Rethinking the Undergraduate Political Science Major: The Wahlke Report Revisited

Steven Rathgeb Smith, American Political Science Association, smithsr@apsanet.org and

Meghan McConaughey, American Political Science Association, mmcconaughey@apsanet.org

with assistance from Megan Davis, Amanda Grigg, Erin McGrath, and Tanya Schwarz, Betsy Super, American Political Science Association

Introduction

▷ Review of the Wahlke Report

▷ Challenges Facing Higher Education

▷ Data on Trends in Political Science and Social Science Majors

▷ New Directions for the Major

▷ Service Learning and Civic Engagement

▷ Conclusion

The Wahlke Report: Background

▷ Formally "Liberal Learning and the Political Science Major: A Report to the Profession," by John C. Wahlke (1991)

▷ Report of Task Force on the Political Science Major, appointed by APSA President Lucian Pye

▷ Part of volume on "Liberal Learning and Arts and Sciences Majors" compiled by Association of American Colleges

John Wahlke

▷ President of APSA (1977-78). He taught at several universities including: Amherst, Vanderbilt, SUNY-Buffalo and the University of Arizona.

▷ He was very active in various APSA related activities related to the undergraduate major including a "syllabus project" in the 1970s. He also chaired a committee on educational policy and programs for the association.

▷ In the 1960s, he was one of the early Presidents of the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, now called ICPSR at U of Michigan.

The Wahlke Report Recommendations

Recommendation 1	Departments prepare and distribute "Majors' Handbook"
Recommendation 2	Curriculum include assumptions, methods, and analytical approaches used by political scientists and by cognate disciplines
Recommendation 3	Departments reexamine their conceptions of "minor field" and "cognate disciplines"
Recommendation 4	Teach most American Government courses in comparative fashion
Recommendation 5	All relevant courses address ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity and international and transnational dimensions of particular problems and policies
Recommendation 6	Introductory American Government course emphasize dimensions, and past and present trends, of ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity in America
Recommendation 7	Departments introduce every political science major to a common set of core topics
Recommendation 8	Curriculum focus on acquisition of the knowledge and skills to read contemporary political analyses and development analytic capacity

New Challenges in Higher Education

▷ Unsustainable Costs: how to "bend the cost curve"?

▷ Technology innovations and needs: new technologies for education introduce new opportunities but also new demands

▷ Balancing skills and humanities instruction in the curriculum: growing demand for new skills such as data science, but need to maintain and make case for humanities education as well

Inspired by report "Challenges to Higher Education's Most Essential Purposes" by Kevin M. Guthrie

New Challenges in Higher Education

▷ Changing student population: increasing numbers of students of color, low-income students, first generation students, and students at different career and life stages

▷ Less-prepared students: increasing number of less-prepared students that need higher levels of support

▷ Busier students: increasing number of students with other commitments, particularly work and family obligations

Inspired by report "Challenges to Higher Education's Most Essential Purposes" by Kevin M. Guthrie; Report of APSA Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century speaks to these issues.

Challenges Facing Political Science Discipline and Major

▷ Trends in enrollments and degrees awarded

▷ Distribution of undergrad enrollments

▷ Trends in courses and curriculum

Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology bachelor's degrees conferred, 1949 - 2016

Legend:
- Economics
- History
- Political Science
- Sociology
- Social Science Average
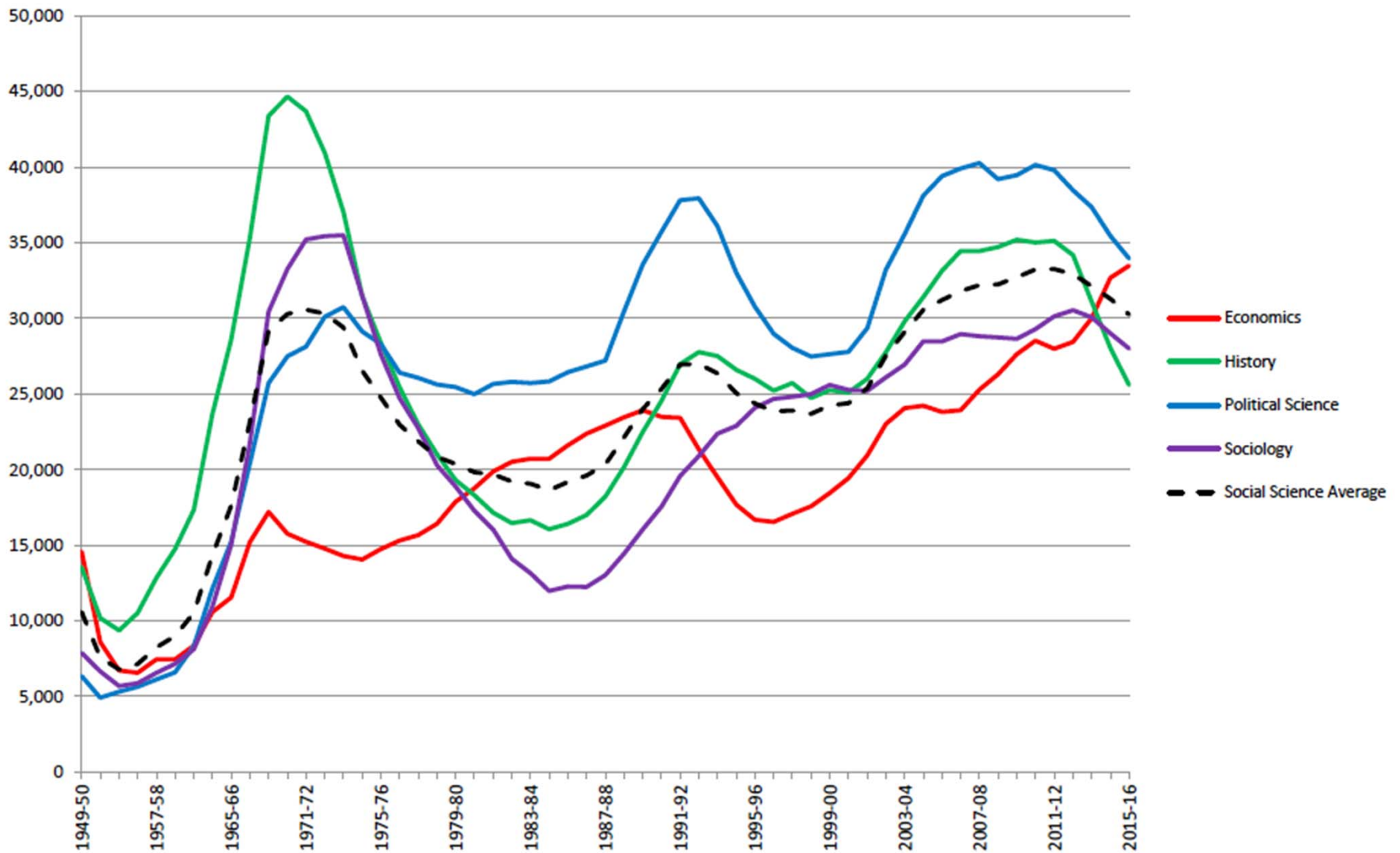
Data from NCES annual Digest of Education Statistics; figure from APSA Trends in Degrees Awarded in the Social Sciences: 1949-2016 Report

Political Science as a proportion of all Social Science degrees conferred, 1949 - 2016
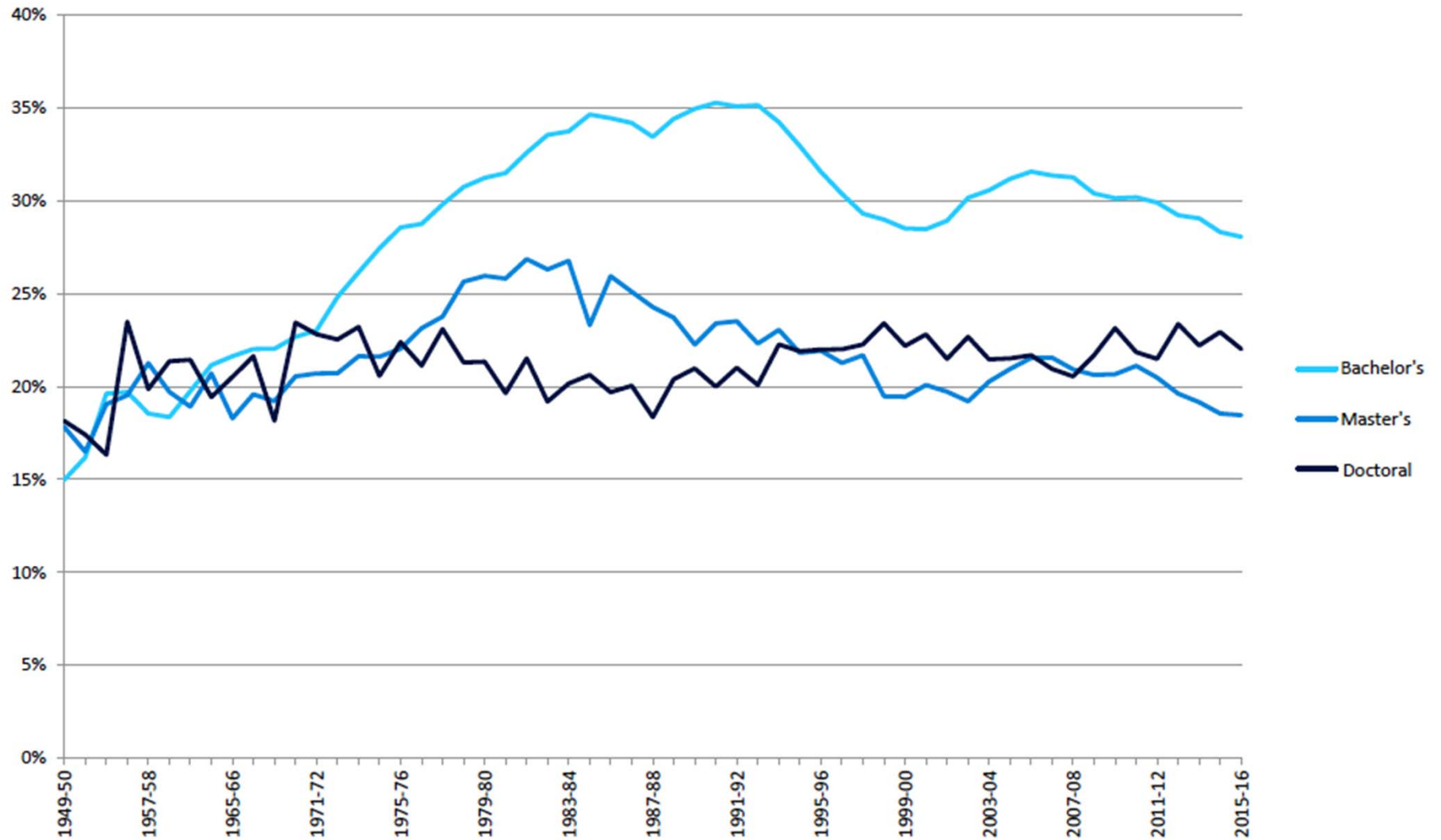
Legend:
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctoral

Data from NCES annual Digest of Education Statistics; figure from APSA Trends in Degrees Awarded in the Social Sciences: 1949-2016 Report

Two-Year Reported Undergraduate Enrollment Changes

	Declined Significantly		Declined Slightly		Stayed the Same		Increased Slightly		Increased Significantly	
	2014-15 to 2015-16	2016-17 to 2017-18	2014-15 to 2015-16	2016-17 to 2017-18	2014-15 to 2015-16	2016-17 to 2017-18	2014-15 to 2015-16	2016-17 to 2017-18	2014-15 to 2015-16	2016-17 to 2017-18
All	2.0%	1.9%	30.6%	23.9%	36.7%	23.9%	25.9%	39.0%	4.8%	11.3%
Public	2.3%	1.1%	29.9%	20.4%	33.3%	21.5%	27.6%	40.9%	6.9%	16.1%
Private	1.7%	3.0%	31.7%	28.8%	41.7%	27.3%	23.3%	36.4%	1.7%	4.5%

Data from APSA 2015-2016 and 2017-2018 Departmental Surveys

New Directions: Workplace Skills

▷ Increased focus on workplace-relevant skills: 2016 UCLA Higher Education Research Institute Survey indicates 85% of first year students across 184 four-year colleges report that "to get a better job" is a "very important" reason they attend college

▷ But majors in arts and sciences (arts and humanities, biological sciences, physical sciences, social sciences) report fewer work-related skills than those in professional fields (education, health, business) (2018 National Survey of Student Engagement)

New Directions: Workplace Skills

▷ Social science faculty relatively unlikely to "substantially structure courses for job- or work-related knowledge and skills" (just over 50%)

▷ Seniors in arts and humanities, biological, and social sciences, as well as seniors who participated in service learning, more likely to have "unconventional immediate" career plans (internship, travel/gap year, service/volunteering)

Results from 2018 National Survey of Student Engagement

New Directions: Comparative Advantages

▷ **Workplace Skills:**
  - ○ Social science, communications, education, and social services majors report greater skills in understanding people of other backgrounds
    - ■ Generally, non-STEM fields more successful in teaching how to work with others and communicate better
    - ■ How to effectively reframe these as job-related skills
  - ○ Seniors in social sciences, communications, arts and humanities, and social services report gaining more skills in writing than the average senior

▷ **Changing Demographics:**
  - ○ Social science, and specifically political science, particularly suited to address changing student demographics by engaging with subjects like race and politics and women in politics

Workplace skills data results from 2018 National Survey of Student Engagement

Role of Service Learning and Civic Education

▷ Service learning is a key trend in higher education and the social sciences in particular
  ○ Nearly 40% of respondents to 2018 APSA Community College Faculty survey report that their institution offered internships for credit
  ○ New criteria for accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission (effective in 2020) includes specific encouragement for activities that promote informed citizenship and workplace success
  ○ A preparedness study by Bentley University indicates that there is demand for civic skills from employers

Role of Service Learning and Civic Education

▷ Service learning and community participation are important for civic education
  ○ Matto and Civic Nation argue in Forbes that students must be engaged outside the classroom
  ○ Students Learn Students Vote Coalition defines "democratic engagement" to include student participation in communities and applied learning
  ○ Teaching Civic Engagement Across Disciplines indicates goal is to "impart...skills to peacefully and constructively access [our democratic systems]."

▷ Opportunity to connect civic education and workplace skills. Civic engagement education builds skills that can be useful in careers

Future of the Political Science Major

▷ Restructuring to Emphasize a common core that includes a strong analytics component with strong concentrations and sub-fields.

- ○ **UCSD**—7 different political science majors. Required course in Methods and 3 or 4 courses in American Politics, IR, Comparative, and Power and Justice
- ○ **Stanford**—Restructured introductory course which is now called, The Science of Politics. Additional Methods course is required and several courses in one of the 5 tracks: 1) Data Science; 2) Elections, Representation and Governance; 3) IR; 4)Justice and Law; and 5)Political Economy and Development
- ○ **Duke**—Required courses: Data Analysis and one topical courses; choice of courses from sub-fields; other electives; and a capstone
- ○ **UCLA**—6 undergraduate political science concentrations, including Race, Ethnicity, and Politics

Future of the Political Science Major

▷ Restructuring the major to emphasize specific topical areas including civic leadership. (*University of Illinois*)

▷ More in-depth learning and more options for service learning, online instructions, simulations, etc.(*San Jose State*)

Future of the Political Science Major

▷ Many departments though retain many of the traditional components of the major: required courses in 4 or more sub-fields and several additional more advanced sub-field courses. Capstone experiences and required methods courses remain quite variable.

▷ Public Policy undergraduate majors as competitors to political science:
  ○ *Typical requirements*: required stats; ethics; internships; capstone; policy and political analysis
  ○ *Examples: Duke, USC*

Future of the Political Science Major

▷ Also a growing divide between PhD and BA institutions, with large PhD granting institutions offering more choice and new curricular pathways in the major.

▷ Partially a result of enrollment and hiring trends that allow for more diverse offerings at larger programs

▷ Partially because larger higher education trends have led to greater contrasts in how different institution types understand higher education and the political science major

Concluding Thoughts

▷ In many respects, the recent reform efforts are to varying degrees implementing the Wahlke report's recommendations of greater analytic rigor, more structure to the major, and greater responsiveness to student interests and the changing demographics of higher education.

▷ Important for these curricular and pedagogical innovations to continue, given the competition for students and greater expectations for accountability for departments and faculty.

Appendices

Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology bachelor's degrees as proportions of all bachelor's degrees conferred, 1970 - 2016
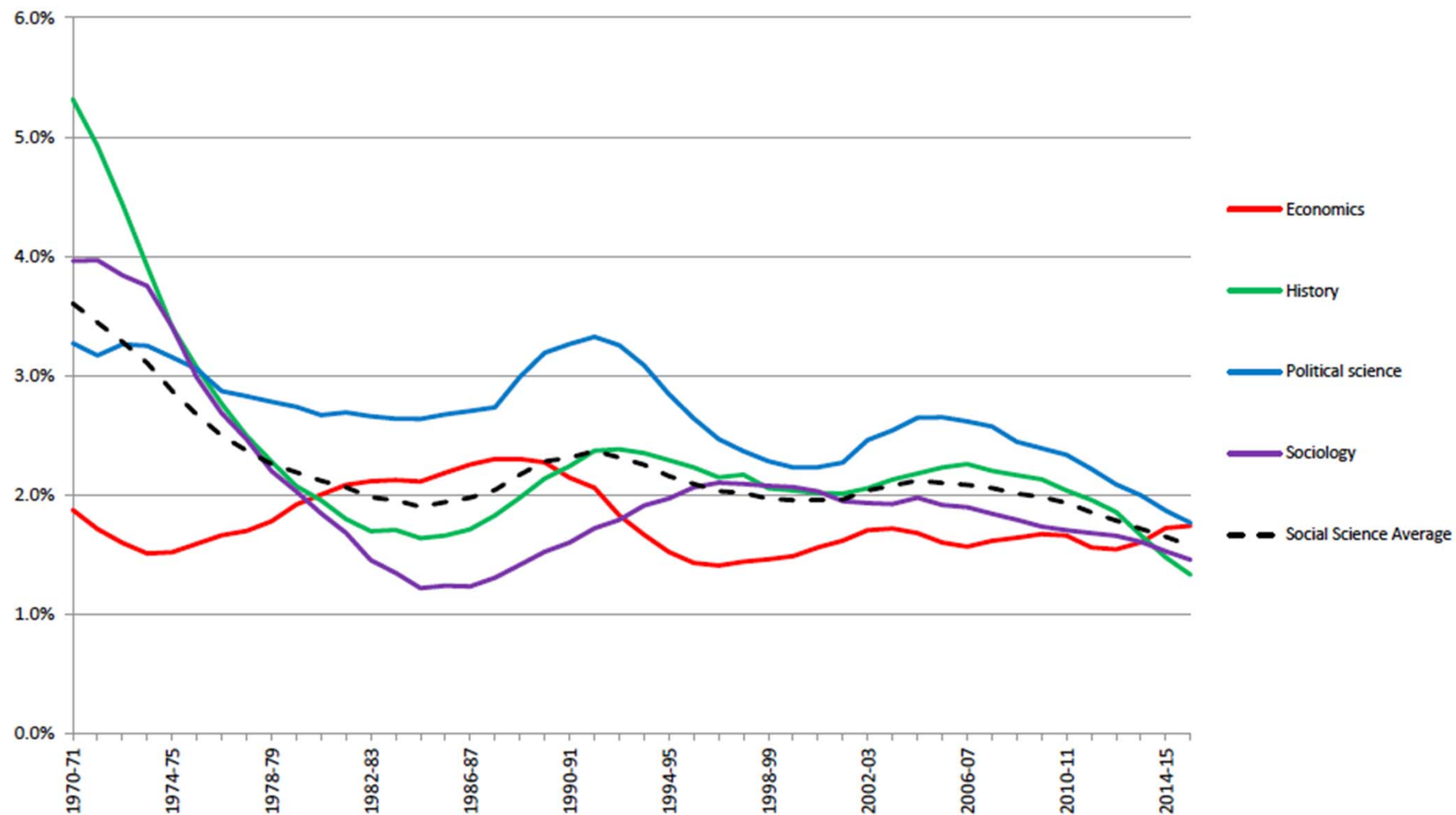
Data from NCES annual Digest of Education Statistics; figure from APSA Trends in Degrees Awarded in the Social Sciences: 1949-2016 Report

Undergraduate Core-Curriculum Courses by Institution Type and Department Type

		All	PhD	MA	BA	BA Combined	Social Science
Introduction to Politics/Political Science	All	34.3%	28.9%	37.9%	34.2%	41.9%	29.6%
	Public	39.0%	33.9%	41.2%	44.1%	53.3%	23.1%
	Private	28.8%	11.8%	14.3%	30.0%	35.7%	35.7%
Introduction to American Government	All	97.8%	98.7%	98.3%	98.2%	97.7%	92.6%
	Public	98.3%	98.3%	98.0%	97.1%	100.0%	100.0%
	Private	97.3%	100.0%	100.0%	98.8%	96.4%	85.7%
Introduction to International Relations	All	89.9%	96.1%	94.8%	93.9%	79.1%	63.0%
	Public	93.0%	96.6%	94.1%	97.1%	86.7%	61.5%
	Private	86.3%	94.1%	100.0%	92.5%	75.0%	57.1%
Introduction to Comparative Government	All	79.6%	94.7%	82.8%	78.1%	79.1%	37.0%
	Public	84.9%	96.6%	82.4%	85.3%	86.7%	38.5%
	Private	73.3%	88.2%	85.7%	75.0%	75.0%	35.7%
Introduction to Political Theory/Ideology	All	73.0%	82.9%	75.9%	73.7%	67.4%	44.4%
	Public	76.7%	81.4%	78.4%	73.5%	73.3%	61.5%
	Private	68.5%	88.2%	57.1%	73.8%	64.3%	28.6%
Introduction to Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics	All	66.0%	63.2%	77.6%	64.9%	58.1%	66.7%
	Public	69.8%	66.1%	76.5%	67.6%	60.0%	76.9%
	Private	61.6%	52.9%	85.7%	63.8%	57.1%	57.1%
Research Methods/Statistics	All	82.4%	94.7%	93.1%	85.1%	67.4%	37.0%
	Public	87.8%	93.2%	94.1%	94.1%	73.3%	38.5%
	Private	76.0%	100.0%	85.7%	81.3%	64.3%	35.7%

Data from APSA 2017-2018 Departmental Survey

Number of Undergraduate Core Requirements by Institution Type and Department Type

		All	PhD	MA	BA	BA Combined	Social Science
All	1 to 2	15.2%	26.1%	13.6%	15.0%	4.7%	5.6%
	3 to 4	34.4%	44.9%	37.3%	28.3%	30.2%	33.3%
	5 to 6	30.8%	14.5%	39.0%	32.7%	37.2%	38.9%
	7 or more	18.2%	10.1%	10.2%	23.0%	27.9%	22.2%
	Don't know	1.3%	4.3%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Public	1 to 2	15.2%	25.5%	15.7%	3.0%	6.7%	9.1%
	3 to 4	40.0%	43.6%	37.3%	33.3%	46.7%	45.5%
	5 to 6	30.9%	18.2%	39.2%	36.4%	40.0%	27.3%
	7 or more	12.7%	9.1%	7.8%	27.3%	6.7%	18.2%
	Don't know	1.2%	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Private	1 to 2	15.3%	28.6%	0.0%	20.0%	3.6%	0.0%
	3 to 4	27.7%	50.0%	37.5%	26.2%	21.4%	14.3%
	5 to 6	30.7%	0.0%	37.5%	31.2%	35.7%	57.1%
	7 or more	24.8%	14.3%	25.0%	21.2%	39.3%	28.6%
	Don't know	1.5%	7.1%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%

Data from APSA 2017-2018 Departmental Survey

Undergraduate Enrollment Changes from 2016-17 to 2017-18 Academic Year by Institution Type and Department Type

		All	PhD	MA	BA	BA Combined	Social Science
All	Declined Significantly	3.7%	0.0%	5.1%	4.2%	0.0%	14.8%
	Declined Slightly	21.3%	19.0%	16.9%	22.7%	25.0%	25.9%
	Stayed the Same	26.2%	19.0%	16.9%	34.5%	25.0%	33.3%
	Increased Slightly	38.7%	44.3%	45.8%	31.1%	50.0%	22.0%
	Increased Significantly	10.1%	17.7%	15.3%	7.6%	0.0%	3.7%
Public	Declined Significantly	2.3%	0.0%	3.9%	2.8%	0.0%	7.7%
	Declined Slightly	16.0%	18.0%	17.6%	11.1%	7.1%	23.1%
	Stayed the Same	25.7%	14.8%	19.6%	47.2%	28.6%	38.5%
	Increased Slightly	41.1%	49.2%	41.2%	25.0%	64.3%	23.1%
	Increased Significantly	14.9%	18.0%	17.6%	13.9%	0.0%	7.7%
Private	Declined Significantly	5.2%	0.0%	12.5%	4.8%	0.0%	21.4%
	Declined Slightly	27.5%	22.2%	12.5%	27.7%	33.3%	28.6%
	Stayed the Same	26.8%	33.3%	0.0%	28.9%	23.3%	28.6%
	Increased Slightly	35.9%	27.8%	75.0%	33.7%	43.3%	21.4%
	Increased Significantly	4.6%	16.7%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%

Data from APSA 2017-2018 Departmental Survey

Undergraduate Enrollment Distributions by Institution Type and Department Type

		n	Min	Max	Mean	Median
All	All	318	37	15784	1784	973
	PhD	76	336	15784	3889	3737
	MA	58	94	8390	2310	1606
	BA	114	37	5105	869	651
	BA Combined	43	53	3405	612	335
	Social Science	27	40	4475	451	205
Public	All	172	55	15784	2681	1784
	PhD	59	336	15784	4452	4205
	MA	51	94	8390	2545	1973
	BA	34	126	5105	1298	1034
	BA Combined	15	125	3405	958	531
	Social Science	13	55	4475	783	335
Private	All	146	37	4803	726	477
	PhD	17	548	4803	1937	1735
	MA	7	199	860	595	519
	BA	80	37	4611	687	554
	BA Combined	28	53	1932	427	289
	Social Science	14	40	254	143	146

Data from APSA 2017-2018 Departmental Survey

Average Undergraduate Enrollment in Core Curriculum Courses by Institution Type and Department Type

		All	PhD	MA	BA	BA Combined	Social Science
Introduction to Politics/Political Science	All	162	245	290	102	80	63
	Public	222	265	301	144	114	59
	Private	66	50	25	75	53	65
Introduction to American Government	All	495	908	885	178	254	194
	Public	821	1121	990	355	553	328
	Private	108	181	138	105	88	48
Introduction to International Relations	All	169	344	186	90	46	90
	Public	237	378	207	141	33	151
	Private	82	223	50	68	55	22
Introduction to Comparative Government	All	136	264	126	84	45	27
	Public	178	286	134	114	36	42
	Private	79	180	72	70	51	12
Introduction to Political Theory/Ideology	All	95	189	87	61	32	25
	Public	123	207	93	81	32	31
	Private	58	130	26	53	33	14
Introduction to Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics	All	60	114	70	41	26	21
	Public	68	113	74	63	29	21
	Private	38	120	42	31	25	21
Research Methods/Statistics	All	82	161	83	44	27	32
	Public	110	183	88	57	22	47
	Private	44	91	44	38	30	17

Data from APSA 2017-2018 Departmental Survey