

Handbook for Graduate Students in MA Program in Political Science

The information here is a supplement to that in the Graduate Catalog (available in print and on the UNLV Web site) and in the Graduate Student's Guide (available on the Graduate College's Web site). You are responsible for knowing that information. In case of conflict between this information and information provided by the Graduate College, the latter has precedence. The information here is subject to change.

Program Overview

The Department of Political Science offers a general Master of Arts degree. Students tailor their programs with the assistance of the department's graduate coordinator. Programs are flexible, and students may take advantage of individualized instruction. Advisory committees will approve programs that provide an appropriate degree of specialization in two of the fields of political science with supporting studies in others. Students can pursue graduate education in the areas of comparative politics, international relations, political theory, American politics, public law, and public policy. Students can normally expect to complete the program in from one-and-a-half to two years. The department offers a number of graduate assistantships as well as internship opportunities at the local, state, and federal levels, where students can obtain on-the-job experience. The graduate program in political science is designed to prepare graduate students for doctoral studies, teaching positions at secondary schools and community colleges, or employment by government agencies, research centers, or private industry. Our graduates have gone on to executive positions in national, state, and local governments and to doctoral programs at top schools throughout the country.

Academic Integrity

The Department of Political Science has high expectations of its students, among which are that you adhere to standards of integrity. You are expected to do all of your work, oral and written, honestly. You should be familiar with the statement on the subject in the Graduate Catalog.

One aspect of integrity is providing adequate citations in your written work. The department does not have one required format for citations, although professors may impose such a requirement in their courses. If the professor does not do so, you should use a method specified in a style book (e.g., Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*).

Degree Requirements

You may take classes in four fields of political science: comparative politics, international relations, political theory, American politics, (including public law and public policy).

You must complete a minimum of thirty credit hours under Plan A (thesis option) or thirty-three credit hours under Plan B (comprehensive examination option) in courses designated for graduate study in political science and related disciplines. You must take course work in at least two fields. You must designate two fields as your major fields; in each field you must take at least three courses. Eighteen credits must be taken in graduate seminar work. You may complete a maximum of six graduate credits in related areas outside political science.

You must maintain a minimum B average to remain in good standing. Only those courses in which you receive a grade of B or better may be used for graduate credit. You must take PSC 701 (Research Design and Methodology) among your first twelve credit hours. Other seminars may have prerequisite requirements; for example, PSC 701 must be taken before PSC 729.

Internship credits do not count toward a degree program.

If there is a difference between the degree requirements as stated in the Graduate Catalog when you were admitted and the requirements as stated in the Graduate Catalog when you plan to graduate, either catalog may be used.

Full-time students can normally expect to complete the program in two years.

Among the rules to be found in the Graduate Catalog is that you must be registered in the semester in which you plan to graduate. The Graduate College does not require you to register in the summer unless you plan to graduate in the summer.

Plan A (Thesis Option)

If you select Plan A, you must complete twenty-four credit hours of course work in at least two fields of political science, plus six credits of thesis. Completion of the thesis consists of an oral examination administered by your advisory committee.

Plan B (Comprehensive Examination Option)

If you select Plan B, you must complete thirty-three credit hours in at least two fields of political science, including PSC 795 (Directed Readings in Political Science). After completing the departmental course requirements, you take a comprehensive examination—written and oral—administered by your advisory committee.

Advisor and Advisory Committee

Advisory Committee consisting of three faculty members from the department and one faculty representative of the Graduate College (until students have formed their Advisory Committee, the Graduate Coordinator acts as students' temporary advisor). One of the three departmental members serves as chair and, from that point, as the primary advisor. The chair of the Advisory Committee should be a faculty member from one the student's major fields.

With the Advisory Committee's approval and that of the Graduate Coordinator, students establish a program of study for their remaining credits.

Independent Study

You are allowed to take a maximum of six credits of independent study (PSC 791). To take this course it is essential that you have a subject you want to study in depth that cannot be covered in a seminar being offered that semester. Then you must find a professor willing to instruct you. You should plan to meet with that professor regularly—if possible, weekly—during the semester. The two of you must draw up a schedule of reading and writing assignments and list them on the Graduate Independent Study form, which you should download and print from the department's Web site. You may take an independent study for one, two, or three credits; the amount of work for a three-credit independent study should be the same as that for a graduate seminar (approximately six books read and thirty pages written), with the amount of work for fewer credits reduced proportionately. The professor determines the number and length of writing assignments.

Be aware of the difference between PSC 795 and PSC 796. PSC 795 is a course of directed readings; it is only for those students who are not writing a thesis and who are preparing to take the oral and written examinations. Do not register for PSC 795 if you are writing a thesis or plan to write one as part of your program.

Thesis

If you want to write a thesis, the first step is to decide on the subject. You should do so in consultation with your advisor, the other members of your committee, and perhaps other faculty. The result of this process should be a specific question about politics that you want to answer,

and it should have theoretical significance. You must write a prospectus of three to five pages, outlining the question you will treat, the methods you will use to treat it, the organization of your chapters, and the significance of the study.

It is never too early to begin thinking about a topic for a thesis; but your six credits of thesis are normally the last credits of your program. You are not allowed to register for thesis until you have submitted the following forms to the Graduate College: Appointment of Advisory Committee, Proposed Master's & Specialist Degree Program (parts 1 and 2), and Prospectus Approval.

You must take six credits of PSC 796; you may take more, but only six credits count toward your program. Once you have begun to take PSC 796, you must register for three credits of PSC 796 every semester—summers excluded—until you finish. If you plan to defend the thesis and graduate in the summer, you must take three credits of PSC 796 that summer.

Each member of the advisory committee reads the thesis—chapter-by-chapter, unless the committee members request otherwise—and may require revisions. In writing the thesis, you should follow the Guide to Preparing and Submitting a Thesis or Dissertation (available on the Graduate College's Web site: <http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/>); the department has no formatting or stylistic requirements of its own, but your committee may have such requirements.

Twice a year the Graduate College holds a seminar to explain its requirements for writing a thesis. The department strongly urges you to attend one of those seminars; doing so will likely save you much time in the long run.

The thesis must be unanimously approved by the committee. After the thesis has been approved, an oral defense of the thesis is held. You are responsible for arranging a date and time at which all members of your committee may attend; you are also responsible for arranging a room with one of our administrative assistants.

The committee may require you to make substantive or stylistic revisions, or both, to your thesis even after you have defended it.

When you have successfully defended your thesis, made any necessary further revisions, had those revisions approved by your committee, and submitted final copies to the Graduate College, you are required to give the department one copy of your thesis, bound in black cover.

If you are writing a thesis on a topic that requires primary research in a foreign language, you must have reading competence in that language.

Comprehensive Examination

If you do not write a thesis, you must take a comprehensive examination. The first part of it is written; the second, oral. Approximately four months before the comprehensive exam is given, you submit to the departmental members of the advisory committee a bibliography listing the books and articles that have been covered in course work. Individual committee members may then add more materials to fill the gaps in your studies. The precise definitions of the examination fields are determined by your course work and the bibliographies created by the committee members. The reading list for each field should be approximately twenty-five books or the equivalent in articles. The questions on your exam are based on these materials.

The written part of the exam consists of questions divided by field, submitted by each of the committee members. The number of questions in each field is determined by the committee member in that field. You have four hours to answer the questions in your first major field. The following day you have a total of four hours to answer the questions in your second major field. All committee members grade all essays. The oral part of the exam is normally held four days after the written part; all four committee members must be present. You are responsible for arranging a date and time at which all members of your committee may attend; you are also responsible for arranging a room with one of our administrative assistants. The questions in the oral part of the exam may be based on the questions on the written part and on your answers to them, but the oral questions may go beyond the written questions to cover other material from the bibliography. The oral part normally lasts two hours.

Immediately upon conclusion of the oral part, the committee members decide upon a grade for the written and oral parts taken together. That grade must be B or better for you to pass the examination.

If you fail the examination, the committee drafts written comments on your performance on all essays; these comments are filed with the exam and available to the student. Each failed essay may be retaken once, not sooner than three months after the first attempt; passed essays need not be retaken.

Forms and Deadlines

All of the forms listed below are available on the Graduate College's Web site—except part 2 of the Proposed Master's & Specialist Degree Program form, which is available on the department's Web site.

For an up-to-date list of deadlines, see the Graduate College's Web site.

The following forms must be submitted to the Graduate College before completion of sixteen credits (or by the sixth week of your first semester as an admitted student if you are counting twelve or more credits toward your degree that were completed before you were admitted to the program):

1. Appointment of Advisory Committee
2. Proposed Master's & Specialist Degree Program, part 1
3. Proposed Master's & Specialist Degree Program, part 2
4. Prospectus Approval (if you are writing a thesis)

The Application for Graduation form must be submitted in the semester of graduation according to the deadline specified on the Graduate College's Web site.

Any change in your proposed degree program must be submitted on a Change in Proposed Degree Program form.

The following deadlines apply if you are writing a thesis:

1. Eighth week of the semester of your graduation: submit a draft of the completed thesis to your advisory committee, and to the Graduate College for an initial format check.
2. At least one week before the defense of your thesis: submit the completed thesis to your advisory committee.
3. At least three weeks before the end of instruction: defend your thesis.
4. At least two weeks before the end of instruction: submit final copies of the revised thesis, as well as the Oral Defense Results form, to the Graduate College.

The following deadlines apply if you are not writing a thesis:

1. At least three weeks before the end of instruction: complete the oral part of your comprehensive examination (normally four days after the written part).
2. At least two weeks before the end of instruction: submit the Final Exam Results form to the Graduate College.

Graduate Assistantships

The information here supplements that in the Graduate Assistant Handbook (available on the Graduate College's Web site).

The number of assistantships offered by the department may vary from year to year. The number of vacancies varies from semester to semester. Selection of recipients is made by a committee of departmental faculty.

Contracts for graduate assistants (GAs) begin at the beginning of the week before instruction begins in a semester; contracts end at the deadline for submission of final grades by

instructors.

Assignments held by graduate assistants vary from semester to semester. Assignments are normally made in the week before the contract for the semester begins. Depending upon the faculty member to whom graduate assistants are assigned, they will be either assisting faculty with teaching or research or both. Graduate Assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis and to maintain an assistantship students must remain in good standing (e.g., maintain at least a 3.0 grade point average and make continuous progress toward their degree).

The MA Graduate Assistantship contracts may be awarded up to a maximum of two years.