

Overview of the Major

- Founded over 35 years ago—among the oldest of UVa’s interdisciplinary honors majors
- Allows students of diverse interests and backgrounds to construct their own imaginative and engaging major in the broad areas of social and political inquiry and policy
- Admits about 20 students per year—size encourages the creation of a vital intellectual community
- Rigorous full-year seminar for third years emphasizes writing skills through weekly short essays; students learn to argue effectively and persuasively both on paper and in discussion
- A fourth-year thesis of about 80-100 pages allows students to pursue a topic of their choice in great depth, with the help of advisors drawn from all over the University

Basic Requirements

1. PST Third year seminar (fall and spring term, *6 credits*) taught by the Program Director
2. Foundation Classes (*6 credits*, chosen from a carefully chosen list available on the website; examples include 300-level political and social theory classes, feminist theory, human rights)
3. Three student-defined areas of study containing two courses each (*18 credits total*). Students define areas (*for example*: 20th century social movements, post-colonial literature of South Asia, American labor politics; modern ethical theory; food politics; the civil rights movement) and designate two courses for each area. These areas are developed by the student in consultation with her advisors. Thus each PST student has a unique combination of a common core and individually chosen areas of study.
4. The Fourth year thesis (*6 credits*, plus a *2-credit* thesis workshop). Students write on a wide range of topics—for examples see the PST website.

How to apply

Admission to the major involves a straightforward application, including a transcript and one faculty recommendation; a previously submitted paper to any UVa class as a writing sample; and a short (300-500 word) essay setting out your intellectual rationale for joining the major. For details, check our website, here: <http://pst.as.virginia.edu/how-apply> . Due date this year is **March 7, 2019**. Questions? Contact Professor Smith (mjsmith@virginia.edu) or any current PST student.

After PST—what?

PST students are consistently admitted to highly-ranked *graduate schools*. Over the past five years, students have gained admission to Ph.D. programs UC/Berkeley (and Columbia) in Sociology; to Columbia, Harvard, Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Princeton and Stanford in political theory and (in two cases) in Comparative Literature; one to NYU in history, one to Cambridge, UK, in English Literature. Two of our PST alumni are faculty members here and several other teach at Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Duke and L.S.E. The fact that our students are admitted to Ph.D. programs in the variety of the fields we treat in PST shows that our students are both well-prepared and well-regarded as they apply to competitive graduate programs. In the past four years PST has had two Rhodes Scholars, four Coro fellows, and three Fulbright Scholars. In 2017, PST had three Marshall Scholars, of the 43 awarded nationally.

Many PST graduates go on to top *law schools*--we currently number six recent alumni who serve as assistant district attorneys and one who just stepped down as the deputy director in the Civil Rights division of the Justice Department. Students are regularly admitted to law schools like Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Duke, NYU and Columbia. Several graduates now work for prominent law firms in NYC, Washington, Miami, and Atlanta.

In addition to further study in graduate and professional schools, PST graduates often go directly to work in a variety of fields in teaching, public service, or private industry. To cite some examples: PST counts several practicing journalists, including well-known staff writers at the *The New Yorker* and *Slate.com*; five people working in various capacities at *Google*; the *Director of Economic Development* in the Austin Texas Chamber of Commerce; officials in the New York City government; staff members of a range of NGOs; consulting firms like Deloitte; an activists such as one in Texas whose work on improving conditions for workers in the building trades led to his election as a Austin city councilor. PST students become leaders in their fields.

Comments by Recent PST Graduates

The structure of the PST program surely had a profound effect on me. I felt thrilled to have a perspective that was unique from my other classmates, and to be in a forum where we could freely disagree, exchange analyses, and validate one another on our thoughts, or push one another to reconsider. I felt for the first time that I was in a course where my perspective was truly considered by my peers.

Writing the weekly essays gave me an unparalleled opportunity to focus on being succinct while still maximizing creativity. I learned how to make bold, specific and interesting arguments. This has helped me in my chosen profession of the theater because I have to understand the essence of a character as immediately as possible. Writing the weekly essays helped me land in the core of a text and work outward (i.e. my process as an actor with a script).

The PST program was the highlight, if not the very core, of my academic experience at UVa. Without the program, I would not have been aware of the beauty that exists in learning and discovering new ideas. Not only was I introduced to various works that piqued my curiosity and fueled my interests, but I was introduced to some of the most remarkable young people I've encountered in my life. The PST program offered the best of all worlds: a relaxed environment for discussion at times, heated debates on controversial topics, a structured setting for thesis writing, but the flexibility to explore a wide range of topics. The seminar classes of the Third year portion of the program contributed immensely to my growth as a student, and the thesis writing portion of the program of Fourth year solidified my understanding of myself as a person. I truly owe the PST program a 'thank you' that will echo throughout the rest of my life, as I find that more and more experiences I have will be founded upon what I learned in PST.