

UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT
IN POLITICAL SCIENCE
2010-2011, 2012-2013, 2013-2014

March 4, 2016

Foreword

Enclosed are findings on enrollment trends for undergraduate students in political science from the 2013-2014 APSA Departmental Survey. These indicate that enrollments in political science courses vary by department type. Overall enrollments are largely unchanged or in slight decline since 2011-2012. These findings are consistent with [previous APSA reports](#) and with data (such as [data from the National Center for Education Statistics](#)) that indicate a recent downturn in the number of students with undergraduate degrees in political science.

As institutions of higher education increasingly tie department budgets to enrollment numbers, departments make decisions about their future hiring and curriculum around enrollments. Illustrating the need for departments to better understand national trends in political science enrollments, [Stanford University made news](#) for restructuring their undergraduate curriculum to reflect current trends in learning and in response to enrollments trends. For these reasons, accurate data on the national trends in enrollments is critical for departments of all types and sizes.

About the Data

This report is based on responses to questions regarding undergraduate enrollment (seats filled) from the 2013-2014 APSA Departmental Survey, the 2012-2013 APSA Departmental Survey, and the 2011-2012 APSA Departmental Survey. In 2013-2014 the Departmental Survey was administered to the chairs of 1033 departments of political science and public administration at 4-year colleges and universities in the United States and in 2012-2013 it was administered to 1212 departments. The response rate was 24.6% (n = 254) for all programs. Tables in this report include data for enrollments in public and private universities, separated out to compare departments by the highest degree in political science or government that is offered: Bachelor's degrees (BA), Master's degrees (MA), and doctoral degrees (PhD). 'BA combined' refers to departments that offer a combined Social Science degree or offer a Bachelor's degree in Political Science or Government combined with another discipline such as History. Response rates vary between categories of departments, and these are shown at the degree granting and public/private level in Table 3.

In 2013-2014 we collected the data as whole number values and this is displayed in Table 1, and we look forward to tracking longitudinal trends in years going forward. In order to provide comparable data with the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 enrollment reports, Figures 1-3 use the 13-14 data recoded into the same ranges used for collecting data in those years. The data illustrated in Figures 1-3 provide a series of sequential snapshots. They do not track individual department enrollments year on year, but they do display what proportion of reporting departments have overall enrollments in certain size categories.

We encourage you to read the report carefully, and we welcome your questions, suggestions, and ideas. Please contact us with any specific questions about the findings. You can find more reports and materials on the American Political Science Association website, www.apsanet.org. You can also contact us at surveys@apsanet.org, or by calling the main APSA office at 202-483-2512.

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Key Findings

Overall Enrollment (Figures 1 – 3)

- Overall enrollments at public institutions are higher than at private colleges and universities.
- Enrollments for both public and private PhD-granting programs appear to be rising or holding steady, with particular growth among public PhD-granting institutions.
- MA-granting institutions have seen an overall decline in enrollments. Most notably, fewer private MA-granting institutions report enrollments of more than 750 students in 2013-2014. Among private MA-granting departments, the proportion reporting fewer than 200 enrollments decreased, but those reporting between 200 and 500 enrollments increased
 - Response rates were lowest among private MA-granting programs and private programs combining Political Science with one or more field, adding some uncertainty to the data presented on those programs (Table 3).
- BA-granting institutions compose the largest sub-group of the APSA Departmental Survey, and data from 2013-14 indicate that enrollments at both public and private departments are in overall decline, though this is more apparent among private BA programs than their public counterparts.
- Programs combining Political Science with another field (including departments of social science) reported an overall decline.
 - This category is the lowest-responding group to the Departmental Survey, and these data represent a relatively small proportion of programs contacted for the survey (Table 3).

Introductory Course Enrollments (Table 2)

- Mean introductory course enrollments at public colleges and universities were the highest in American Politics, with average enrollments as much as double or quadruple the number of enrollments for any other course. Enrollments in introductory American government were also a significantly larger proportion of introductory course enrollments at public institutions when compared to their private counterparts. For instance, average enrollments in introductory American Politics courses for public PhD granting departments represented 32.9% of total introductory enrollments, while only composing 16% of total introductory course enrollments at private PhD granting departments. At public BA programs combining political science and other fields, the mean course enrollment for American Politics (61.5% of enrollments) was greater than enrollments for every other course *combined*.
- Average enrollments in introductory International Relations courses were proportionally the second highest at public and private PhD granting departments. Enrollments in Comparative Politics were more popular at MA- and BA-granting public departments, followed International Relations and Political Theory.
- At private institutions, average enrollments in introductory International Relations and Comparative Politics tended to be a greater proportion of all introductory enrollments when compared to public institutions. Notably, International Relations, Comparative Politics, and Political Theory introductory courses each had higher average enrollments than courses in American Politics at private PhD-granting institutions. Enrollments in American Politics were greater than other courses at BA-granting private institutions (26.1%), but enrollments in other courses were more evenly spread among total enrollments compared to other institutions.

Table 1. Average Undergraduate Enrollments in Political Science Courses by Institution Type

All Departments					
	All	PhD	MA	BA	BA (PoliSci + Other)
n	215	40	36	97	42
Mean	1756	3577	1995	1449	525
Median	841	3205	1624	534	220
Public Departments					
	All	PhD	MA	BA	BA (PoliSci + Other)
n	114	33	31	32	18
Mean	2150	3781	2228	1235	649
Median	1624	3450	2000	1028	550
Private Departments					
	All	PhD	MA	BA	BA (PoliSci + Other)
n	101	7	5	65	24
Mean	1311	2615	545	1554	431
Median	400	2178	300	450	180

Figure 1. Proportion of Departments reporting between <200 and >2000 annual undergraduate enrollments, by highest degree offered in political science

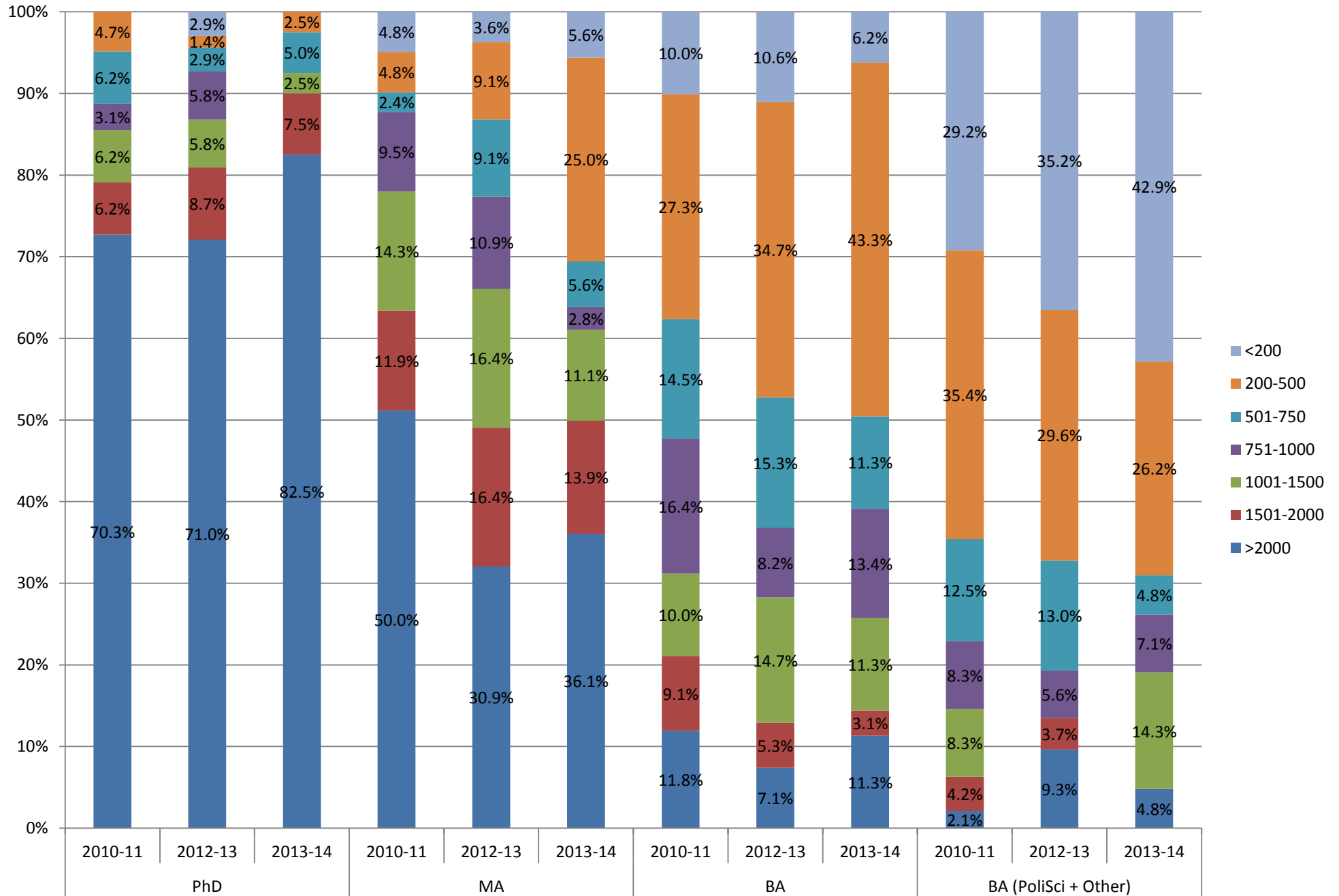


Figure 2. Proportion of public departments reporting between <200 and >2000 annual undergraduate enrollments, by highest degree offered in political science

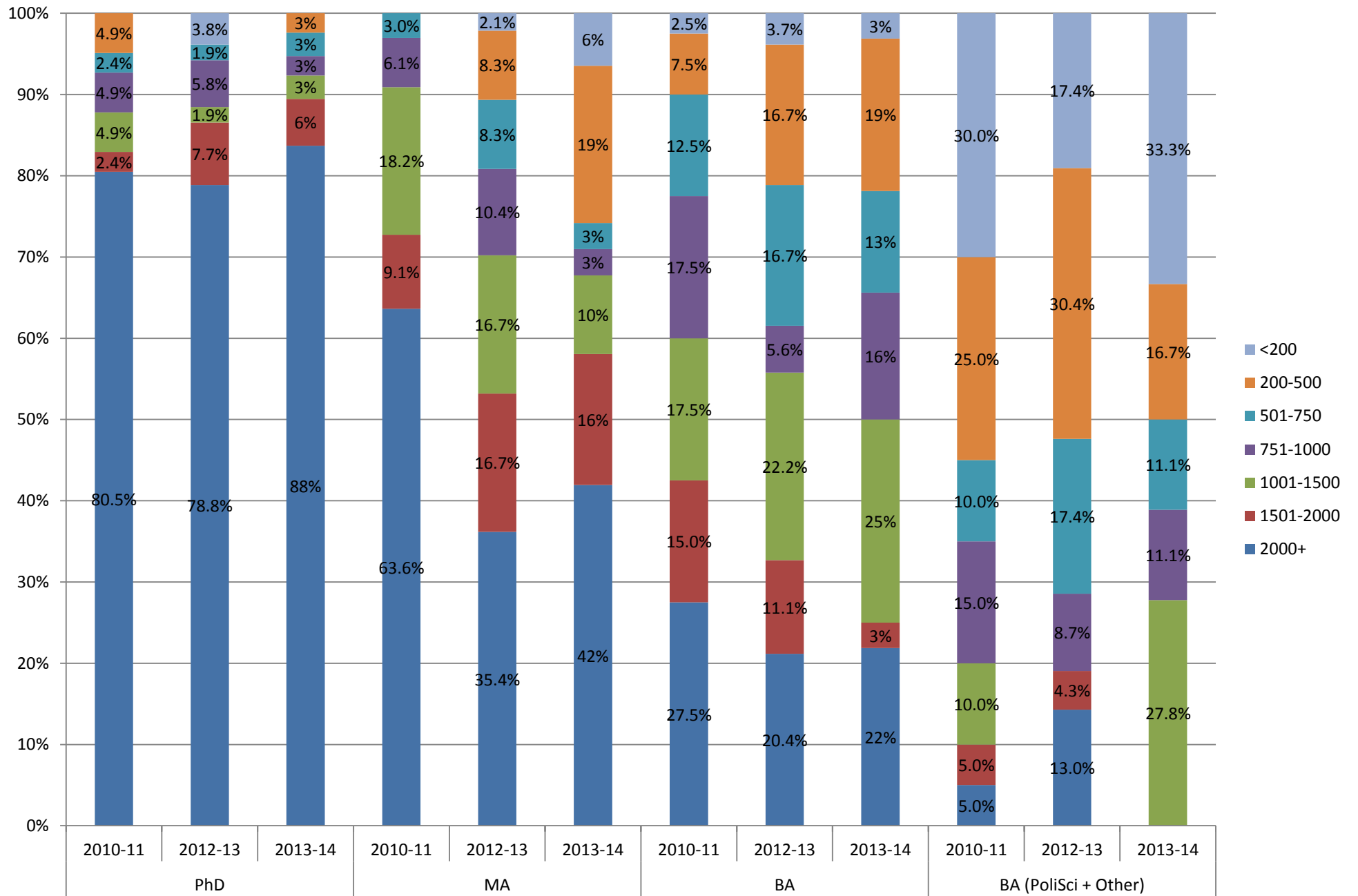


Figure 3. Proportion of private departments reporting between <200 and >2000 annual undergraduate enrollments, by highest degree offered in political science

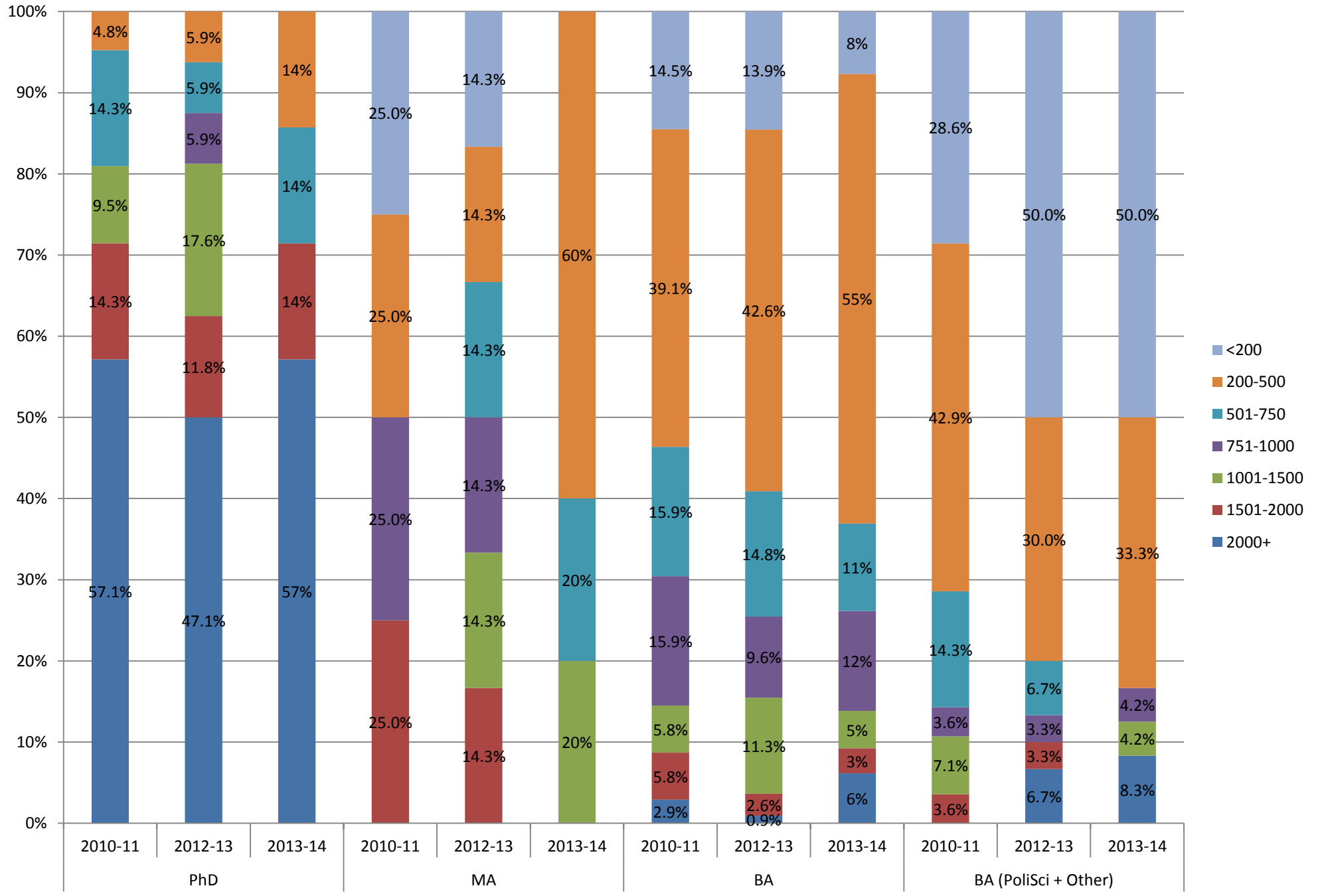


Table 2. Average Undergraduate Enrollment, Introduction Courses in Political Science

	Intro to American Government		Introduction to Comparative Politics		Intro to International Relations		Intro to Political Theory		Intro to Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics		Intro to Research Methods/Statistics		Average Total
	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%	
Public													
PhD	353	32.9%	171	15.9%	247	23.0%	160	14.9%	73	6.8%	69	6.4%	1073
MA	206	37.1%	117	21.1%	81	14.6%	80	14.4%	22	4.0%	49	8.8%	555
BA	112	33.8%	65	19.6%	57	17.2%	32	9.7%	27	8.2%	38	11.5%	331
BA (PoliSci + Other)	209	61.5%	30	8.8%	32	9.4%	21	6.2%	27	7.9%	21	6.2%	340
Private													
PhD	72	16.1%	84	18.8%	124	27.7%	98	21.9%	59	13.2%	11	2.5%	448
MA	48	21.8%	33	15.0%	26	11.8%	44	20.0%	26	11.8%	43	19.5%	220
BA	46	26.1%	31	17.6%	36	20.5%	26	14.8%	18	10.2%	19	10.8%	176
BA (PoliSci + Other)	36	29.0%	17	13.7%	39	31.5%	9	7.3%	11	8.9%	12	9.7%	124
All													
PhD	303	31.3%	156	16.1%	222	23.0%	152	15.7%	71	7.3%	63	6.5%	967
MA	184	36.4%	105	20.8%	72	14.2%	74	14.6%	23	4.5%	48	9.5%	506
BA	68	30.0%	42	18.5%	43	18.9%	28	12.3%	21	9.3%	25	11.0%	227
BA (PoliSci + Other)	114	51.4%	23	10.4%	35	15.8%	15	6.8%	18	8.1%	17	7.7%	222

Table 3. Departmental Survey Response Rates, 2012-13 and 2013-14

Public Departments						
	2012-13			2013-14		
	Respondents	# Recipients	Response Rate	Respondents	# Recipients	Response Rate
PhD	56	88	63.6%	41	79	51.9%
MA	50	134	37.3%	38	105	36.2%
BA	54	145	37.2%	39	123	31.7%
BA (PoliSci + Other)	27	139	19.4%	18	112	16.1%
Total	187	506	37.0%	136	419	32.5%
Private Departments						
	2012-13			2013-14		
	Respondents	# Recipients	Response Rate	Respondents	# Recipients	Response Rate
PhD	19	42	45.2%	11	39	28.2%
MA	8	30	26.7%	5	27	18.5%
BA	116	339	34.2%	76	294	25.9%
BA (PoliSci + Other)	41	295	13.9%	26	247	10.5%
Total	184	706	26.1%	118	607	19.4%
All Departments						
	2012-13			2013-14		
	Respondents	# Recipients	Response Rate	Respondents	# Recipients	Response Rate
PhD	75	130	57.7%	52	119	43.7%
MA	58	164	35.4%	43	132	32.6%
BA	171	484	35.3%	115	420	27.4%
BA (PoliSci + Other)	69	434	15.9%	44	362	12.2%
Total	373	1212	30.8%	254	1033	24.6%