



### Political Science: AB vs BS

Students new to political science often ask about the difference between the Bachelor of Arts (AB) and Bachelor of Science (BS) degrees. The AB in POLS is the traditional choice of most students and offers a broad understanding of American politics & government, political theory, and law & courts; the BS is new to UGA and caters to students with a special interest in research skills, quantitative data analysis, and formal theory.<sup>1</sup> There is significant overlap, but what follows focuses on the differences.

Both degrees follow a liberal arts approach to the general education requirements and require students to meet all SPIA-wide requirements for literature, fine arts and philosophy, and foreign language, as well as the economics and quantitative requirements. The differences here are largely present in Area VI: AB students take one class from either ECON 2105 or 2106, and need only take one for quantitative skills (typically STAT 2000); BS students will take both economics courses, at least two quantitative classes from MATH 2250 and, often, STAT 2000, and an additional class in geographic information systems (GEOG 2011).

Both majors consist of 10 courses, but the requirements for each differ in emphasis. The AB takes a broad approach requiring two courses from political theory and methods topics. These can come from formal or normative theory or research methods. They also take two courses from American studies: including politics, government, law and courts. The remaining six courses are “major electives” which can come from any major-level POLS courses, two of which may also come from INTL or PADP classes. Often, students opt for more American studies work here.

The BS degree emphasizes data analytics, research, and theory. BS students take two research methods courses, one course from formal theory, and one additional course from formal theory or methods. Three courses are needed from American studies and three more from any POLS courses, two of which may also come from INTL or PADP classes.

Most students interested in political science broadly will opt for the AB degree. This is an excellent path for students whose interests cross with other social sciences like sociology and history or with journalism majors. Pre-law students most often follow the AB degree because it allows them more flexibility to take courses in political philosophy (like *Legal Theory*, for example) and more courses in law & courts.

Students with strong quantitative backgrounds, desires to develop data-driven analytical skills, or those thinking about attending graduate school are good candidates for the BS degree. The requirement for calculus, along with formal theory, is often decisive. The BS offers excellent training for policy analysis, data analytics, and graduate studies, but is perfectly fine to pair with similar goals/programs as the AB, including pre-law.

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<sup>1</sup> Formal political theory applies mathematics to the study of politics, with the goal of maintaining logically consistent theory and precise analysis.

## AB vs BS in POLS Quick-Look Guide

### Bachelor of Science:

- Emphasis on Analysis, Research
- Calculus and Statistics Required
- ECON 2105 *and* 2106 required
- Research Methods Sequence
- Formal Theory Required
- Pairs Well with ECON & CSCI

### Bachelor of Arts:

- Broader Look at Politics, Gov't
- STAT 2000 is Sufficient
- Either ECON 2105 *or* 2106
- Emphasis on American studies
- Theory incl. Political Philosophy
- Pre-Law, Journalism, Social Science

#### BS Major Requirements

Research Methods 1  
 Research Methods 2  
 Formal Theory  
 Theory/Methods Option  
 American studies  
 American Studies  
 American Studies  
 POLS Elective  
 SPIA Elective  
 SPIA Elective

#### AB Major Requirements

Theory or Methods  
 Theory or Methods  
 American Studies  
 American Studies  
 POLS Elective  
 POLS Elective  
 POLS Elective  
 POLS Elective  
 SPIA Elective  
 SPIA Elective

### Good Questions Based on Broad Generalizations:

- Are you prepared to take calculus? Do you have a good quantitative background or an interest in learning about data analytics or statistics?
  - Yes? The BS might be a good fit. Particularly if you already have pre-college credit for MATH/STAT courses. This is generally the deciding factor in our experience.
- What sounds more interesting: *Social Justice* or *Social Choice and Elections*?
  - Preference for normative theory courses in political philosophy like *Social Justice* or *Hobbes to Nietzsche* over formal theory courses emphasizing social choice and game theory would indicate an AB student. The latter would likely appeal to the BS student.
- Are you more excited about developing research design or learning how campaigns function?
  - The BS is prep for a life as an academic or graduate school but also policy studies/data analytics; the AB's general approach will be the best fit for most students, particularly whose preferences lean towards other social sciences, humanities, and journalism. Either can pursue further study in any political science-oriented graduate program (MA, PhD, MPA, MPP, etc)
- Are you pre-law?
  - Pre-law students are most likely AB students good at digesting information, communicating orally and in writing, and want to develop those skills while learning broadly about American politics, government, and courts. Many law schools value the benefits of data analytics and advanced statistical training. Ultimately, it's OK for them to do either.
- What should students take after POLS 1101?
  - AB students are encouraged to seek major-level courses which align with why they've selected political science as a major. There is no sequencing or required second-step course in the AB program.
  - BS students should look at POLS 2000 or POLS 4150 as next steps in the BS program, but note there is no required next-step course.
  - POLS 2000 is a good choice for an unsure student as it broadly introduces theory and research methods upon which 4150 later builds and applies to either major.