

CAREER  
LINKS



Career Development  
Center

Conversations about Career Success...with Faculty



**Marilyn Gaar**  
**Professor, Political Science/History**

**What was your college major?**

My Bachelor's degree is in Slavic Language and Literature. I have lots of hours in sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history and political science. I was in a Master's/Ph. D program in Political Science at Indiana, but left after two years when I saw that the Ph. D. graduates were not getting jobs. My Master's is in Political Science – Russian and Eastern European comparative governments.

**Did this major lead you to your current career?**

I am now teaching American Government. I came to JCCC in 1973 and got active in politics in Johnson County when a student said that the textbook theory was not how politics worked in this area. I got involved in committees, Home Owners Associations, political organizations and campaigns and civic groups. I learned a lot about politics.

**What are the characteristics that your most successful students possess?**

The number one characteristic is a love of learning. It opens doors and keeps one alive. Students also need the ability to problem solve. They should have above basic reading and writing skills.

**Name three things a student should know when exploring this career.**

#1. Political Science is a stepping stone to something else. There are very few careers in Political Science outside of teaching. #2. One has to be well grounded in economic numbers to understand Political Science. #3. Political Science as a career choice is seldom an end in and of itself. Jobs are not listed for someone to be a “political scientist”. Public Administration, while not totally a Political Science degree, is generally located within Political Science departments and prepares one to work in government. Students can also go into polling research, lobbying or campaign consulting. Lobbying is not a position that one can start into without connections. Campaign consulting is now a never ending job, and individuals in it can make big money. JCCC has a start-to-finish program via KU at the Edwards campus with the major being Public Administration. That degree can be followed by KU’s graduate MPA program. The JCCC Political Science department is part of the bachelor-level Public Administration offering.

**What skills will a student learn when pursuing this career?**

Students will learn basic problem solving and analytical skills. They will learn a methodology of problem solving – how to look at all sides and find the truth. Political Science is about understanding the forces that shape our lives.

**For a student needing part-time employment while in college, what types of jobs provide the best experiential learning opportunities?**

Someone who is sensitive to their environment will feel the influence of government everywhere. Working in a grocery store, one will see what is taxed and what is not. Driving on roads with unfilled potholes, one is very aware of government. Seeing how state and local governments spend tax dollars raises one’s awareness of how politics impact life.

**If a college student is unable to find related work experience in this career field, how do you suggest he/she prepare for the workplace?**

The department has an internship for students at the freshman and sophomore levels. Students have done internships in the State House and Senate. One of them now has a non-elected job in the Senate. Another student did an internship in the Overland Park City Manager’s office; that student moved on to a job in Chicago. Following an internship one student got a job in the federal government, but left it for the private sector.

**Is there a selection process for entering this program?**

No, students can pick and choose the classes they want to take. The department offers a 3-credit class on the Model United Nations. Students who participate in the Model UN program travel to other cities—New York, Chicago and St. Louis, for national competitions. During the competitions, students lobby on behalf of “their country’s” positions, beliefs and political structure.