

**THE DEPARTMENT OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE  
GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**Version 2022.5**

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL  
SCIENCE 133 DEUPREE HALL  
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## **I. General Information about the Graduate Programs**

### ***A. Degree Programs***

The Department of Political Science at the University of Mississippi offers two graduate degrees: the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and the Master of Arts (M.A.). The Ph.D. program is designed primarily for those students interested in obtaining faculty positions at academic institutions and research positions. As such, the program provides rigorous training in the practice of scholarly research. Students can expect to obtain a mastery of the relevant literature as well as the methodological tools needed to undertake sophisticated political science research. The small size of our graduate program also provides the opportunity for most students in the Ph.D. program to supplement their research training with classroom experience either as teaching assistants or, in the case of advanced Ph.D. students, as course instructors.

The Master of Arts degree serves students with many different goals. Some M.A. students choose to enter government positions while others seek employment in the private sector. Some M.A. students decide to pursue the Ph.D. degree. The goal of the M.A. program is to provide the analytical skills necessary for success in any of these goals. Because of this, the M.A. program is designed to impart the same mastery of the political science literature and the basic research tools as the Ph.D. students receive, just on a smaller scale.

### ***B. Fields of Study***

The Department of Political Science offers concentrations in three subfields of political science: American Politics, Comparative Politics, and International Relations. Every Ph.D. student must choose two of these fields and designate one as the major field and one as the minor field. M.A. students select one field to be their major field.

- American politics focuses on the behavioral and institutional elements of U.S. domestic politics. Faculty members in the former area examine voting behavior and turnout, as well as other forms of political participation. Scholars in the area of institutions focus on Congress, state politics, and the Presidency.
- Comparative politics examines the domestic politics of countries other than the United States. Thematic areas include social movements, comparative institutions, and democratization and development. Area foci are Western Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, and East Asia.
- International relations covers the politics between countries, including international interactions such as war and trade. The core of the departmental IR faculty lies in the causes of interstate conflict and cooperation.

Students interested in developing a deeper understanding and skillset for quantitative analysis should consider obtaining the Interdisciplinary Graduate Minor in Applied Statistics. More information can be found at: <https://gradschool.olemiss.edu/gmas/>

## **II. Admissions Information**

The Department of Political Science accepts applications for entry into the M.A. or the Ph.D. program. Applicants need not have an M.A. for admission into the Ph.D. program, nor must a student hold a degree in political science. The applications for both programs are the same in terms of procedure and deadlines (Feb. 1st, annually.).

## ***A. Required Information***

An application for graduate work will be considered complete upon receipt of the following six items:

To the Graduate School:

- A completed application (applicants can go to: <http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/applynow.html> to complete the online application).
- An official transcript from all institutions the applicant previously attended.
- The GRE General Test is NOT required. You may submit GRE scores, but they are not required and will not be used to exclude you from admission or funding (but they can help).
- Three letters of recommendation submitted online by your recommenders. It is important to have letters of recommendation from your undergraduate professors (or graduate professors if currently in an M.A. program). We hope to attract students who will do well in an academic political science program which prepares people to conduct original research and to teach at a college level if that is what they want to do. In general, the people who can best assess students' ability in that regard are their undergraduate professors (rather than military officers or employers or their hometown ministers, etc.). For those who work for a while after college before pursuing a graduate degree, an employer can be in a good position to assess a student's potential, and it is fine to have him/her/them write a letter. But try to get at least two and preferably three professors who can provide an assessment of your academic potential in Political Science. In general, however, do the best you can and do not let concerns about letters keep you from applying.
- A writing sample. Send a substantial piece of work that highlight your best writing and analytical skills.
- A two-page letter describing your interests in political science. The statement of purpose should describe your substantive interests in political science. For the Ph.D. you should state which field you would study as your major field and which field you would study as your minor field. For the M.A., please specify the major field you would study. Within those fields, be as specific as possible about your interests (for example, parties/elections within the field of American Politics). However, if you are not sure what you want to focus on, just say so and apply anyway. Your statement should also say something about your career goals for which a graduate degree will prepare you.

*Applicants from non-English speaking countries must also submit an official TOEFL score (or an approved alternative evaluation method). Please see the university's Office of Global Engagement for more information.*

It is important to note that the Department will not be able to fully process an applicant's file until the Graduate School has received all of its required items.

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## ***B. Timeline***

Although there is no hard deadline for applications to the Department, applicants who wish to receive full consideration for graduate assistantships must have a completed application by February 1st in the year of matriculation.

Although it is technically possible, we only permit people to start in the spring in unusual circumstances. It is much better to enter in the fall. One reason for this is that we require a two- semester methods sequence, part one in the fall and part two in the spring. Students should not try to start the sequence midstream unless they have excellent background in research methods at the graduate level, and they also should not delay the methods sequence until their second year because it is a foundation for understanding other courses in the three substantive fields of political science. Our program places strong emphasis on quantitative methods in political science, i.e., the use of statistical methods to analyze quantitative data.

### ***C. Applying for Departmental Financial Aid***

No separate application exists for those applicants desiring departmental awards. All applicants are considered for assistantships based on the completed application for graduate work.

### ***D. Qualifications***

Decisions to admit or reject an applicant are made based on all the elements of the file. This includes GPA and letters of recommendation. The department also places great weight on the personal statement. The small size of the department necessitates a strong fit between a particular applicant and the interests and expertise of the faculty.

Students applying for the graduate program should also have at least a 3.0 GPA overall and a higher GPA in their majors.

## **III. Ph.D. Degree Requirements**

The Political Science Ph.D. Program is designed to provide scholarly and professional training in political science. The structure of the program is designed to be completed in four years. Students must choose fields of study and complete the program requirements as described below.

### ***A. Fields of Study***

Ph.D. students are required to choose *two* fields for examination from the following list:

- American Politics
- Comparative Politics
- International Relations

Students are required to establish a major and minor field of study. The major field requires a student to complete at least 5 courses consisting of the field pro-seminar and 4 research seminars. The minor field requires a student to complete at least 4 courses, consisting of the field pro-seminar and 3 research seminars.

### ***B. Credit Requirements***

Students must complete 54 hours (a graduate school requirement) before obtaining ABD (all-but-dissertation) status. Below is a table that shows the credit distribution:

	<b>Credit Requirement</b>
<b>Major field</b>	15
<b>Minor field</b>	12
<b>Methods</b>	9
<b>Research Practicum</b>	3
<b>Third Field/Electives</b>	6
<b>Exam Prep/Exams/Prospectus</b>	12
<b>TOTAL CREDITS</b>	<b>54</b>

Typical students will continue to take 9 hours in each of their first five semesters (45 credits). During the 5<sup>th</sup> semester students will, in addition to two seminars, take 3 credits of comp prep. In the 6<sup>th</sup> semester, students complete comprehensive exams and a dissertation prospectus by taking 3 credits of comp prep credits and 6 credits of prospectus research. These prospectus research credits are directly tied to producing a dissertation proposal and are to be completed by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> semester (see below).

Below is a year-to-year plan that shows a typical program of study for an entering student under the curriculum plan. The plan may be changed depending on student and departmental needs:

#### **Year 1**

Fall - POL 550, Seminar Major-1, Seminar Minor-1

Spring – POL 551, Seminar Major-2, Seminar Minor-2

#### **Year 2**

Fall – POL 552, Seminar Major-3, Seminar Minor-3

Spring – Seminar Major-4, Seminar Minor-4, POL 695 (Research Practicum)

#### **Year 3**

Fall – Seminar Major-5, Seminar Third Field/Elective-1, POL 696 - Advanced Readings (3 hours – used for comprehensive examination preparation)

Spring – POL 696 (3 hours); Comprehensive Exams, Prospectus - POL 796 (6 hours)

## **Year 4**

Fall – POL 797 (dissertation hours - 9)

Spring – POL 797 (dissertation hours - 9)

### ***C. Required Courses by Field***

Students must complete 6 hours (two courses) of methods and complete the core pro-seminar in the selected subfields. The pro-seminars and required methods courses are:

#### American Politics

POL 500: Seminar in American Politics (pro-seminar)

#### Comparative Politics

POL 523: Concepts and Theories of Comparative Political Analysis (pro-seminar)

#### International Politics

POL 531: Seminar in International Relations (pro-seminar)

#### Methods

POL 550: Research in Politics

POL 551: Empirical Political Analysis

POL 552: Applied Political Research

Additionally, students must complete 3-4 research seminars in each of their chosen fields. A research seminar involves an in-depth academic study in one subfield area within a student's field. The research seminar has as its principal graded assignment a paper designing or reporting original research. Finally, a student must complete a 2<sup>nd</sup> year research practicum as described below.

### ***D. Research Practicum***

Students will be required to complete a research practicum by the end of the second year. A research practicum is a significant, independent, and original effort to apply social science research methods guided by a POL faculty advisor. The POL faculty advisor is to approve the design and oversee the implementation of the student's research project. The practicum is to culminate in a journal-length, research paper potentially acceptable for presentation at an academic conference.

The objective of the research practicum is to work with a faculty member in a project applying research methods training. The goal is for the student to produce a paper that is at least suitable for a conference presentation but which could be revised for journal publication. In instances when the advisor believes this goal has been achieved, the student and advisor may wish to present the paper and submit it for journal review.

Students may identify their practicum advisor and begin the research design during the fall and summer before the spring semester when credit is designated. A faculty member may not be an advisor to more than two students in any academic year unless the situation is discussed with the GPC.

### ***E. Comprehensive Exams***

## **1. Timing of Comprehensive Exams**

Written exams will be offered in January each year. The exact dates will be set by the Graduate Committee. Unless waived by unanimous vote of the examining field committee, an oral exam will occur within 2-3 weeks of the written exams. With permission of the Graduate Committee, a student may retake exams once; however, a second comprehensive exam will not necessarily be offered in the same academic semester.

## **2. Nature of Written Exams**

Each student takes two written field exams. Written exams will be take home, open note/book exams. Students have 72 hours to complete the major field exam and 48 hours to complete the minor field exam. The two exams will take place over two consecutive weekends. Typically, the major field exam will be distributed by the Department Office Assistant and/or the GPC on Friday at 9 am and returned on Monday, 9 am. The minor field exam will be distributed at 9 am on the following Friday and returned Sunday at 9 am. Exams will be distributed and returned via email.

## **3. Nature of Oral Exams**

The purpose of the oral examination will be to address weaknesses in the written exams. Unless waived by unanimous vote of the examining field committee, an oral exam will occur within 2-3 weeks of the written exams.

## **4. Composition of Exam Committee**

The Chair of the Department will assign three faculty members to solicit questions and write the exam, as well as grade the answers and conduct the orals. These faculty members may or may not be the same as the student's dissertation committee members.

With only 2-3 weeks between written and oral exams, faculty members will be required to read and grade exams in a timely manner.

## **5. Reading Lists**

Each of the subfields *may* generate a list of important readings that help define the extant literature for examination. Syllabi from the relevant seminars are central to the reading and preparation for exams but students should study beyond those documents or any specific list.

## ***F. Dissertation***

The dissertation is the culminating intellectual outcome of a student's doctoral program. The dissertation must demonstrate the students' ability to engage in independent, original, and professionally competent academic research.

### **1. Dissertation Prospectus**

Students should enroll in 6 hours of POL 796 – Dissertation Prospectus – in the Spring of the third year (the semester corresponding with completion of comprehensive exam). Students are required to complete and defend the dissertation prospectus no later than the end of the summer before the fourth year. Failure to do so is a potential cause for loss of funding.

### **2. Prospectus Defense**

A completed dissertation prospectus must be a written document discussing the research question, theory, research design, chapter organization, and timetable for completion. The dissertation chair may establish additional expectations. The prospectus must be approved by the dissertation chair and dissertation committee members in an oral defense. Students not defending a dissertation prospectus by the start of the fourth year may not be eligible to teach



for departmental stipend support and may not receive stipend support depending on graduate stipend resources.

### 3. Dissertation Committee

The student is responsible for asking POL tenure-track faculty member appropriate for the topic of the student's chosen research area. This selection should occur at or before the comprehensive exam stage of a student's graduate career so that dissertation planning can begin as early as possible. The student is responsible for completing the "Dissertation Committee Form" on my.olemiss.edu notifying the Graduate Program Coordinator of the committee composition. The student should consult with the Dissertation Chair to select an appropriate outside faculty Committee member. It is assumed that faculty members have a professional obligation to serve on a dissertation committee, if asked. However, a faculty member may decline if they already serve on two or more dissertation committees in any academic year.

### 4. Continuing Hours

Students must enroll in at least three hours of POL 797 each semester during their dissertation- writing. Additional requirements concerning continuing hours are stated under "General Academic Regulations and Other Information" in the Graduate Catalog of the University of Mississippi, accessible at <http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/current.html>.

### 5. Dissertation Defense

A student is expected to submit a completed draft of a dissertation to all Committee members. Committee members are professionally obligated to read drafts in a timely manner. An oral defense of the final dissertation must be scheduled by the Dissertation Chair and must be successfully completed. The student and Dissertation Chair must communicate with the Graduate Program Coordinator in advance of the Oral Defense to complete necessary Graduate School documents.

## IV. Master's Degree Requirements

The M.A. degree requires a minimum of 30 graduate level credit hours. Each student is required to take 12 credit hours in the major field and 6 credits in other fields, which may constitute a minor field if taken from the same field. M.A. students are required to take two methods core courses (POL 550, POL 551). Students may take POL 552 as an elective course with the permission of the GPC.

	Credits	Requirements
<b>Total Credits</b>	30	
<b>Major Field</b>	12	Pro-seminar (if offered)
<b>Minor Field/Electives</b>	6	
<b>Methods</b>	6	POL 550, 551
<b>Thesis/Exam</b>	6	

Upon completion of coursework, M.A. students choose either to write a Master's thesis or take the M.A. level written examination.

### A. Nature of the Thesis

Students selecting the thesis route will write and submit a 30-50 page professional research paper equivalent to a paper worthy of presentation at a major political science conference and defend the work in an oral defense at the end of the semester in which the thesis is written.

### ***B. Nature of the Exams***

M.A. examinations are take-home and students have 48 hours to complete the major field exam. The student will then have an oral defense of the written work if necessary.

### ***C. Nature of the Committee***

For the thesis option, the student is responsible for selecting a committee. M.A. committees are comprised of (at least) three faculty members: an advisor from the student's major field as well as (at least) two other faculty members (1 from the major field and 1 from the minor field). For degree-by-exam, the Ph.D. exam committee will constitute the M.A. exam committee.

## **V. Advising**

Upon entry into the program, every student will be advised by the Graduate Program Coordinator. At any point in a student's tenure in the department a student may choose one faculty member to take over as the primary advisor. M.A. students must choose a faculty advisor prior to the exam or thesis. Ph.D. students must choose a primary advisor no later than the beginning of the semester prior to comprehensive exams.

## **VI. Departmental Assistantships**

The Department of Political Science offers a limited number of full and half-time departmental assistantships. Ph.D. students are given priority for assistantship support. A full department assistantship includes, at a minimum, a stipend of \$10,000.00 for the nine-month academic year, mandatory participation in the graduate student health insurance program, as well as a tuition waiver (including the out-of-state fees, if necessary). Most assistantship stipends are significant higher.

A half-time assistantship includes, at a minimum, a \$5,000.00 stipend, mandatory participation in the graduate student health program, and a 75 percent tuition benefit.

Other sources of funding are available at times, including positions in the Social Science Research Laboratory or positions from external grants awarded to faculty members. In these cases, students will be selected by the appropriate faculty members and notified by the department.

An important thing to note is that funding is not guaranteed for every student, every year. A student who received funding in one year can expect to have it again the following year assuming normal progress has been made toward completion of the degree, the responsibilities of the assistantship were handled adequately, and the student remains in good standing within the program and university. Ph.D. students who meet these expectations can receive stipend money for at least four years (through one year of dissertation writing). M.A. students will receive two years of funding. The department carries out reviews of students by the relevant faculty members (e.g., those who taught graduate seminars and those who had research assistants). Students assessed to be performing unacceptably either in their academic role or as a graduate assistant may have their funding not renewed, even if in "good" academic standing with the graduate school. Poor academic performance is not simply based on grades and GPA. Students assessed to have a low likelihood of completing their degree in an acceptable timeframe may not have their funding renewed. Budgetary conditions may also affect the department's ability to provide continuing financial support.

To remain in good standing in the program graduate students must maintain a 3.0 or better GPA and show adequate progress, as determined by the Graduate Affairs Committee, toward

the MA or PhD. Failing to successfully complete required courses, comprehensive exams, as outlined in this handbook, or defending a dissertation prospectus within a reasonable timeframe, as determined by the Graduate Affairs Committee, are examples of failing to make adequate progress.

To retain department funding students must show significant competency in both their coursework and assistantship. Meeting the minimum GPA may not be sufficient evidence of progress and competency to maintain funding. Generally, funded students are expected to earn, on average, a higher GPA than the university minimum requirement for good academic standing.

Graduate students should develop and model the dispositions that are expected of professional researchers and educators. Disposition is defined as the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, colleagues, and communities. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as fairness, honesty, responsibility, and those outlined in the UM Creed. Our faculty expects all graduate students to exhibit dispositions characteristic of a professional researcher and educator; therefore, we take the responsibility of assessing and reviewing their dispositions.

Students who fail to show acceptable dispositions for a professional researcher and education will be notified and must meet with the Graduate Program Coordinator and any affected faculty. The GPC may recommend to the Graduate Affairs Committee that the student be warned, end any department-based financial assistance (ie. assistantship), or dismissal from the program.

The Political Science Graduate review and dismissal policy is intended as program-specific supplements to the University of Mississippi's Graduate School's Academic Discipline Policies and Procedures. All students in the program are also subject to the Graduate School's policies.

### ***A. Teaching Assistantships***

Students awarded graduate assistantships can be used in the classroom in many ways. Some faculty members will utilize a student as a teaching assistant in small discussion sections that accompany a larger lecture. Alternatively, faculty members may ask a graduate assistant to work as a grader in a 300-level course. A final option is to give senior graduate students an opportunity to teach their own courses.

### ***B. Research Assistantships***

Students assigned to be research assistants are asked to aid professors in many different aspects of the research process. For example, students may collect data or gather relevant cites of the extant literature that are necessary for completion of a project. Sometimes these assignments lead to opportunities for co-authoring on papers for conferences and publication.

## **VII. Conference Travel Support – before submitting a proposal to a conference**

Academic conferences allow graduate students the opportunity to present independent research to members of the academy who have similar research interests. In order to help facilitate conference participation, the department has limited support up to \$550.00 with an additional \$200 from the UM Graduate School for a total \$750 per trip. These funds are to offset the expenses accrued through travel, registration, and daily necessities such as food. Students wishing to attend a conference should become familiar with the deadlines for submitting conference paper proposals, as the deadlines are often 10-12 months in advance of the actual conference.

### ***A. Rules for Receiving Travel Support***

- Department support would be awarded no more than once per year to any one graduate student when total funds are limited.
- Graduate student applicants for travel support must present research at the conference/meeting when total funds are limited.
- To maximize the available funds preference will be given to proposals that include room or ride sharing and applicants who also apply to the Graduate School for Travel funds (\$200).
- Seniority in the program will be used to determine award. First year students do not qualify for department funding.
- Department awards will not exceed \$550 per student and will be limited to available funds. Proposals for departmental award must be submitted at the time of the conference proposal.

### ***B. Process for Receiving Travel Support***

Those eligible to receive travel support should follow the following process

- Propose an abstract of the paper and a brief budget breakdown for approval by the Graduate Program Coordinator prior to the conference proposal submission.
- If the proposal is approved by the Graduate Program Coordinator, the student must complete a Graduate Student Travel Support Application from the Graduate School.
- The student receiving support must complete the standard University travel authorization with the department. Graduate student travel support is limited by the availability of funds.

## **VIII. Summer Options**

The department rarely offers formal graduate seminars in the summer terms. However, several options do exist for students (but varies by year):

- Teaching summer courses (with compensation)
- Taking additional methods courses at summer programs such as the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan
- Attending other methodologically oriented programs such as the Empirical Implications of Theoretical Models

## **IX. The University of Mississippi Creed**

All students of the University of Mississippi must behave in a manner consistent with the University's Creed. Engaging in behavior contrary to the Creed is grounds for disciplinary actions, including the loss of funding and/or recommendation for program dismissal.

### **UM Creed**

The University of Mississippi is a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment. As a voluntary member of this community:

I believe in respect for the dignity of each person

I believe in fairness and civility

I believe in personal and professional integrity

I believe in academic honesty

I believe in academic freedom

I believe in good stewardship of our resources

I pledge to uphold these values and encourage others to follow my example.

## **Appendix: Graduate Courses**

Please see the University Catalogue for a list of graduate course titles and numbers. Courses with numbers 500 and higher are graduate courses.

*<https://catalog.olemiss.edu/liberal-arts/political-science/courses>*

University of Mississippi  
 Department of Political  
 Science  
 Ph.D. Guidelines Checklist – 54 Total Hours  
 Required

Major Field: \_\_\_\_\_ (15 Credits, including the field pro-seminar):

Course Number and Name	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Grade

Minor Field: \_\_\_\_\_ (12 Credits, including the field pro-seminar):

Course Number and Name	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Grade

Methods: (9 Credits)

Course Number	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Grade
POL 550				
POL 551				
POL 652				

Research Practicum: (3 Credits)

Course Number	Year	Semester	Director Name	Practicum Title
POL 795				

Electives: 3 Credits

Course Number and Name	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Grade

Exam/Prospectus/Dissertation: (12 Credits of Exam/Prospectus and 18 Credits of Dissertation Research)

Course Number	Year	Semester	Year	Semester	Year	Semester	Year	Semester
POL 696 (6 credits)								
POL 796 (6 credits)								
POL 797(18 credits)								

University of Mississippi  
 Department of Political Science  
 M.A. Guidelines Checklist – 30 Total Hours Required

Major Field: \_\_\_\_\_ (12 Credits, including the pro-seminar)

Course Number and Name	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Grade

Minor Field or Electives: \_\_\_\_\_ (6 Credits)

Course Number and Name	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Grade

Methods: (6 Credits)

Course Number	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Grade
POL 550				
POL 551				

Thesis/Master's Exam: (6 credits)

Course Number	Year	Semester	Credit Hours	Year	Semester	Credit Hours
POL 697/696						