

Preparing for Careers in Political Science: Getting a MA in Political Science

Costs: Terminal Master's degrees (getting a M.A. without getting a Ph.D.) usually cost money. Sometimes universities will offer assistantships or fellowships, but for the most part, the cost of tuition falls on the student. Costs can range from ten to thirty thousand dollars per year depending on the university.

Length: Degree requirements will vary greatly between universities. Depending on the student's course load, a Master's may typically take one to three years. Many universities offer courses at night so that professional students may take courses as well.

Benefits: While some graduate degrees cater to specific career paths, a general M. A. in political science may not offer much more than the Bachelor's degree in terms of career opportunities. Therefore, because of the financial cost and time commitment, it is important to have a specific career goal and reason in mind before pursuing an M. A. Often times, students may be better served by attaining a Master's of Public Administration, Master's of Public Policy, Master's of International Relations, Law degree, or Ph.D. in political science.

Recommendations: First, we recommend that student's have the highest possible grades and GRE scores. Second, we recommend that students take courses with and develop relationships with tenured or tenure-track political science faculty. Students should frequently talk to faculty about their career and educational aspirations – faculty are here to help! If possible, students should have tenured or tenure-track faculty write their letters of recommendation for them. Third, students should have general career goals or interests in mind – this could help narrow down the choice of programs. Finally, students should look at the on-line admission requirements for programs of interest by their junior year. This way, students can take courses suiting graduate admission requirements.

If an M.A. seems like the appropriate route, then it may be better to apply to universities that offer consecutive Ph.D. programs. Ph.D. granting programs often offer more financial assistance to graduate students along with health insurance and potentially a pay-check. This could save students the cost of tuition. If student's wanted to, at the completion of their M.A., they could continue on and complete the Ph.D. This would offer a variety of career paths that an M.A. alone could not.

Summary: A Master's of Arts in Political Science may not offer the career opportunities that other graduate degrees may offer. We recommend discussing your career/educational goals with political science faculty and developing an appropriate education plan that will suit your aspirations.