



Graduate Study in Political Science at U.C. Berkeley: De-mystifying the Program and Admissions Process

October 17th, 2022

Presenters:

Erin Blanton (Graduate Advisor), Juan Campos (Graduate Student), Rebekah Jones (Graduate Student), Andrew Little (Director of Graduate Admissions)

Presentation Outline

- What's special about U.C. Berkeley?
- What does it mean to get a PhD in political science?
- What do we look for in PhD admissions?
- Program structure and funding
- Q and A Session
 - Anything else?



Picture: <https://gallery.berkeley.edu/>

Berkeley's Unique Profile

- Berkeley is an engine of social mobility
 - 23% of students URM
 - 29% first-generation college students
 - ~27% undergraduates receive Pell grants
- Berkeley is a world-class research university
 - Routinely ranked one of top universities in world
 - Type 5 departments across range of fields
 - Faculty very focused on PhD programs



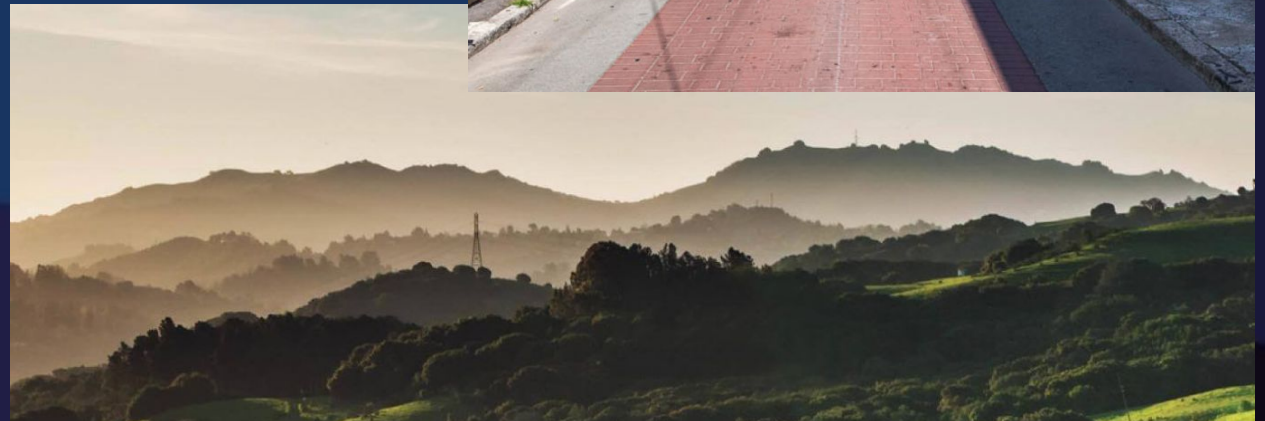
U.C. Berkeley Political Science

- Intellectual culture encourages students and faculty to address “big questions”
- Intellectually plural
- Culture of collaborative research between students and faculty, between students



Living in the Bay Area

- Year-round hiking, biking, windsurfing, sailing...
- Amazing, multi-cultural cuisine, farmer's markets
- Museums, live music, vibrant, diverse urban neighborhoods



What does it mean to get a PhD (in theory)?

- In short: learn to do research
- Becoming a **producer** of knowledge
- Not just a continuation of BA/MA
- Training to be a teacher to the next generation
- **It's a job! You get paid**

What does it mean to get a PhD (in practice)?

- Depending on your questions and methods, could mean a lot of things:
 - Research
 - Designing and fielding surveys
 - Reading primary sources in archives
 - Interviews
 - Writing mathematical models
 - Working as Graduate Student Instructor (GSI)

What does it mean to get a PhD?



Meet **Rebekah Jones**, a third-year PhD student in our department.

Research Interests: Police Unions, Crime Politics, Political Economy

What do political scientists study?

Political Science typically broken into major subfields:

- International Relations
- Comparative Politics
- American Politics
- Political Theory
- Political Methodology

Other subfields span/combine the major subfields (many examples here):

- Political Behavior
- Race and Ethnic Politics
- Area Studies

Examples of Subfields/UCB Faculty



Prof. Martha Wilfahrt

- “How does the legacy of precolonial state institutions affect contemporary development outcomes in West Africa?”
- Primary subfields: Comparative Politics, African Politics

Examples of Subfields/UCB Faculty

Prof. Desmond Jagmohan

- *Dark Virtues: Booker T. Washington's Tragic Realism:* Washington as a virtue theorist of the oppressed
- Primary subfields: Political Theory, American Politics



Examples of Subfields/UCB Faculty



Prof. Marika Landau-Wells

- How do the psychological and neurological underpinnings of threat perception influence policy preferences
- Primary subfields: International Relations, American Politics, Political Behavior

Examples of Subfields/UCB Faculty

Prof. Erin Hartman

- How can we generalize the results of experiments to other political contexts?
- Primary subfields: Political Methodology, American Politics



What do you do with a PhD?

- Designed to prepare you for faculty jobs: research, teaching, service
- Fully support other common pathways
 - Other work in higher education
 - Research-based jobs in the private sector: survey firms, tech
 - Research at think tanks (e.g., Brookings, New America, Heritage Foundation, Public Policy Institute of CA)
 - NGOs, IOs, government (e.g., Amnesty International, State Department, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank)

How do I know if I should get a PhD?

- If you are here, there's a good chance the answer is yes
- Not just about being able to get good grades/wanting the highest degree
- General qualities specific to successful PhD students
 - Self-driven
 - Creative
 - Enjoy sharing knowledge/teaching
- Two things which should **not** stop you:
 - (Typically) don't need to take out loans
 - Don't need to come from a background/family with lots of PhDs: range of perspectives valued

How do I know if I should get a PhD?



Meet **Juan Campos**, a current fourth-year grad student in our department and PhD candidate

Research interests: Comparative Politics, Latin American Politics, Policing, Organized Crime

How do I know if I should get a PhD?

People have different motivations for getting a PhD., but it might be useful to consider the following factors during the decision-making process:

- Understand what a PhD in political science is—i.e., what kinds of jobs does a PhD in poli sci will prepare you for?
- If research is for you, what kind of research do you want to do?
- What are the potential costs and benefits of getting a PhD?
- Are the programs you are applying to is the right fit for you?
- Are you okay with *not* pursuing an academic job?
- Can you handle constructive (and non-constructive) criticism?

What do we look for in admissions?

- Looking for reasons to be excited to admit you
- Interest in and capacity to do research
 - Can come from thesis, RA work, jobs
- Ability to complete coursework
 - Transcripts, Letters, GRE (secondarily!)
- Good citizens/colleagues/teachers
 - Personal statement, letters, other activities
- **There is no perfect applicant**
 - Want cohorts with varying strengths, backgrounds, perspectives

What do we look for in admissions, specifically?

- Statement of purpose
 - Understand what research is about, can propose an interesting research project, write clearly
- Personal statement
 - What about your personal story will add to our department?
 - What challenges did you overcome to get where you are?
- Transcripts
 - No specific required classes/thresholds
 - Ideally relevant/challenging courses, good grades adjusting for challenge/trajectory
 - If you want to do technical work, nice to see some coursework in Stats/Math/Econ/CS

What do we look for in admissions, specifically?

- GRE (Optional)
 - Flawed but somewhat informative
 - Recommend you take it because it can help make the case for you
- Letters of recommendation
 - Ideally from professors who know you well and recently
 - Want to see evidence you have the ability/interest to do research
- Writing sample
 - Most direct evidence of promise for research
 - Never perfect! Looking for original ideas, using what skills you have, clear writing.

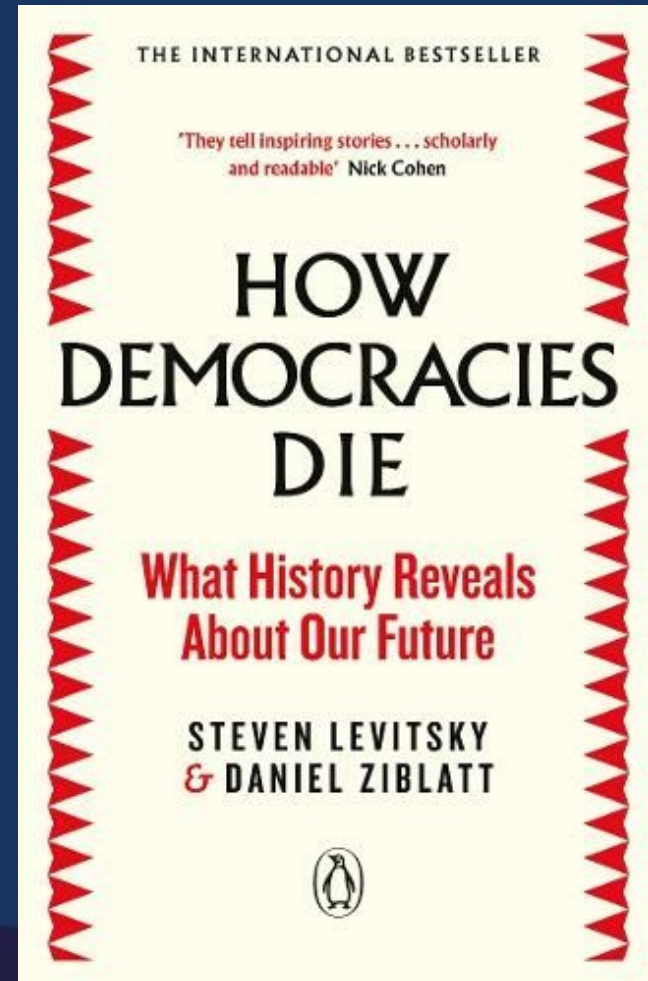
“Pipeline” Programs can help you prepare applications and hone qualifications

Examples:

- Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (APSA)
- Diversity and Inclusion in Government Graduate Studies, UT Austin (for those living in TX, <https://utdiggs.org/>)
- U.C. Berkeley’s Political Science Pipeline program (for Berkeley undergraduates)
- King Center (Stanford) Pre-doctoral Research Fellows Program
- The Minority Graduate Placement Program (<https://www.migaprogram.com/>)
- The Society of Political Methodology Expansion Program
- UC Riverside’s Minority-Serving Institution Research Academy
- MIT Summer Research Program (<https://oge.mit.edu/msrp/>)
- Princeton’s Emerging Scholars Program (<https://graddiversity.princeton.edu/pre-doctoral-fellowship-initiative>)

Department Alumni

- Two Alumni: Steven Levitsky (1999) and Daniel Ziblatt (2002)
- Obama's "Best Books of 2018"
- Professors at Harvard



Department Alumni

- **Justine Davis (2020)**, Assistant professor at Michigan
- “Wartime Experiences of Civic Leaders: Legacies of Civil War, Rebel Control, and Democratization in Post-Conflict Africa”



Department Alumni

- **Eugenia Giraudy** (2015),
Currently Research Scientist at
Meta (“Data Science for Social
Good Team”)
- Dissertation on conservative
political parties in Latin
America

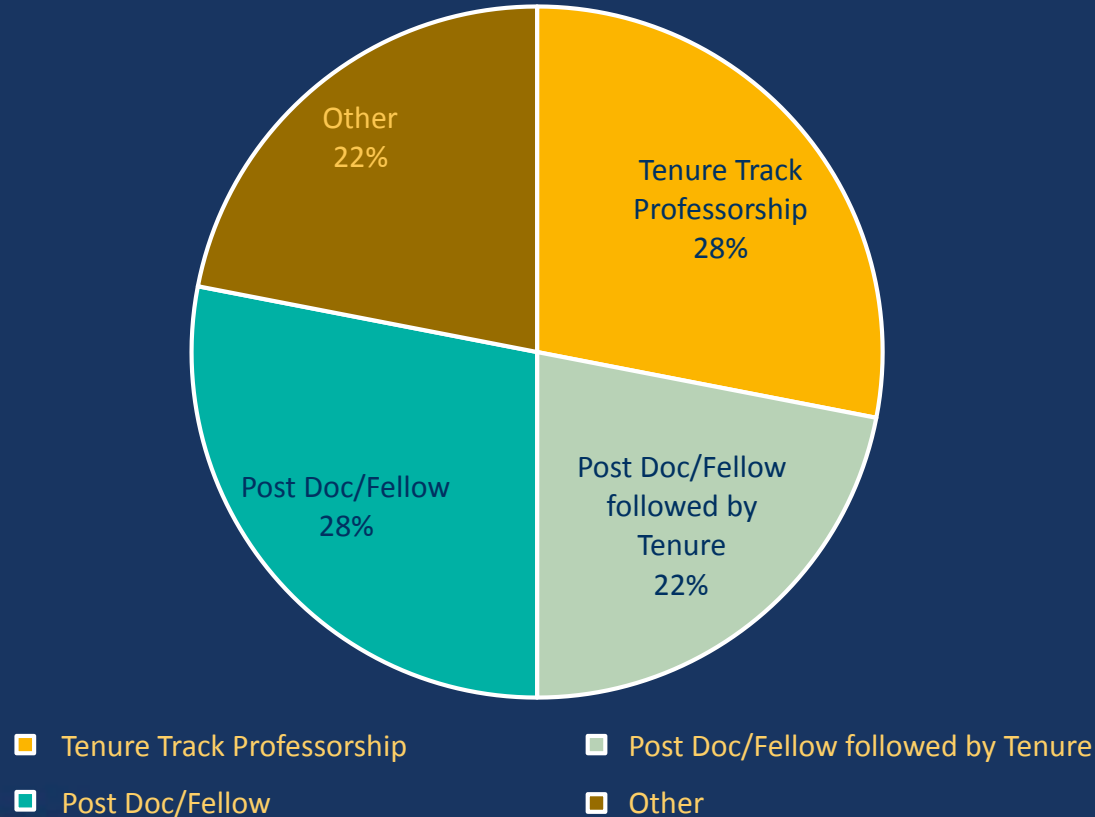


Department Alumni

- **Lee Drutman** (2010),
currently Senior Fellow at the
New America Foundation
- Advocate for electoral reform
in the US



Job Placement Data (Position Type)



***Data from the past 5 years*

Quick overview of program: Coursework

- Primary focus of first year is taking classes
- Continues in second and third year, but typically less due to other requirements
- General subfield seminars, more specific topical courses, methods courses
- Can also take classes outside of the department (Statistics, Area Studies, Economics, Sociology)
- See website for more details about requirements

Quick overview of program: Key Milestones

- Exams in subfields typically in year 2
- MA paper written in year 2
 - Usually take a “Research and Writing” class to help
- Qualifying Exam in year 3: essentially a dissertation proposal
- After that, primarily writing dissertation

Teaching and Funding

- All admitted applicants receive 5 years of funding
 - Funding covers tuition, fees, health insurance, and provides a stipend/salary for living expenses.
- Funding packages vary by student
- Student may work on or off campus to supplement their funding package



Picture: <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/foundation-funding-journalism.php>

Teaching and Funding

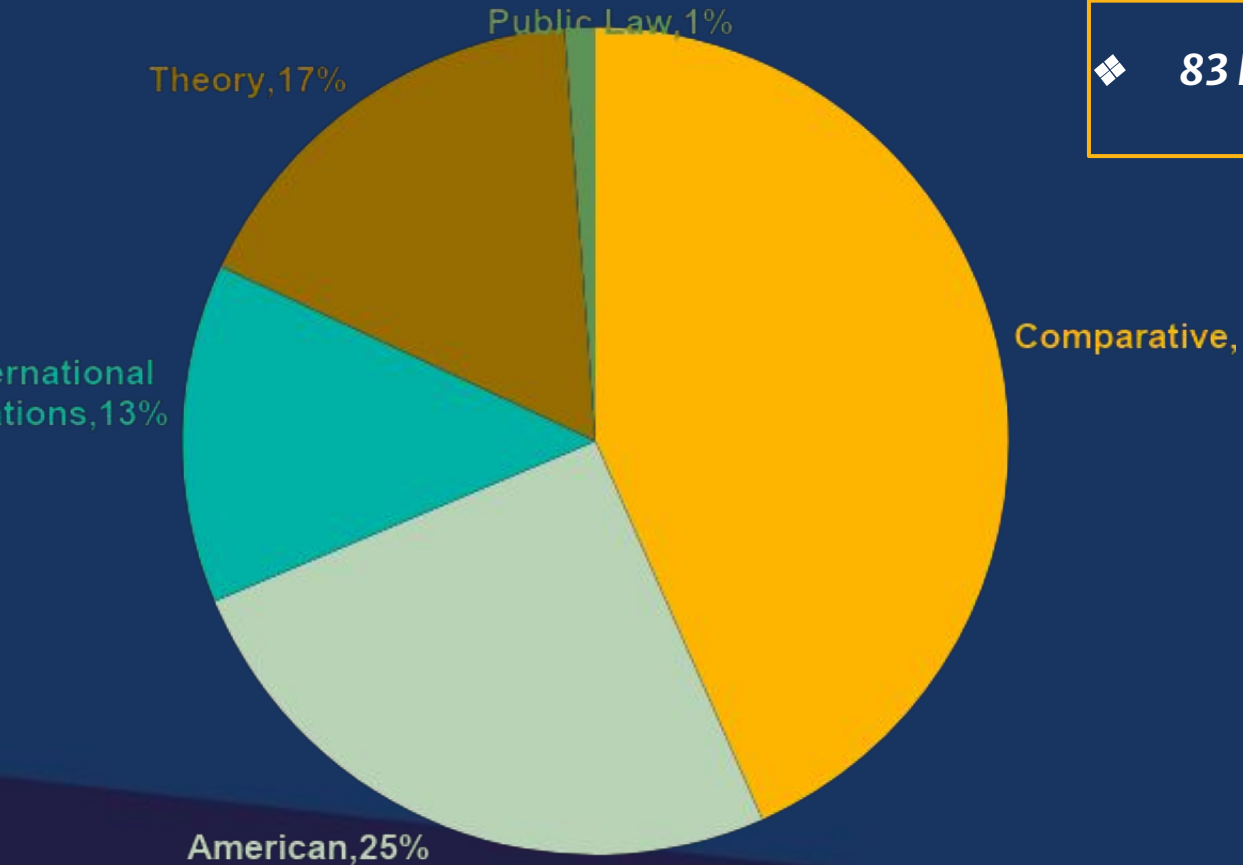
- Most graduate students have a funding package that is a combination of
 - 2 years of teaching or research assistant
 - 3 years of department and university fellow
- 6th-year funding (and beyond) options:
 - Teaching for our department or another department
 - Graduate Student Researcher Position (GSR)
 - Apply for external funding through a fellowship or research opportunity

Questions?



Back-up Slides

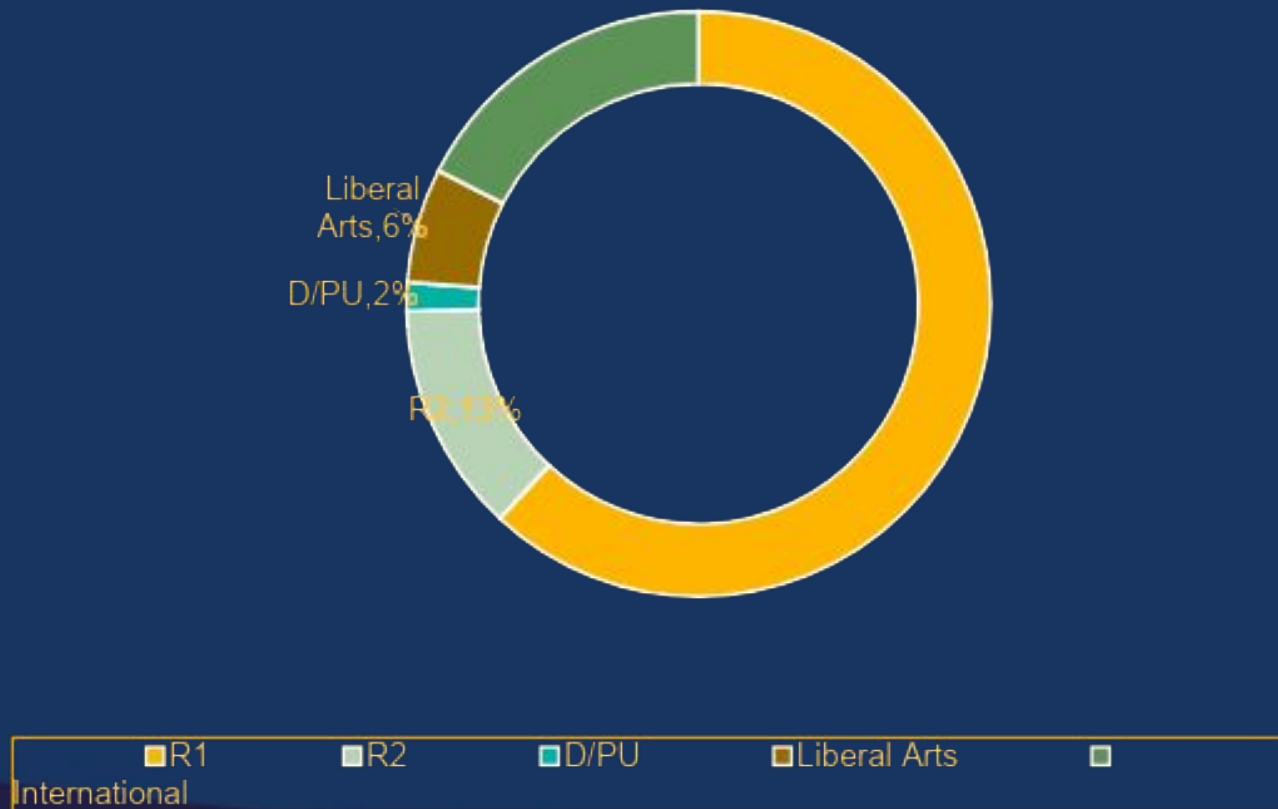
Ph.D. Completion Data



❖ **83 Ph.D.s awarded (Total)**

****Data from the past 5 years**

Job Placement Data (Institution Type)



****Data from the past 5 years**

Why Berkeley is great . . .

- Highly ranked across subfields
- Accomplished Alumni (examples to come)
- Faculty care a lot about graduate training
- Faculty/staff/students committed to making the department inclusive and collegial community
- Meaningful undergraduate teaching
- Great quality of life for most tastes
 - Admitted weakness: cost of living!

Where should you apply/attend?

- Intellectual fit
 - Several faculty actively working in areas of interest?
 - Ideally tenured but not emeritus: Associate Professor or Professor
- Personal fit/Culture
 - Is this somewhere you want to live for most of the next 5–7 years?
 - Do the graduate students seem happy?
- General rankings/placement
 - Check placement records! Are students getting jobs? At places you would want to work? Funding
 - Most good programs are fully funded, generally avoid those that aren't

Funding Websites

- Graduate Program Funding
 - <http://polisci.berkeley.edu/graduate-program/funding>
- Graduate Division Fellowships
 - <https://grad.berkeley.edu/financial/fellowships/>

Helpful Links & Contact Information

- **Political Science Department Webpages:**

- <https://polisci.berkeley.edu>
- <https://polisci.berkeley.edu/graduate-program>
- <https://polisci.berkeley.edu/graduate-program/applying>
- <https://polisci.berkeley.edu/graduate-program/applying/frequently-asked-questions>

- **Job Placement Website:**

- <https://polisci.berkeley.edu/graduate-program/job-placement>

- **Contact Information:**

- Email: pscadmit@Berkeley.edu
- Virtual advising is available by appointment

- **Political Science Department Webpages:**
 - <https://polisci.berkeley.edu>
- **Contact Information:**
 - Email: pscadmit@Berkeley.edu
 - Virtual advising is available by appointment