

Societal Relevance Dimensions of Graduating in Political Science in Austria

Sabine Gatt, Lore Hayek, Christian Huemer

University of Innsbruck, Department of Political Science, Austria

sabine.gatt@uibk.ac.at, lore.hayek@uibk.ac.at, christian.huemer@uibk.ac.at

Abstract

4,350 students were enrolled in a BA and 1,481 pursued a Master's programme in political science in Austria in 2016. However, only a small number of degree holders embark on an academic career; many more move on to jobs in the public or private sector. In this contribution we focus on the impact of teaching political science and the contribution that political science graduates make to society. The article draws on data from the Graduate Monitoring which evaluates graduates' progress in the labour market, and semi-structured interviews with political science graduates. Increasing knowledge about students' career paths will help to improve curricula and contribute to a better understanding of the theories, methods and instruments that graduates will apply in their careers.

Keywords

political science, Austria, degree programme, graduates, careers

Die gesellschaftliche Relevanz eines politikwissenschaftlichen Studienabschlusses in Österreich

Zusammenfassung

Im Jahr 2016 studierten 4.350 Studierende im einem BA-Programm und 1.481 in einem Masterstudium Politikwissenschaft an einer österreichischen Universität. Allerdings beginnen nur wenige Absolventen eine akademische Laufbahn; andere wechseln in den öffentlichen oder privaten Sektor. In diesem Beitrag analysieren wir den Effekt eines Politikwissenschaftsstudiums und den gesellschaftlichen Beitrag, den AbsolventInnen der Politikwissenschaft leisten können. Der Beitrag stützt sich auf Daten aus dem Graduate Monitoring, in denen die Fortschritte der Absolventen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt bewertet werden, sowie auf semistrukturierte E-Mail-Interviews mit Absolventinnen und Absolventen des Politikwissenschaftsstudiums. Die Ergebnisse können zu einem besseren Verständnis der Theorien, Methoden und Instrumente, die Absolventen der Politikwissenschaften in ihrer zukünftigen Laufbahn anwenden können, und damit zur Weiterentwicklung und Verbesserung von Lehrplänen beitragen.

Schlüsselwörter

Politikwissenschaft, Österreich, Studium, AbsolventInnen, Karriere

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

1. Introduction

Political science scholars often evaluate the relevance of their discipline from an academic perspective, supplemented by the contributions scholars make to the production of knowledge in society. They rarely evaluate the impact their work makes on their students and which opportunities their graduates gain from studying political science.

For this contribution, we look at the dimensions of relevance (Senn/Eder 2018) from the perspective of students and graduates because the tight differentiation between the dimensions does not always hold from their view. For instance, political agency can be a part of professional agency for graduates who choose a career in politics or take an active role in society. Alternatively, the civic relevance can be the deciding factor to choose a political science degree in the first place. Like Senn/Eder (2018) and Ennsner-Jedenastik et al. (2018) do in this issue, we treat societal and academic relevance as highly interconnected.

Furthermore, we focus on the societal relevance of a political science degree in Austria. We focus on professional relevance as well as civic relevance. From the perspective of students both can include political agency. In other words, we seek to analyse whether academic training in political science contributes to the professional and political agency of graduates and makes them active contributors to society.

To explore empirically the societal relevance of studying political science in Austria, we combine a quantitative and a qualitative method. First, we look at the career paths of Austrian graduates by using data from the Graduate Monitoring to establish the careers graduates choose after completing the degree. Second, we present the results of a pilot study conducted among recent Diploma graduates of the University of Innsbruck to illustrate the civic and professional relevance dimensions of graduating in political science.

2. Relevance of teaching and learning in higher education

According to the differentiation between academic and societal relevance of political science developed in the introductory chapter of this special issue (Senn/Eder 2018), we look at the concept of relevance through the lens of teaching and learning in higher education. We are only interested in societal relevance. At the same time, we treat academic and societal relevance as interconnected. Therefore, we will first review academic relevance and second societal relevance. In the academic literature, the relevance of teaching and learning is mainly discussed within these two strands: One strand of

research focuses on scientists as teachers and discusses the status of teaching within academia (Anderson 1958; M. Goldsmith/C. Goldsmith 2010; Ishiyama et al. 2010; Trepanier 2017). We classify this strand as a matter of academic relevance. The other strand of research highlights learning outcomes of students. Political science researchers treat learning outcomes mainly as matters of employability and, to a lesser degree, as citizenship education (Abrandt Dhalgren et al. 2006; Collins et al. 2012; Dominguez et al. 2017; Lowenthal 2012; Lightfoot 2015; Niemann/Heister 2010; Nussbaum 2010; Nyström et al. 2008; Stuckey et al. 2013). Here, societal relevance is foregrounded.

A brief look at MA and PhD curricula of political science programs in the United States shows that future political scientists do not receive a profound training in teaching political science (Anderson 1958; Ishiyama et al. 2010; Trepanier 2017). At the same time, teaching assessments in Europe and the United States show that the variety of pedagogical techniques of political scientists is rising (M. Goldsmith/C. Goldsmith 2010; Hartlaub/Lancaster 2008). However, the training of political scientists still does not include teaching as an important or valued part. Against this background, Trepanier (2017) points out that the subfield "Scholarship of Teaching and Learning" (SoTL) is missing in most doctoral political science programs. Strengthening SoTL could provide students with a variety of teaching skills and boost research on teaching and learning in political science. It could help broaden the concept of academic relevance, by theorizing the impact of teaching and learning in political science. It could help strengthening the prestige of teaching and the sensibility for scholarship as a matter of care work and it could provide students with skills relevant within and beyond academia.

Academic and societal relevance of teaching and learning in higher education closely relate to each other with regard to professional agency. Research on societal relevance mainly focuses on the vocational training of students. Here the emphasis is on learning outcomes and the preparation of political science graduates for the job market. At the same time, we know little about career preparation as part of political science curricula (Collins et al. 2012). From the perspective of vocational training, a political science degree should prepare its students for jobs within and beyond academia, because only a small percentage chooses an academic career (Lowenthal 2012). Academic and non-academic jobs might not require the same skills. "A degree in Political Science could be seen as a general degree where the graduates do not have an obvious path to go into" (Nyström et al. 2008, 227). Graduates of political science work within diverse fields of non-academic

jobs, which complicates questions of career preparation and challenges the professional relevance of a political science degree. In other words, teaching as caring also requires sensibility for this situation. Curricula need to address heterogeneous learning outcomes, suitable for academic and non-academic careers.

Collins et al. (2012) have surveyed departments across the United States to examine how they prepare students for their future careers. They find that while several departments set initiatives like financing high quality internships and introducing curricular changes “that political science departments are not doing enough to address their students’ career preparation” (Collins et al. 2012, 87). They especially pinpoint the lack of evaluation tools to determine the effectiveness of different career preparation strategies. In Austria, previous studies on political science programmes include comparisons of curricula and descriptive analyses of the student population on enrolment and mobility (König 2016) as well as a graduate survey report about job market entry, requirements and business sectors (Heinrich et al. 2008). Apart from that, data on career paths of political science graduates is rare and has not yet been used for extensive analyses.

However, we do not restrict our focus to vocational training. We are interested in the societal relevance of a political science degree from the perspective of Austrian graduates. Therefore, we use the typology of societal relevance provided in the introductory chapter. We focus not only on professional relevance, but on civic and political relevance as well (Senn/Eder 2018). Beyond the discourse on employability, studies show that a political science degree raises the political awareness of students and strengthens the ability for political participation (Dominguez et al. 2017; Nussbaum 2010). In other words, a political science degree is, to some extent, a form of adult citizenship education. Therefore, we add civic relevance to our research design. A degree might evoke curiosity and interest in politics and form identities as active citizens (Stuckey et al. 2013). It might also contribute to the political agency of its students. Civic relevance could be as important as professional relevance for individuals. Moreover, we treat political relevance as a form of professional relevance. Political agency of

graduates might be relevant for their professional lives. Graduates might work within political parties or non-governmental organisations or as political consultants. Political careers are important potential non-academic career paths (Niemann/Heister 2010; Lightfoot 2015). From the perspective of learning outcomes, political agency might be part of the vocational dimension as well.

3. Research design, data and Results

Central to this paper are career paths of Austrian political science graduates and their individual learning outcomes. We are interested in the diverse field of potential careers. Collins et al. (2012) show that a degree in political science does not provide students with marketable skills. Does this argument hold for Austria as well? How well are Austrian political science graduates prepared for their individual careers? Moreover, which relevant skills do they acquire? To address these sub-questions and explore the relevance of acquired skills we distinguish between substantive and generic skills (Abrandt/Dahlgren et al. 2006). Substantive skills include all discipline-specific core subjects, such as knowledge about political institutions and processes, theories and methods. Generic skills include skills such as researching, critical thinking or practical skills required through internships. Moreover, we want to know if graduates profit from networks gained through their time as students.

To illustrate the dimensions of relevance of teaching and learning in Austria, we draw on two sets of data. Firstly, we look at data from the Graduate Monitoring conducted by the Institute of Advanced Studies to assess the professional relevance of political science programmes. Secondly, we conducted semi-structured interviews with graduates from the University of Innsbruck to look into the individual and societal relevance of studying political science.

The relevance of political science education is usually measured through graduate surveys, collecting data on contents, methods, and skills acquired during the degree programme. Another relevance indicator is the

Table 1: Research design

	Civic relevance	Societal relevance Professional relevance	Political relevance
Definition (Senn/Eder 2018)	Enhancing political literacy	Career opportunities	Contribution to the process of political decision-making
Data	Interviews	Graduate Monitoring Interviews	Interviews

integration of graduates into the labour market – how employable are political science graduates, and which career paths do they choose? To measure employability, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS, Vienna) does not only rely on surveys, but on a tracking system anonymously registering graduates’ social security number. All graduates active in the Austrian labour market are being tracked to gain insight into career paths, dropout rates or employability of different social groups.

At the University of Innsbruck, the IHS conducted their Graduate Monitoring between 2011 and 2013 (Walch et al. 2014). For the diploma programme political science, cohorts of graduates between 2007/2008 and 2012/2013 were examined. The authors tracked every cohort over the full period, so for the graduates of 2007/2008 data for more than four years after graduation is available. In total, they recorded 317 graduates through the six-year examination period. They collected data on the student’s labour status before and after graduation, the workload while studying, the business sectors they worked in and the development of their income. As an exemplary cohort we show data from the 2009/2010 graduates. Due to the transition to the Bologna system, an exceptionally high number of students graduated in this year and we have data from 105 graduates. Also in our qualitative study, the highest number of respondents graduated in 2010 (11 respondents).

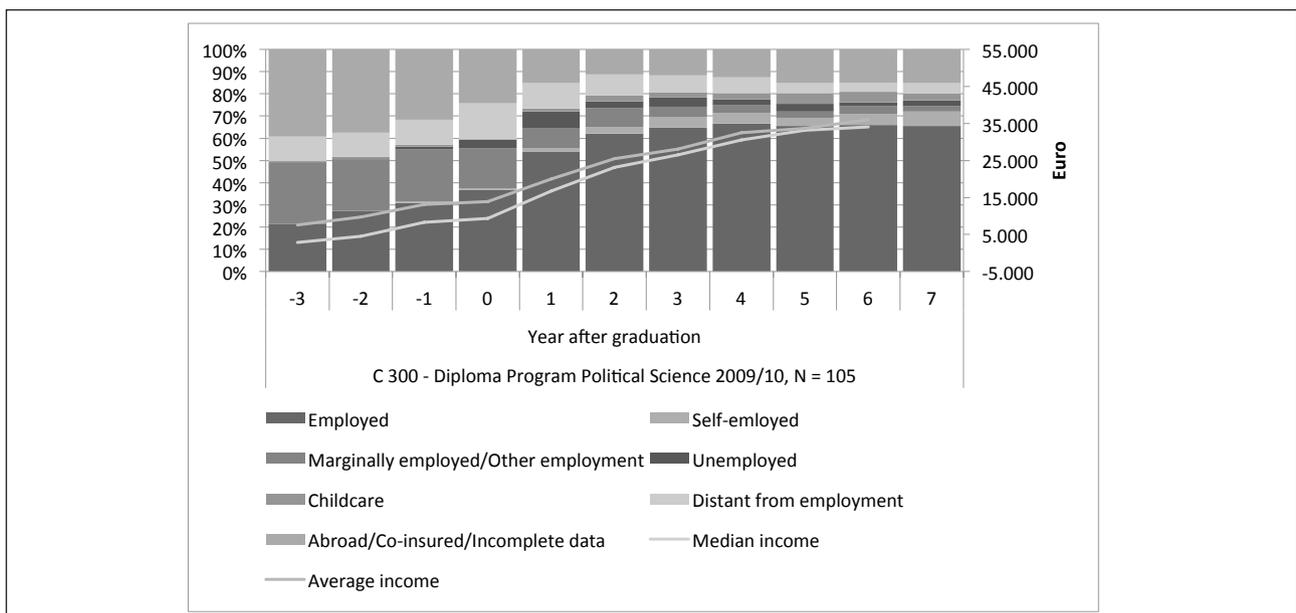
We illustrate career perspectives of political science graduates by examining three indicators from the Graduate Monitoring: The occupational status of students respectively graduates, the business sectors political scientists get to work in after graduating, and

the impact that their graduation has on their annual income or salary.

First, we focus on political science graduates’ occupations. Figure 1 shows the different occupational statuses of students before and after graduation. The dark grey sectors, which increase during the observation period, show the amount of students and graduates whose occupational status is “employed“. Nearly 30 per cent find employment already before their graduation. After graduation, this share rises up to 65 per cent within three years and remains at that level until seven years after graduation. In comparison, the self-employment rate is very low, just about 5 per cent. The amount of people in the middle sector – more than 20 per cent before and around five per cent after graduation – are harder to define. Most of them do not work on a regular basis, which means they have contracts for specific works (*Werkvertrag*) or they are marginally employed.

The figure shows that after graduation, shares of these forms of occupation decline which indicates that graduates manage to get regular jobs. After graduation family planning becomes an issue, but only for one to two per cent of graduates. The unemployment rate is rather high in the first year after graduation, but later declines to a low rate of two to four per cent. The actual number of graduates without occupation may be higher, but on a number of graduates, no data is available (light grey sectors). The most frequent reasons are that graduates have no occupation and are co-insured with their parents (or a partner), or they moved to another country and therefore are not recorded in the Austrian system. Graduates of the diploma program political science, as we can see in figure 1, are highly integrated

Figure 1: Labour market status and income of graduates (Walch, Heil and Oberhauser 2014)



into the labour market even before their graduation. The occupational status changes after leaving university and is becoming more stable.

Second, we look at the impact that the graduates' degree has on their annual income or salary. The progress of wages and incomes of graduates can be used as an indicator of employability and demand for labour. After graduation in the years 2009 and 2010, the average annual gross income increases from EUR 13,945 to EUR 28,000 in the year 2013. There is a difference between the average income and the median income, which shows that there are some graduates with a high income, but many of the graduates have a low progression. Compared to graduates of other disciplines like law graduates or business and management, the average gross income of political scientists is 7,000 to 12,000 EUR lower.

Third, we examine which business sectors political science graduates find employment in. One year after graduation, one fifth of graduates (18 per cent) are working in the sector of professional, scientific or technical activities. This is a very broad sector, which includes jobs like legal and accounting activities, management consultancy activities, public relations and communications or scientific and research activities. Graduates also find employment in the education sector (15 per cent). Within this branch, people work in any kind of educational training, whereas political scientists with very probably find employment in the tertiary education sector. For graduates who are interested in processes in society, working in the public administration is of course an option (12 per cent).

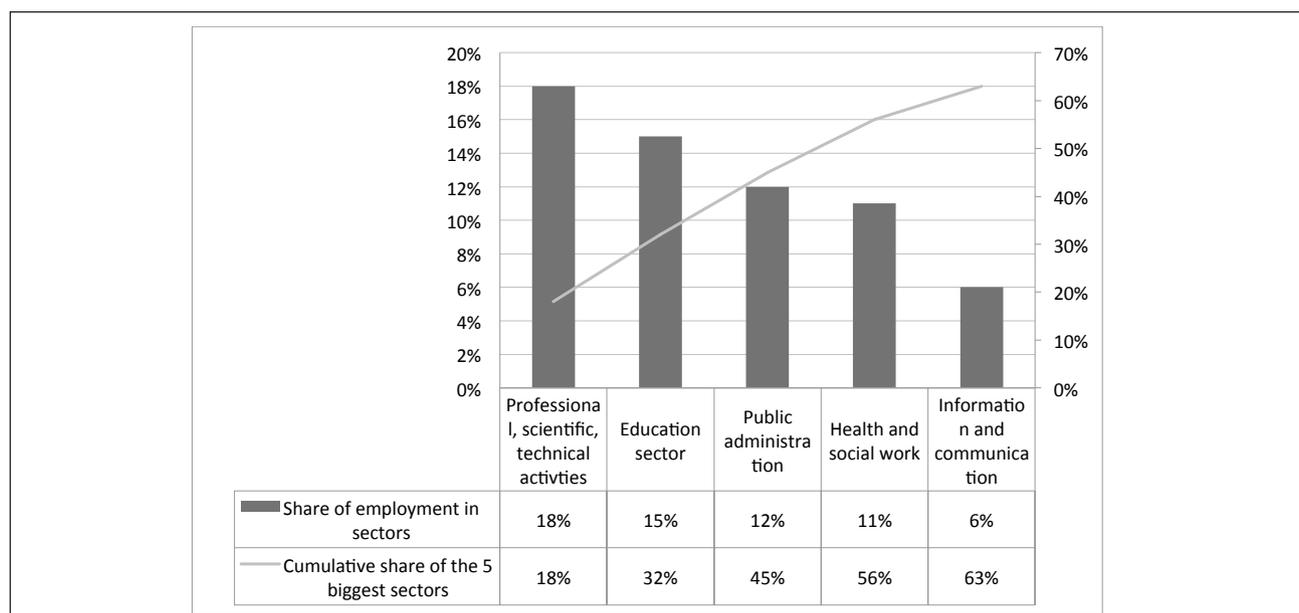
The political science graduates have reached a very stable labour market status with few phases of

unemployment. There is a group of graduates around 10 to 15 per cent who are not registered in the system anymore, probably because they left the country, and no data is provided. The income distribution is increasing, but compared to other graduates there is still a pent up demand.

3.1 Comparison to other cohorts

In order to get a better overview, we compared the results of the cohort 2009/10 to other graduate cohorts of the diploma program. As the data show, after graduation the occupational status "employed" reaches around 60 per cent in every cohort. There are some differences in the self-employment rate, which is higher in the cohort from 2007/08, while in the cohort of 2008/09 the marginally employed or "special contracts" (Werkvertrag) are higher than in other graduation years. One assumption is that after the financial crisis of 2008 it was harder to get a regular job because of the tense situation in the labour market. In the end, the job market integration had taken longer for the 2008/09 graduates than others. If we take a closer look at the business sectors one year after graduation, more graduates of the cohorts were employed in the public administration, in information/communication and other services. Over all the business sectors in which graduates are employed or work do not differ too much. Comparing the progress of income and wages, the graduates from 2007/08 and 2008/09 have a weaker increase of the average annual income from 17,000 EUR to 20,000 EUR. The cohort 2010/11 earned 25,000 EUR in average, but only one year after they graduated.

Figure 2: Business sectors one year after graduation (Walch, Heil and Oberhauser 2014)



A comparison of the performance of political science graduates with diploma graduates 2009/10 across all programmes at the University of Innsbruck shows that the progress of integration into the labour market is very similar. After three years, about 65 % had an employment and the rates of self-employment and unemployment are the same. However, the income and wages after graduation increased faster and higher. In 2012, the average income was about 31,000 EUR.

3.2 Graduates from other universities

The University of Vienna carried out similar studies for their graduates. In cooperation with UNIPORT and Statistics Austria, they examined the entry into professional life of 1091 political science graduates from 2003 to 2014.¹ In contrast to the Innsbruck model, the University of Vienna decided to analyse the former students not in cohorts but as a whole. The results are similar to the ones at the University of Innsbruck. The occupational status “employed” after three years seems to be higher in Vienna (over 80 per cent). The most important business sector is the public administration, where 17 per cent find employment one year after graduation, followed by the sector of representation of interests and associations (11 per cent) and education (10 per cent). Graduates from the University of Vienna also have a higher monthly income of 2,500 EUR three years after graduation. Notably, career perspectives for political science graduates are more favourable in Vienna, as the capital provides opportunities in ministries, NGOs or other public bodies.

As mentioned before, the analysis of social security data has its limitations. Hence, it is not possible to draw conclusions from the data concerning differences between academic or non-academic employment, political or non-political jobs or political agency in general. For these dimensions, we conducted the case study in the following chapter.

4. Case Study: Graduates from University of Innsbruck

To test these dimensions of relevance among recent graduates, we conducted interviews with a group of graduates from the Department of Political Science at the University of Innsbruck. We selected them based on two criteria: Firstly, they have all completed the “Diplomstudium” Politikwissenschaft following the same curriculum (*Studienplan für das Diplomstudium der Studienrichtung Politikwissenschaft 2001*). They had been exposed to the same teaching and learning contents, but

also had faced the same decisions and challenges during their studies. Secondly, their graduation dates back five years or more, so we can assume they have gained some experience in the labour market. Although curricula have since been transformed into the Bologna system, political science graduates still enter the job market with similar skills and competences.

At this point, we would like to highlight again the pilot study nature of this paper. We deliberately chose respondents whose graduation dates back five years or more so that we can also show long-term developments. A third of our respondents graduated in 2010 and therefore belong to the cohort we also examine using the Graduate Monitoring data. We are aware that the dataset used is small, but as a pilot study, the paper can propose ideas for further in-depth research. Further research may include graduates of MA programmes, who to this date constitute too small a number to be properly analysed. Research design and findings are consistent with Heinrich et al.’s (2008) graduate survey at the University of Vienna.

We selected our participants by reviewing lists of graduates and selected a number of participants that we knew personally in order to increase the number of respondents. Due to time constraints, we conducted semi-structured interviews by e-mail. We are aware of reliability issues using this method, but given our well-informed and homogenous respondents (Meho 2006), we are confident to have produced data of adequate quality. We conducted 29 interviews with 20 male and 9 female graduates (the gender imbalance occurred due to selection procedures but is not representative for political science graduates) who have completed their degree programme between 2004 and 2012. Half the respondents have completed only a political science degree, while 14 have completed at least one additional programme. These include economics, psychology, master programmes specialising in subfields of political science, and a PhD degree in political science (five respondents).

The participants stated their exact job titles summarized in table 2. Six of the graduates are employed in the academic sector, while 23 work outside of academia. Only two of the respondents have actually become politicians, but more of them work in the greater field of politics. We have five respondents who work as press officers or legislative assistants in a political context (i.e. for a political party or an institutional body), one respondent who is with the European Civil Service and two respondents who lead projects in an NGO. Summarizing, 16 of the 29 respondents work in the field of political science or politics in an extended sense.

¹ <https://www.qs.univie.ac.at/analysen/absolventinnen-tracking/>

Table 2: Respondents' job statuses

Businesssector (see figure 2)		Job category	
Scientific or technical institutions	6	Scientists (at a university)	3
		Scientists (at another institution)	3
		University personnel (non-scientific)	5
Public administration	11	Legislative assistants	2
		Public service	2
		Politicians	2
Information and communication	7	Press officers	5
		Journalists	2
Other	4	Other	4
None	1	None	1

4.1 Professional dimension

Nine respondents perceive themselves as political scientists in their everyday work. The respondents seemed to interpret this definition rather narrowly (other than on the civic dimension) and emphasized the science and research nature of their work. Those who work in or on the edge of the political process do not perceive themselves as political scientists.

We asked the respondents to name the relevance of specific skills acquired during the graduate programme, including the work-related relevance of contents and concepts, of methods, of networks, and of soft skills. Table 3 shows the respondents' replies by types of acquired skills.

Table 3: Work-related skills acquired through the graduate programme

	Substantive skills	Generic skills
Contents and concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding political systems • Understanding power structures • Classification of political discourses • Understanding contexts and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political communication
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific research methods • Research in different contexts • Employment of research methods • Producing statistical data • Interpreting statistical data 	
Networks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networks were classified as both "useful" or "not relevant" by the respondents.
Soft skills		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self confidence • Analytical skills • Debating techniques • Presentation skills • Relation to practice (Internships)

Graduates assign a high-level relevance to the *concepts and contents* acquired. Some state that they employ specific contents from specific subjects because they are working in this very area:

“The things I have learned about the internal processes in European and international politics are of great relevance for my everyday work.”

EU officer, male

Other summarize that what they have taken away from the programme is a general understanding of contexts, decision-making systems and power relations with respect to their work area.

“Knowledge about processes in practical politics as well as the basics of our political system helps me to make informed decisions.”

City councillor, female

Regarding the *methods training* in the graduate programme, graduates provide mixed responses. Half the respondents state that the methods training they received was insufficient and is not relevant to their everyday work at all. Not a single respondent states that he or she can actively employ the research methods acquired during the political science programme; however, a number of respondents report a “second-level competence” in research methods, meaning that they are able to interpret and understand results presented to them.

“Researching specific contents and assessing their quality is very relevant to me; other than that, no methods skills were conveyed.”

Public servant (financial sector), male

Network building does not seem to play a crucial role for political science graduates. Only a third of the respondents assign a high relevance to network building. This applies particularly to graduates working in the media and public relations sector.

Soft skills, finally, seem to have been much more relevant than their place in the curriculum might have suggested. Almost all of the respondents name presentation techniques, discussion and argumentation skills or teamwork as soft skills relevant to their work.

“Preparing presentations (alone or in groups) is a large part of my work – therefore I find the skills acquired during the programme very helpful and can use them every day.”

Communications manager, female

Internships receive extra attention by many respondents. They state that it was important for them to gain their first working experience in a field relevant to their studies as well as having built relations that helped them in finding a job.

“In my view, internships are one of the most important parts of the programme. The mandatory internship helps many people make their first steps in job life, and many return to where they completed their internship. Personally, I would even extend the importance of internships in the programme.”

Head of communications division, male

No difference exists between graduates working in academia and those working outside academia concerning the skills they could take away from the programme.

4.2 Civic dimension

Twenty-one respondents perceive themselves as political scientists in their daily life, outside of their work. Many of them state that discussing and analysing politics is part of their daily life, and they do perceive the job title “political scientist” as something they have gained with their degree.

“I perceive myself as a political scientist because I chose the programme out of general interest and not for job training reasons.”

Scientist, female

“Politics has become more than a job for me.”

Press officer, male

Those who do not perceive themselves as political scientists state that their personal lives have little or no connection to politics or political science and they have no reasons to use “political scientist” as self-description. All of them work in fields remote from the political science discipline and, in addition, state that political scientist would not be an accurate job description for them.

The political science degree was also useful for many of the respondents’ everyday life skills. Many of them state that they can still draw on the general knowledge and analytical skills acquired during their studies, although some light-heartedly question the relevance of these learned facts.

“I have gained a lot of knowledge that I can brag with on an evening with friends.”

Legislative assistant, male

Despite some criticism, 24 of the respondents (82 per cent) would choose the programme again. Most of the respondents state that they continue to be unbrokenly interested in the subject, and would enjoy the opportunity to acquire more and new knowledge again. Many who have not done so previously, however, would choose a second programme to go with the political science degree. Those who would not choose the programme again list the low chances of employability and the new curriculum as reasons.

“Studying political science has like no other activity given me the opportunity to independently work on contents and ideas that would have interested me anyway. However, I am not sure whether this is still possible today under the Bologna regime.”

Press officer, male

Finally, we sought to measure political agency by asking respondents whether the political science degree has made them a more political person. Responses were mixed: 17 respondents agreed and state that the programme has helped them question their beliefs and become less dogmatic. Of those disagreeing, many say that they have been political people before. Only one respondent states that he perceives himself as a political outsider and has no desire to become a political person.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

From the findings from the Graduate Monitoring and from our exploratory study conducted at the University of Innsbruck, we conclude that political science graduates do well on the societal dimension.

On the civic dimension concerning their individual benefits, students seem to be satisfied with their choice of the degree programme. A great number of graduates state that they would choose the programme again and all of them have taken away at least some general knowledge and an understanding of political processes from the programme. On a personal level, graduates perceive themselves as political scientists at a much higher rate than they do in their professional life. The programme highly contributes to their understanding of political systems and processes. The fact that two thirds of the graduates work in fields close to politics (or political science) shows that the programme also contributes to the political agency of its students.

On the professional dimension of relevance, graduates seem to be less satisfied. Firstly, income expectations are low. Many political science graduates start working in areas that do not pay too well (PR and media, NGOs...) and often only work part time jobs.

The unemployment rate within the first two years after graduation is high. Secondly, expectations about their future work seem to differ greatly from what students experience during the programme. Many respondents state that they had to acquire additional skills after completing the programme before they felt ready for the work they wanted to do. They especially felt a lack in methodological training and would have profited from more profound specializations in core areas. Graduates working in scientific institutions feel better equipped for their careers (see also Heinrich et.al. 2008).

As stated before, our study is a small-n pilot study to explore the relevance dimensions among recent graduates. Departments should regularly conduct such surveys to track their graduates' progress and find out about the demands and challenges for political science graduates in a rapidly changing labour market.

The issues of overcoming these expectation gaps and preparing students for a career outside academia have already been addressed at various institutions. In its handbook “Careers and the Study of Political Science”, which it has published six times since 1974, the American Political Science Association (2003) advises students on how to choose a career and to employ the skills gained in their political science studies. The handbook highlights all possible areas of work for political science graduates, including the federal and state governments, non-profits, journalism, campaigns, or academic careers. For every career area, the handbook lists the skills from a political science major that may be useful, as well as specific advice in how to apply for and enter these careers.

To highlight an example from Europe, the department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg introduced an elective course called “The professional political scientist”, worth 15 ECTS credits (Broms/de Fine Licht 2017). In response to the debate about the meaning and purpose of higher education, the department decided to develop a “more practice-based and skill-building course” for their curriculum. The course consists of three parts, “Working in the public service”, “Writing and communication in working life” and “Introduction to project management”, mixing theoretical inputs with a large portion of practical exercises, such as working under time pressure or popular writing. Practitioners who work outside academia, but do have a political science background teach all courses. The course has been running for two years and feedback from students as well as practitioners is more than positive, although the period is yet too short to measure actual effects on students' career chances.

The American Political Science Association (2003) states that “one of APSA's most important functions is the identification of career opportunities for political science students.” Career opportunities naturally include

academic as well as non-academic careers. We would therefore like to conclude with the recommendation that Austrian political science departments in cooperation with the Austrian Political Science Association take a close look at the approaches other institutions choose, and take additional measures to fit both the challenges of academic as well as professional careers (see also König 2016, p.27). Regularly surveying recent graduates of BA and MA programmes will give Austrian institutions an insight into students' career paths as political science graduates, their expectations and perspectives. These results will allow to develop curricula and provide additional opportunities for scholars and teachers to advance their teaching skills to help students acquire valuable skills and knowledge they can use in whatever area they will be working in.

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Authors

Sabine Gatt is a lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Universität Innsbruck. From 2014 – 2018 she was research fellow at the department. Her research focuses on democratic theory, citizenship, migration and gender studies.

Lore Hayek is a post-doc researcher at the Department of Political Science, Universität Innsbruck. Her research interests include electoral campaigns and political advertising.

Christian Huemer is a political science graduate and the coordinator of quality assurance in teaching at the Universität Innsbruck.

