

Ideal Trajectory for SNaPP Lab Members

Every student will have a slightly different experience in the lab based on the nature of his or her interests, skills, and the state of Prof. Settle's active research projects. However, the goal is to develop a multi-faceted experience designed around your particular research ideas that results in a capstone independent research project or portfolio.

By the end of your sophomore year:

In your first year in the lab, you will complete boot camp while immersing yourself in a team project and developing some preliminary ideas for your own independent project. You are invited to sit in on the boot camp instruction in subsequent years, but you cannot receive credit for doing so unless you propose a substantially new research focus from the previous year.

By the end of your sophomore year, you should narrow your research interests down to one-three specific research questions. This likely means that you have taken several core courses in a relevant department (government, economics, psychology, neuroscience, linguistics or computer science), as well as at least one upper-division elective related to your research interests. You hopefully have found ways to integrate your research interests with assignments in your classes.

You should have completed GOVT 301 (or a similar research design course) by the end of your first year in the lab, ideally in the spring of your freshman year but definitely by the spring of your sophomore year. You should have also taken at least two other courses related to research methods or data analysis. (See the Recommended Courses handout for suggestions). By the spring semester of your sophomore year, you should have some sense for whether you are most interested in doing experimental studies in the lab or field, social media analysis requiring basic computer science skills, or an econometrics-oriented approach to survey or aggregate data.

Ideally, in the summer after your first or second year (or both!) you would be able to spend at least five weeks on campus, funded through the Charles Center. Some students may also have the opportunity to travel to the Political Networks Conference or other training opportunities.

By the end of your senior year:

The main goal of your junior year is to lay the groundwork for a meaningful capstone research experience. You want to have taken enough coursework (including methods courses), and done enough independent reading, to identify an independent research project that you can feasibly complete. Ideally, you will be preparing to conduct an honors thesis. By December of your junior year, you should have two-three research questions and some ideas about your research design. You will submit your proposal in early March to (hopefully) receive funding from the Charles Center, and you can be on campus for at least five weeks in the summer working on your project.

If another capstone experience besides an honors thesis is a better fit for you, you should talk with Prof. Settle in the spring of your junior year to discuss your plans.

The final year should be your capstone experience in the lab. You are working on a thesis or other independent or team project that you can submit to the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago in April. Especially sophisticated projects may be suitable to submit as co-authored publications with Prof. Settle. You also take on a leadership role in the lab to help mentor younger students, or you may be working at the SSMRC. Finally, you could also be completing an internship that puts your data analysis skills to use.