Political Science in the Digital Age - Australia

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Enhancing knowledge of governance in Australia and globally

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Australia

Population: **24.5 million**

Federal system (six states, two territories)

43 universities (40 public, 2 international, 1 private)

1,457,209 total students (2016)

380,800 (26%) Management & commerce

312,569 (21%) Society & culture

64,507 total staff (FTE) (2015)

29,555 teaching (including teaching & research):

3,306 (5.1%) Management & commerce

5,985 (9.2%) Society & culture.

Cth Dept of Education & Training

Political science

About 70 years old, emerging after 1945:
36 staff in 1956, 57 in 1961, 275 in 1977,
400 staff in 26 universities in 2011.
36 Bachelor's degree programs;
21 Master's degree programs (2016)

Research:
Australian Research Council
National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP)

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Number of research grants:										
1606	**Political Sci**	15	21	29	26	17	20	8	16	152
1605	**Policy & Admin**	18	13	13	19	16	15	14	7	115
	Total	33	34	42	45	33	35	22	23	267
	All Grants	1,678	1,711	1,552	1,421	1,268	1,341	1,023	854	10,848
		2.0%	**2.0%**	**2.7%**	**3.2%**	**2.6%**	**2.6%**	**2.2%**	**2.7%**	**2.5%**
	(Success rate)	21.0%	21.4%	24.3%	23.8%	17.5%	21.3%	14.9%	20.7%	
Value of research grants ($AUD million):										
1606	**Political Sci**	$7.59	$7.53	$8.91	$11.09	$3.48				
1605	**Policy & Admin**	$6.74	$4.28	$3.94	$6.47	$2.76				
	Total	$14.32	$11.81	$12.86	$17.56	$6.24				
	All Grants	$954.39	$735.97	$705.10	$1,018.02	$354.00				
		1.5%	**1.6%**	**1.8%**	**1.7%**	**1.8%**				

Political Science in Australia 2011: Grants and Staffing
Patrick Weller & Paula Cowan (2012)
Australian Journal of Political Science Vol 47(2): 295-309

Universities (27)	No. staff (FTE)	AustralianP ol. Sci.	Compar-ativ e Pol. Sci.	Political Theory	Internat Political Economy	Internat relations	Other
ANU	51	2	15	6	4	16	8
U. of Qld	42	15	1	1	3	18	8
Griffith U.	33	11	11	8	5	18	8
U. of Sydney	30	5	8	2	1	7	6
Flinders U.	23	9	5	2	1	5	1
Deakin U.	21	8	5	2	3	12	3
U. of Melb.	20	5	4	4	2	2	4
U. of Adelaide	18	3	2	1	0	5	5
U. of Tas.	18	2	3	0	0	3	10
La Trobe U.	16	4	3	4	0	5	5
Monash U.	15	4	4	5	0	7	0
U. of NSW	15	0	0	4	2	9	0
Macquarie U.	13	2	4	3	1	3	0
Murdoch U.	13	3	7	2	2	5	5
University of WA	12	3	0	2	3	4	2
U. of Canberra	10	3	1	1	0	0	5
16 Universities 10+	350	79	73	47	27	119	70
11 Universities <10	52	12	7	9	7	19	13
	402	**91**	**80**	**56**	**34**	**138**	**83**
		23%	20%	14%	8%	34%	21%

The sub-disciplines
Comparative; electoral; gender; Indigenous; international relations; political theory; public administration; public policy; Australian politics

Has 'political science in Australia (and internationally) become over-specialised and fragmented'?

> **'Situating the sub-disciplines in the *Australian Journal of Political Science'***
> Marian Simms, *Australian Journal of Political Science* 50(4), 2015

Focus on **electoral politics** 'highly appropriate for a country that has maintained, by international standards, a complex set of electoral arrangements'; 'between the state and federal government, and by the level of government... coupled with frequent elections and compulsory voting, electoral participation in Australia is easily higher than that of any other advanced democracy.'

> Ian McAllister (2015). **'Electoral politics in the *Australian Journal of Political Science*: A review**' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 50(4): 639–652

Michele Ferguson & Brian Head (2014). **The Value and Character of Political Science: Report on the Members' Survey**. Australian Political Studies Association. http://www.auspsa.org.au/sites/ default/files/apsa_survey_results_reportfinal.pdf

	Freq.	Percent
Student	31	16.2
Early–career academic	60	31.3
Established academic	83	43.2
Other (e.g. retired; public sector; private sector)	18	9.4
Total responding to this question	192	100.0

Only 20% saw political science as '**self-standing**'
80% agreed with a proposition that political science is 'inherently inter-dependent with other knowledge disciplines' e.g.
     1) Sociology, economics, history and law
     2) Psychology, philosophy and anthropology
     3) Media and communications, geography, environment, health and statistics
                         (Head 2017)

Brian Head (2017) **Assessing the value of political science in the era of relevance and impact**, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 52(4): 599-614

'… public understanding and support for expertise and professional scholarship have been challenged by recent waves of antielitist sentiment, expressed through populist advocacy groups and media channels. Expertise has especially been under attack in disciplines not directly connected to the utilitarian problem-solving of the technological and bio-medical sciences.'
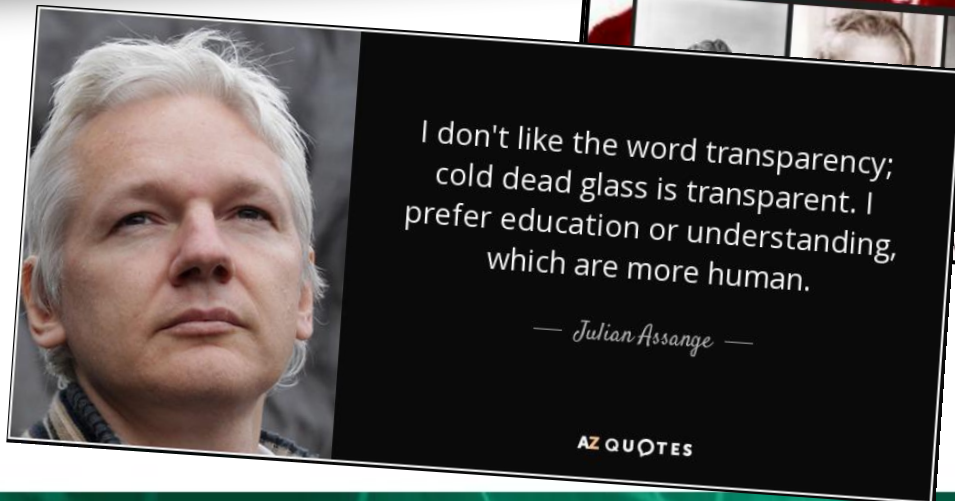
'… paradoxically, this same increase in the speed and volume of communications has posed new problems for evidence-informed exchange. The values of detached, reasoned and systematic inquiry have been made problematic in a media-saturated environment, where large flows of opinion and information tend to drown out the voices of expertise. Thus, as Keane (2013) argues, the 'democratisation' of knowledge is double-edged. On the one hand, it entails a world where anyone can publish their opinions online, where self-contained 'echo-chambers' of ideological opinion can reinforce stereotypes, and where media consumers can be manipulated from multiple sources.'

Keane, John. 2013. *Democracy and Media Decadence*, Cambridge University Press

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Challenges to political science as a discipline (2014 survey responses):

1. **Relevance for students**: that is, the need to attract and retain students and improve their graduate attributes and skills

2. Need to raise awareness of the importance, value and relevance of the discipline in the face of **a politically cynical and disengaged public**

3. The need to improve engagement and communication strategies with other academic disciplines and also with non-academics

4. Trade-off between **academic autonomy and external funding support**: that is, the need to access funding while retaining ability to directly critique powerful stakeholders, … in a context where funding is seen as increasingly politicized

5. **Methodology**: the need for a rigorous intellectual base which respects quantitative, qualitative and theoretical approaches, and the need for an increase in formal training in research design and methods

6. The need to strike a balance between maintaining a disciplinary foundation for the field, and the need to work in a in an era of rapid political, social and technological change. **trans-disciplinary way**

The Digital Age: Positives and Negatives for *Politics and Public Policy*

The Digital Age: Positives and Negatives for *Politics and Public Policy*

	+ve	-ve
Political communication	Ease of communication	Overload
Accountability & integrity	Transparency	Decline of professional media
Evidence-based policy	Data	Post-truth
Participation	Information & engagement	Decline of attention spans, 'spin' controls
Empowerment	'Critical' citizenship	'Impossible' citizenship (disrespect, expectations)

The Digital Age: Positives and Negatives for *Political Science Learning*

	+ve	-ve
Employment	Performance (market) driven change	Competitiveness + growing self-admin load
Structure	Interdisciplinarity & theory	Fields collapsing? (govt & international relations)
Methods	Flexible / blended learning	Superficiality (inadequate direct contact)
Content	Information, case learning, access to the best… no excuses	Deteriorating quality / depth (declining attention spans, inability to discriminate)
Integrity	Tools to detect & manage	Plagiarism / poor effort

The Digital Age: Positives and Negatives for *Research*

	+ve	**-ve**
Methods	Ease of data collection (e.g. surveys)	Reduced attention spans; quality; depth
Participation	Big 'automatic' data / social media	World is over-surveyed, over-measured
Outlets	Proliferation and speed	Proliferation and quality
Reach / impact	Information ever more accessible	No time for it to be read / heard / implemented
Content	Internationalisation / 'shiny things'	Declining localism, historicism, contextualisation

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