GOVERNMENT

Purpose of the Program

The Government program is designed to serve a varying constituency of students. It provides ample preparation for those few Monmouth students who wish to pursue Ph.D.s in political science as well as the somewhat larger number of students who wish to pursue more practically oriented Masters programs or who enter directly into careers in politics or public administration. In addition, the program is one of many at Monmouth College which provides a sound basis for pre-law students. The program also responds to the needs of those students who have a fascination for politics but whose careers will be in business or social service. Finally, the program, in conjunction with that of the Education department, is designed to train excellent teachers of social studies at the secondary level. (The program also plays an important support role for all education majors, offering several large sections of American Politics annually to meet the State's certification requirement.) Common to our work with all these constituents is an abiding concern for fostering critical thought, active participation, and the backbone of modern democracy, responsible citizenship.

As this last point makes clear, the Government program clearly reflects the overall mission of the College as well as the goals of liberal education. It fosters profound understanding of the world around us (as well as our own hearts and minds) rather than emphasizing unconnected facts or morally disembodied technical efficiency. It asks-- no, it demands-- that students take the necessary risks associated with interpretation and moral judgement in a diverse, often perplexing society. In addition, the Government program is one of the College’s most intensive when it comes to written, and oral expression. All of its courses include major writing assignments. These are rarely limited to straight-forward academic research. They also require sound opinions. All government courses encourage class discussion. Some are primarily discussion rather than lecture courses. In this respect, the Government program promotes the skills necessary for fruitful democracy.

Scope, Direction and Object of the Program

The Government program encompasses the four most prominent fields within contemporary political science (as defined, for example, by the American Political Science Association): American political process and policymaking, comparative political process and policymaking, international politics and political philosophy. Students are required to take at least one course in each of these areas. A number of courses combine the concerns of these fields. There is also a course on constitutional law and at least one which would fall into the field of public policy. Concerns of methodology are touched upon throughout the program and become paramount in the Senior Seminar. Public administration is touched on incidentally at various points of the program, though it is rarely a focal point.
In addition to these academic foci, students are strongly encouraged to pursue practical experience through internships of one sort or another. These internships have included work for various campaigns, legislative offices, interest groups, the public defender's office, the State's Attorney, and the local newspaper.

The object of this overall approach is to give students empirical, normative and practical insights needed to penetrate complex political realities and a plurality of perspectives and ideologies. This includes some awareness of the benefits and limits of scientific method and statistics (as applied to politics). It also includes the use of political imagination to go beyond the seeming inevitability of what is to what ought to be and can be, both in the near and long term future. Implicit in our approach is a respect for various perspectives, though it is not assumed that all are of equal validity.

**Program Structure**

Students are required to take courses in the following four areas:


Government majors are required to take the Senior Seminar: Government 415. Students are required to write a research paper on a topic from any of the four areas of the discipline outlined above. In addition, a majority of Government majors complete one or more internships.

**Specific Objectives for Students**

As suggested in the previous section, the object of the program is to produce open-minded, compassionate students who can analyze empirical data as well as normative issues in the study of politics. This includes the ability to understand and interpret charts, graphs and tables, the ability to distinguish scientific from non-scientific polling, the ability to judge the validity of competing technical and moral arguments, an inkling as to how scientific method may be applied to the study of politics, and other related goals.

In addition, students should be able to apply these competencies in the context of current events. Active attention to the ever dynamic world of contemporary politics is required in a majority government department courses. In short, we wish our students to have the benefits of scholarly rigor without barricading themselves in an "ivory tower."
Measures of Learning Outcomes

While the Government program does not conclude with comprehensive exams, it does leave professors with a highly indicative idea of how much and what kind of material has been absorbed by various students. Government courses all include numerous opportunities for student feedback in the form of papers, exams, and evaluations.

In addition, we get to follow the progress of many of students after they have left Monmouth. We see how well they do in graduate school, law school, and/or professional life. More specifically, we have many opportunities to find out if our students are going out into the political, academic or business world less than fully prepared for what they will find out there. So far, all indications are that students who please us will please their new professors or bosses as the case may be. Our students have specifically mentioned the usefulness of our high standards for written work and opportunities for improving discussion skills.

Of course, some of our goals go beyond this sort of measurement. We want to educate responsible citizens who can help this nation and the world to formulate and sustain a grander vision of justice than that which currently exists. As our students go off to various "careers," it is difficult to see whether we are succeeding in this regard. In this case, we must do what seems right to us and hope for the best.

For the last two years we have been using our seniors to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our program. We have made specific changes as a result of this initiative. For example until last year the Senior Seminar attempted to expose students to the recent research in political science and require them to write an extensive research paper. This proved to be too daunting for students and as a result the department introduced a new Junior level required course: Government 397, State and Markets. This course introduces students to recent research in the four areas: comparative politics, American politics, international politics and political philosophy. Our goal is to better prepare our majors for the senior seminar in which they conduct a major research project.

The department engages in continuous process of evaluation of our program. We plan to use our junior and senior level courses to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our program.