

earnings differences. The fourth includes state of employment and 69 dummy variables for hours worked per week, to examine the impact of where and how much one works. The fifth model repeats the fourth, but limited to people without graduate degrees.

I present the original regression analyses in the online appendix, but show only the percentage differences by major in the tables. In each table, I arrange the majors in order of their success on that measure and present differences from comparable political science majors.

almost evenly between master’s and professional degrees (table 2). The remainder of the table shows differences from political science in probabilities of each degree after a full set of controls (also see appendix tables 2 and 3). Only biology, philosophy, and physics majors are more likely to obtain graduate degrees, with the difference primarily in doctorates. Political science majors stand out for professional degrees: only biology majors are more likely to earn them, and only history majors are within 10 percentage points as likely as comparable political science majors to do so. One-fifth of political science graduates complete law school.

Only 46% of political science majors stopped with a bachelor’s degree; 5.5% earned doctorates, and the remaining 49% were split almost evenly between master’s and professional degrees (table 2).

Limitations

Students with different interests and abilities choose different majors, and ability has a substantial impact on earnings (Arcidiacono 2004; Webber 2014, 2015) and, presumably, educational attainment. Students in the highest-paying majors have the highest mean SAT-math scores (Altonji, Blom, and Meghir 2012), and math ability and classes have important impacts on earnings (Rendall and Rendall 2013). Because ACS data do not include any measures of ability, this research cannot test the possibility that differences in abilities among people choosing different majors explain all the differences in unemployment, educational attainment, and earnings. Political science graduates may not have earned more if they had majored in computer science, nor less if they had chosen English.

FINDINGS

Unemployment

Unemployment rates are high for those in their 20s, but substantially lower for college graduates than for the less-educated (4.9% versus 11.7% in 2009–2014). Political science majors’ unemployment rate of 6.6% was nearly the highest among college graduates, however (table 1), and a logit model controlling for individual characteristics did not substantially alter that picture (also see appendix table 1). The first column shows unemployment rates; the rate of 2.8% for health science majors, for instance, is 3.8 percentage points lower than for political science majors. The second column shows the differences in unemployment rates (relative to political science) after controlling for education, age, race/ethnicity, gender, relationship status, year, and state; this difference remained at 3.5 points. Graduates of half the majors—including business, social work, psychology, criminal justice, economics, sociology, and communications—were 1 to 3 percentage points less likely to be unemployed than comparable political science majors. No major had a significantly higher unemployment rate than political science.

Educational Attainment

This possible difficulty in starting a career may contribute to political science majors’ decisions to pursue further education. Only 46% of political science majors stopped with a bachelor’s degree; 5.5% earned doctorates, and the remaining 49% were split

Table 4
Mean and Median Salaries by Major, 2009–14

| | Mean | Median | Sample Size |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Economics | \$116,271 | 85,000 | 42,026 |
| Biology | 107,541 | 75,000 | 95,349 |
| Engineering | 105,182 | 93,000 | 170,818 |
| Physical Sciences | 102,605 | 80,000 | 61,205 |
| Political Science | 99,651 | 75,000 | 53,889 |
| Mathematics | 98,892 | 80,000 | 28,135 |
| Computer Science | 88,695 | 80,000 | 64,061 |
| History | 88,302 | 62,000 | 42,333 |
| Business | 84,791 | 65,000 | 432,755 |
| Total | 81,450 | 62,000 | 1,889,755 |
| Philosophy & Religion | 81,347 | 57,000 | 13,192 |
| Health Science | 79,344 | 69,000 | 132,177 |
| Architecture | 76,554 | 65,000 | 15,383 |
| Interdisciplinary Studies | 74,778 | 55,000 | 14,914 |
| English | 74,677 | 56,000 | 55,010 |
| Other Social Sciences | 74,378 | 60,000 | 23,758 |
| Languages | 73,175 | 58,000 | 17,033 |
| Communications | 69,761 | 55,000 | 72,876 |
| Liberal Arts & Humanities | 69,581 | 53,000 | 24,654 |
| Environment | 69,553 | 58,000 | 13,669 |
| Psychology | 69,368 | 55,000 | 82,936 |
| Sociology | 66,049 | 52,000 | 29,561 |
| Agriculture | 65,954 | 50,000 | 27,768 |
| Criminal Justice | 64,839 | 55,000 | 35,226 |
| Physical Fitness | 59,856 | 50,000 | 15,412 |
| Fine Arts | 57,380 | 46,000 | 65,878 |
| Education | 55,790 | 50,000 | 196,957 |
| Social Work | 52,347 | 45,000 | 20,857 |
| Theology | 50,725 | 41,000 | 11,984 |