

# Political Economy and Society Curriculum Working Group

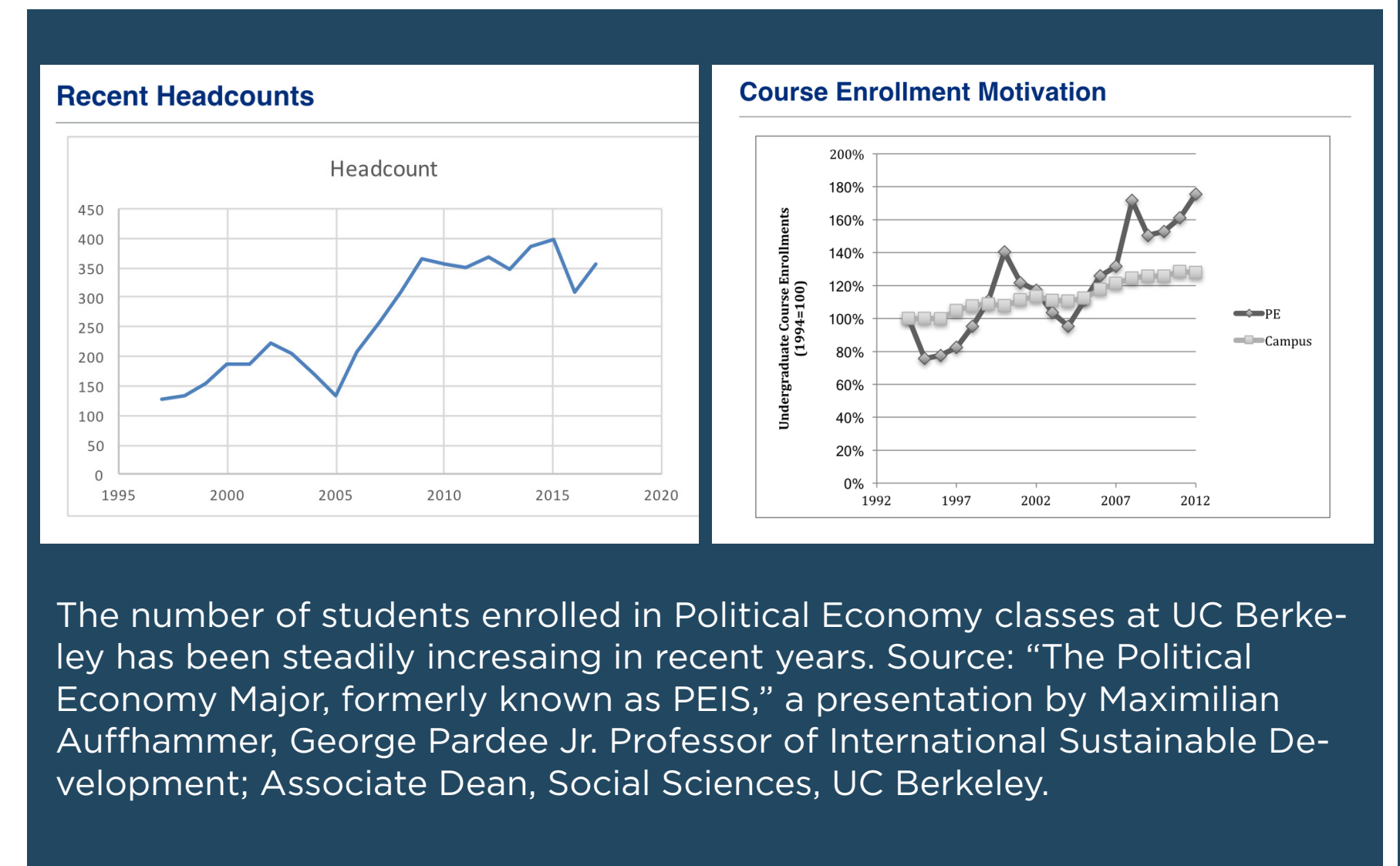


With approximately 450 students per year, the field of Political Economy (POLECON)—focused on the relationship between politics and economics in modern societies—is the largest of the interdisciplinary majors within UC Berkeley’s International and Area Studies Teaching Program (IASTP). This discipline has served several generations of Cal students exceptionally well, and has grown accordingly, while helping fill in some of the campus’s unsatisfied demand for economics training.

Still, the POLECON major is facing more growth than it can handle, and while the curriculum of the major is generally strong, it allows students to choose their own concentrations, which has led to some interesting patterns. Increasingly students want to use their concentrations to study inequality, poverty, new technologies, and the relationship between national wealth and economic development (or the lack thereof).

This Matrix Prospecting Team brings together faculty and graduate students from a range of departments and professional schools to address the intellectual and pedagogical challenges of bringing the Political Economy program into its next era. After conducting an analysis of curricula at UC Berkeley and peer institutions, the team—led by Alan Karras, Associate Director of the International and Area Studies Program—will draft recommendations for improvements to the existing major and related programs.

Among the challenges facing this program: courses for undergraduates are taken across the College of Letters and Sciences, especially in the Social Sciences Division, as well as the professional schools (e.g the Goldman School of Public Policy, the School of Public Health, the College of Natural Resources, and the Haas School of Business).



The number of students enrolled in Political Economy classes at UC Berkeley has been steadily increasing in recent years. Source: “The Political Economy Major, formerly known as PEIS,” a presentation by Maximilian Auffhammer, George Pardee Jr. Professor of International Sustainable Development; Associate Dean, Social Sciences, UC Berkeley.

“The faculty from these programs are not in regular conversation with each other,” the team’s leaders explained in their proposal. “As a result, there has been no coordinated curriculum planning, or even discussions about what the matrix ought actually to look like. This prospecting team thus aims to convene an interdisciplinary group of faculty, scholars, and graduate students to consider the opportunities and challenges that would be involved in coordinating a possibly significantly expanded major in Political Economy.”

Using Social Science Matrix as a hub, leaders from across campus will re-shape the Political Economy program to ensure it can accommodate the needs of a new generation of students. “It will not necessarily be a curriculum planning effort; rather, it will focus on ways to more closely coordinate and align courses from across the campus so that they work for multiple purposes,” the researchers explained. “More generally, we will seek to foster dialogue across all the disciplines and campus units that have (and/or ought to have) a stake in Political Economy.”

## RESEARCH GOALS

- Engage a cross-disciplinary, multi-rank team to evaluate the current state of the Political Economy major at UC Berkeley
- Draft recommendations to better integrate teaching on the subject of Political Economy and related topics across the Berkeley campus.

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