

Preparing for Political Science Careers: Working for the CIA

What does the CIA do?

The CIA provides global intelligence on political, social, economic, technological, and military issues to senior U.S. policymakers. Each year, the Agency hires analysts, clandestine service officers, linguists, scientists and engineers, support personnel, and a wide range of other specialists. As noted in the “Careers” section of CIA’s public web site (www.cia.gov), “virtually any job you can imagine is available at the CIA – plus, some you can’t even imagine.”

What academic background do you need?

To get a job at CIA, foreign language skills, military experience, and having lived overseas at one point or another are pluses, according to the CIA web site. The Agency is also looking for people with a strong interest in foreign affairs, outstanding interpersonal skills, and the ability to write clearly and accurately. Applicants must be US citizens.

How to apply for a job:

Because of the classified nature of the work at CIA, the hiring process is a lengthy one. Depending on your specific circumstances, it may take as little as several months or more than a year. As part of that process, prospective employees undergo a thorough background investigation examining your life history, character, trustworthiness, reliability, and soundness of judgment. Prior to being hired, job candidates undergo thorough mental and physical exams, as well as a polygraph examination.

To be considered suitable for CIA employment, applicants must generally not have used illegal drugs within the last 12 months. The issue of illegal drug use prior to 12 months ago is carefully evaluated during medical and security screening.

Resumes should be submitted online via the CIA web site.

Other Student Opportunities with the CIA:

CIA also has a range of student opportunities, including the Undergraduate Scholarship Program, the Undergraduate Co-Op Program, and the Undergraduate Internship Program. All student assignments are located in the Washington DC area, and these assignments are highly competitive. To apply for participation in a student program, you must be at least a college sophomore. Applicants must be US citizens and should have a strong academic record (3.0 GPA or better). To obtain more information and apply online for a specific student position, visit the www.cia.gov web site.

How to find more information:

Information about other careers and student opportunities in the US Intelligence Community (IC) can be accessed via the “Career Opportunities” link of the Director of National Intelligence web site, www.dni.gov, as well as the web sites of individual IC agencies.

Mark Mansfield, formerly the CIA’s Director of Public Affairs, is a CIA “Officer in Residence” at the University of Miami and is currently teaching a course on intelligence. Per an Agency agreement with the University, Mansfield is expressly prohibited from actively recruiting university students for professional employment with, or service to, the CIA, but he would be happy to respond to students’ questions about life as a professional intelligence officer.