every course matters.
- 2) Last chance to get involved, or gain leadership experiences in the organizations with which you are involved.
- 3) Penultimate Semester: Check to see that you have completed all requirements (or will have after your last semester) with your advisor. Then meet with the Chair for Department approval, and the “official” check with the Registrar.
- 4) Plan on attending the PSC Commencement Reception!
- 5) If you need or may need recommendation letters for your next step (graduate school or jobs), request them from your professors with plenty of time.