

Department of Political Science Graduate Handbook for M.A. Students

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Greetings from the Department Chair

Welcome to the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama. This handbook is designed to provide you with information about our MA Program. While we are hopeful it will answer most of your questions and be highly informative, it is still important that you read the University's Graduate Catalog, as well as all relevant information from the Graduate School website.

We look forward to working with you to help you achieve your professional goals. Please feel free to stop by my office during office hours, make an appointment, or email me if you have any questions or simply wish to chat about anything regarding the graduate program. Your ideas and suggestions are always welcome, as we are constantly striving to improve our graduate program to maximize your success.

Sincerely,

Joseph Smith, PhD
Department Chair

The M.A. Program

The Master of Arts (M.A.) degree primarily serves students who seek a career in public service or who intend to pursue a Ph.D. degree later, either at the University of Alabama or at another institution. Students in the M.A. program will take many of the same courses that Ph.D. students take. M.A. students typically complete the degree in two years.

The Department of Political Science offers two paths to the M.A. degree in Political Science, which are detailed below.

All students in the M.A. program are subject to the rules and conditions specified in this handbook and in the University's Graduate Catalog.

Admission and Financial Aid

Applicants should visit The Graduate School website for application materials and information about the application process. All admission materials are submitted to the Graduate School. Admissions to the M.A. program are only considered for the Fall semester, and applications are due by December 1 for full potential funding consideration and February 15 otherwise.

Transfer Credit

M.A. students may request to transfer a maximum of 9 credit hours from another institution, subject to Departmental approval and the restrictions below.

Students must provide syllabi for all courses for which transfer credit is requested. Decisions on granting transfer credit will be made by the Graduate Director in consultation with the faculty member(s) teaching the most nearly equivalent UA course. To receive transfer credit, courses must be judged to have a workload and content comparable to departmental graduate courses.

Core seminars in each field (see the Graduate Catalog) must be taken in residence.

M.A. Program, Plan I

Students who choose Plan I will complete 30 credit hours of course work, 6 credit hours of PSC 599 Thesis Research, a thesis, and a final oral examination of the thesis.

Plan I Course Requirements

Students will be expected to attain a satisfactory degree of knowledge and competence in two of the following fields of Political Science: American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Public Policy & Administration, and Political Theory.

Students choose a major field and one minor field. Plan I students will complete 12 credit hours in the major field, and six credit hours in the minor. In addition, students must complete PSC 521 Research Design, PSC 522 Quantitative Methods I, and PSC 500/501 Departmental Seminar. Students select one additional elective course from any field.

Students must complete the core seminar in their major field and minor field. The core seminars are PSC 601 (American Politics), PSC 631 (Comparative Politics), PSC 642 (International Relations), PSC 565 (Public Policy & Administration), and PSC 651 (Political Theory).

Plan I Thesis Prospectus

During the Spring semester of their first year of the program, the student will consult with faculty members to serve as Chair of the Thesis Committee regarding a thesis topic, if this has not already occurred. The thesis is not simply a longer version of a seminar paper. It should make rigorous use of research methodology skills attained while completing the degree, and it should make some novel contribution to the field of political science, as determined by the Chair of the Thesis Committee and the Committee (described below).

The prospectus should contain a narrative statement of the thesis proposal, including hypothesis, methodology, and other supporting materials to justify the thesis, an outline of the proposed thesis, and a preliminary bibliography. The Chair of the Thesis Committee approves the thesis prospectus and forms the Thesis Committee, which shall consist of one additional faculty member from the Department of Political Science and one outside faculty member from another Department. The Committee must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Plan I Oral Thesis Defense

The oral examination of the thesis will be conducted by the three-member committee consisting of two Political Science faculty members, with one serving as Chair, and one outside faculty member from another Department.

General Plan I MA Roadmap

Below is an example of how an MA student could fulfill all requirements within two years. Actual course offerings will vary, and students must be flexible to take their major and minor field core seminars when offered.

First Year, Fall Semester

- PSC 521 – Research Design
- PSC 522 – Quant Methods I
- PSC 500 – Departmental Seminar
- Major field core (e.g. PSC 601)

Second Year, Fall Semester

- PSC 599 - Thesis research (6 hours)
- Major field seminar
- Defend prospectus (early Fall)

First Year, Spring Semester

- PSC 501 – Departmental Seminar
- Minor field core (e.g. PSC 631)
- Major field seminar
- Elective (e.g.: PSC 622)

Second Year, Spring Semester

- Major field seminar
- Minor field seminar
- Optional Research (PSC 599 3 hours)
- Oral Thesis Defense

M.A. Program, Plan II

Students who choose Plan II will complete 36 credit hours of course work and a written comprehensive examination in their major field.

Plan II Course Requirements

Students will be expected to attain a satisfactory degree of knowledge and competence in two of the following fields of Political Science: American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Public Policy & Administration, and Political Theory.

Students choose a major field and minor field. Plan II students will complete 12 credit hours in the major field and six credit hours in the minor. In addition, students must complete PSC 521 Research Design, PSC 522 Quantitative Methods I, and PSC 500/501 Departmental Seminar. Students select three additional elective courses from any field.

Students must complete the core seminar in their major field and minor field. The core seminars are PSC 601 (American Politics), PSC 631 (Comparative Politics), PSC 642 (International Relations), PSC 565 (Public Policy & Administration), and PSC 651 (Political Theory).

Plan II Comprehensive Examination

The written comprehensive examination will cover the student's major field and will require integration of material across courses in the field.

Students are eligible to take comprehensive exams no earlier than the semester they will complete their required coursework. Students with incompletes, in any course, may not take comprehensive examinations.

Students indicate their intention to take the comprehensive examinations by completing the form located on the department website. An email will be sent each semester announcing the deadline to declare intention to take comprehensive exams.

Please note that the qualifying examinations are not simply tests of the material students have taken in their coursework. Rather, these are considered comprehensive examinations in each field, and the student is responsible for knowing and understanding the major theoretical approaches and literatures in each field, regardless of whether they have been covered in a specific course. Students are strongly urged to speak to each faculty member in the relevant fields to inquire about strategies for studying, reading lists, old syllabi, etc. This is even more strongly recommended for students who have transferred courses from other institutions and may not have interacted with some of the faculty members who might be submitting questions for the examination.

Comprehensive examinations are administered during the Fall and Spring semesters only.

Major field comprehensive examinations for the Fall semester will take place the third Tuesday of each September. Major field comprehensive examinations for the Spring semester will take place the second half of March with a precise date to be determined by the Director of Graduate

studies prior to the beginning of the second week of classes. The Director of Graduate Studies will send out a notice at the beginning of the academic school year asking graduate students to indicate if they plan to take their exams during that semester. Graduate students must give such notice in writing, and these notices will indicate the field(s) in which the student plans to take his or her examinations and provide a listing of the courses the student has taken in each field as well as the professors who taught those courses. No later than two weeks before the first examination, the Director of Graduate Studies will contact the exam coordinator for that field (this person will typically be the subfield coordinator, as further described below).

The exam is open book and open note. Students are permitted to consult notes and sources as they write their exam, but students may not submit pre-prepared text or copy and paste from prepared responses. Plagiarism software will be used. Students found to have violated academic policies on plagiarism, cheating, fabrication or misrepresentation (as described more fully in the University of Alabama Faculty Handbook) will be subject to discipline up to and including expulsion from the graduate program.

Students may not communicate with, solicit help from, or provide help to any other person during the exam. Students may not communicate in any way details of the exam to a person scheduled to take the exam at a later date or time.

Students must include parenthetical citations where appropriate.

Students will have 4 hours to complete the M.A. comprehensive exam. Students will be given detailed instructions regarding electronic delivery and submission of the exam.

Upon submission of the exam, the Director of Graduate Studies will distribute the exam answers to the appropriate field coordinator, who will distribute the exam to relevant colleagues for grading. Faculty members will be asked to evaluate only those answers on which they have sufficient expertise to make informed decisions. Thus, the number of faculty members grading various answers on the same exam may differ. At least two faculty members will grade each answer and at least three faculty members will participate in the grading of each exam. The field coordinator will convene a meeting of all faculty members who participated in grading the exam.

If a majority of these faculty members vote to pass the student, the student will pass; if a majority vote to fail, the student will fail. Tie votes will constitute a decision to fail, except in cases where there are only two graders. In cases in which only two faculty members voted, a third faculty member (to be chosen by the Director of Graduate Studies) will be asked to read the examination and break the tie. The final vote of the graders will be the sole factor determining whether the student has passed the comprehensive examination.

Once all fields have completed their meetings and submitted the results of comprehensive examinations, the Director of Graduate Studies will notify all students regarding the outcome.

If a student fails comprehensive examinations, there is one opportunity to re-take the exam. This will occur the next regular semester (i.e., Fall or Spring). All rules stated above will apply to the re-taking of the comprehensive examination.

If a student fails comprehensive examination a second time, the student is dismissed from the

graduate program at the conclusion of that semester.

General Plan II MA Roadmap

Below is an example of how an MA student could fulfill all requirements within two years. Actual course offerings will vary, and students must be flexible to take their major and minor field core seminars when offered.

First Year, Fall Semester

- PSC 521 – Research Design
- PSC 522 – Quant Methods I
- PSC 500 – Departmental Seminar
- Major field core (e.g., PSC 601)

Second Year, Fall Semester

- Major field seminar
- Minor field seminar
- Elective

First Year, Spring Semester

- PSC 501 – Departmental Seminar
- Minor field core (e.g., PSC 631)
- Major field seminar
- Elective (e.g., PSC 622)

Second Year, Spring Semester

- Major field seminar
- Elective
- Optional Elective or research hours
- Comprehensive Examinations

Policies and Procedures

In this section of the Graduate Student Handbook, you will find policies and procedures that govern our work life. Some are University or College policies, while others originated in the Department of Political Science. If you have any questions about these policies, please contact the Director of Graduate Studies or the Department Chair.

Advising

All graduate students are required to meet with the Director of Graduate Studies prior to registering for classes each semester.

Graduate Student Committee Representation

These representatives will participate in important discussions involving rules and procedures governing the graduate program, as well as the qualifications of applicants for new faculty positions. The representatives' major responsibility will be to seek and aggregate graduate student opinion, so that faculty can consider the views of graduate students in their deliberations.

In the case of the Graduate Studies Committee, the student representative will not be involved in confidential discussions dealing specifically with individual students or prospective students.

Professional Socialization Courses

M.A. students are required to register for PSC 500 in the Fall semester and PSC 501 in the Spring semester of their first year. These courses are professional socialization seminars that are offered on a pass/fail basis for 1.5 credit each.

These courses cover numerous topics such as effective teaching strategies; attending and participating in political science conferences; publishing your work in professional journals; the academic job market; and ethical issues facing instructors and researchers.

These courses will meet approximately twice each month, with the Director of Graduate Studies and/or a faculty member coordinating the discussion. In addition to the class meetings, students will also attend research presentations and job talks as part of the professionalization process.

Student and Employee Conduct, Rights, and Responsibilities

All graduate students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the University of Alabama's student Code of Conduct as well as rights and responsibilities detailed in the University of Alabama's Student Handbook. This includes, but is not limited to, adherence to the University of Alabama's stated policies on Title IX (sexual harassment and misconduct) as well as academic integrity. All employees of the University, including graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), are further required to be aware of their rights and responsibilities as detailed in the University of Alabama's Employee Handbook. This includes, but is not limited to, adherence to the University of Alabama's stated policies on Title IX (sexual harassment and misconduct) and consensual romantic relationships.