

POLITICAL SCIENCE GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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POLITICAL SCIENCE GRADUATE PROGRAM

The purpose of this booklet is to help guide you through department and USU procedures that relate to the Political Science graduate program. We have tried to answer questions that might come up during your graduate years. You are responsible for knowing and meeting the requirements of the university and the department. Most questions that arise can be answered by reading this handbook and by consulting the [Graduate School Handbook](#). It is your responsibility to see that all necessary forms are properly done and filed with the School of Graduate Studies. Failure to do so may result in delays in completing your degree. Throughout this booklet, boldface type is used to highlight those forms that must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies. Additional information about university graduate programs and policies is available from the School of Graduate Studies booklet.

THE CURRICULUM

The program requires completion of 30 graduate credits (all courses are three credits unless otherwise designated). The Master of Arts degree requires language proficiency in a second language as determined by the Languages and Philosophy Department.

- POLS 6910 Research Design (required)
- POLS 6300 American Politics Seminar (required)
- POLS 6220 Comparative Politics Seminar (required)
- POLS 6250 International Relations Seminar (required)
- POLS 6310 Political Theory Seminar (required)
- POLS 6970 Thesis Research (6 hours if Plan A thesis, 3 hours if Plan B)
- POLS 5000+ or 6000+ electives (9 hours if Plan A thesis, 12 hours if Plan B)
-

*See below for more information on the Plan A versus Plan B thesis.

Other options for elective hours:

- POLS 6910 - Graduate Tutorial (**1-3 credits**) (may count up to 6 credits toward the degree, subject to approval)
- POLS 6920 - Internship (**1-15 credits**) (may count up to 3 credits toward the degree, subject to approval)
- Approved graduate courses taught outside the department (**3 credits**)

PROGRAM TIMETABLE

The Master's program is generally a two-year program, though highly motivated students may be able to complete it sooner. The suggestions below assume a two-year time frame. **If you find your actual timetable departing significantly from the one proposed, you should discuss your reasons and circumstances with your thesis committee chair and the Director of Graduate Studies.** Failure to make adequate progress towards degree completion can be grounds for termination from the program.

UPON ARRIVAL, you should attend the graduate student boot camp. If you miss the boot camp, you must meet with the graduate director, Colin Flint, within the first week of the semester. He can give you ideas on what course work you should take and help you find a faculty advisor who specializes in the field you would like to emphasize.

DURING THE FIRST SEMESTER, you should meet as many of the faculty as possible. If you find that a particular faculty member is working on something you are interested in, drop by and talk to them about it.

You should enroll in 9 credits of coursework (3 classes) this semester. One of those is required to be POLS 6010, Research Design. You should also take a foundational course in the track you are interested in completing.

You should begin thinking about a topic that you are interested in developing into a thesis. This need not be a specific topic, but consider general areas of interest to you that you might want to narrow and refine into a thesis. You should also consider how to pursue a Plan A degree. As you think about a topic, you should also think about forming a committee. Your committee must be comprised of at least three members. One member will serve as committee chair and must be from the Political Science Department. Select your chair carefully because she or he will be your principal guide through the program and principal advisor for preparation of your thesis. Of the two remaining members one needs to be from the political science department and one from outside the department. Your committee chair may help you identify faculty outside of the department who would be suitable to provide good guidance on completing the thesis. Your full committee will approve your course work, your entire program of study, assist with your thesis, and evaluate your thesis proposal and defense of the thesis. Committee changes can be made as necessary during your studies up until the six weeks prior to the final defense. *Changes cannot be made during the six weeks prior to the final defense.*

BY THE END OF THE SECOND SEMESTER, in addition to picking up an additional 9 credits of coursework there are a number of important things that must be accomplished. First, you must complete a **Supervisory Committee Approval Form**. This form can be downloaded from the Graduate School's web site. The form names the three members of your committee and requires their signatures. It must be submitted to the graduate school by the end of the second semester.

Second, you must complete the **Program of Study Form** (available on the graduate school's web site). This form lists the courses you will take to fulfill the 30 credit hour requirements. It requires the signatures of all three members of your committee. Submit the completed form to the School of Graduate Studies and provide a copy to the Director of Graduate Studies. Check the course catalog and talk to your committee chair about courses in other departments that may be beneficial. Before you take courses from outside the political science department, though, make sure your committee members are willing to endorse those courses for your program of study. Check with department secretaries for tentative course schedules that will tell you what courses will be available for your second year in the program.

You should have met with your committee and discussed a research proposal to enable you to conduct thesis research over the course of the summer. Students must complete a **MS Proposal Approval Form** at this time. Failure to complete this form will prevent students from completing their subsequent thesis defense. Preferably, students should complete and defend their research proposal prior to the summer. The proposal provides a guide for your research and a completed proposal will enable you to have the productive summer that will make completion of your thesis in the spring more likely. Do not expect or assume faculty are available for a proposal defense, or any form of advising, during the summer.

BY THE END OF THE THIRD SEMESTER you should complete the bulk of your course work. You are required to have written your thesis proposal and held the defense of the proposal with the participation of all 3 committee members by the end of the semester, though it is preferable that this was done prior to the summer. You should also complete some of the research and writing for the actual thesis in this semester. The various deadlines imposed by the graduate school will require you to have a draft of your thesis to your committee sometime in March if you want to be able to have your name in the program for May graduation. As such, getting a good start on the thesis in the third semester is imperative.

Additionally, you should make sure you keep your **Program of Study Form** up to date. Any changes to course work you indicated on your plan need to be changed formally with the School of Graduate Studies prior to defending your thesis.

IN THE FOURTH SEMESTER you should take any courses needed to complete your requirements. However, most of your time in your final semester should concentrate on final preparation of your thesis. You should register for thesis credit hours (POLS 6970) in your fourth semester. For a Plan A thesis, you need at least 6 credit hours (but no more than 9) of thesis hours on your **Program of Study Form**. For a Plan B thesis, you should register for 3 credit hours, but you cannot count more than 3 thesis hours on your **Program of Study** form.

You should, in consultation with your committee chair, arrange a defense of your thesis. To do this, you must submit an **Appointment for Examination** form at least 2 weeks (10 working days) before the date of your defense. This form schedules the time and place of your defense and must be signed by personally by all members of your committee. Members of your committee will generally not sign the Appointment for Examination form unless you have given them a complete draft—the two weeks allows your committee sufficient time to read and comment on your thesis and also gives the graduate school to check your records and make sure the requirements for graduation have been met. The graduate school does not make exceptions to this two-week rule easily. If you want to graduate in the fall or spring and have your name in the commencement program you must typically defend your thesis and submit completed paperwork to the graduate school by about April 1 (deadlines vary by year and can be found on the graduate school's web site). If you want to graduate but don't care about having your name in the program, you typically can take an extra week or two. **Knowing the dates of these deadlines and meeting them is the student's responsibility. It is not the responsibility of the graduate director of thesis committee chair to make sure the student meets these deadlines. Failing to meet them will result in delays to receiving your degree and additional tuition costs.** Any revisions to the committee form or program of study form also need to be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies prior to your defense.

During the semester that you defend your thesis, you must sign up for at least three hours of graduate course credit. Your committee chair fills in a letter grade or pass/fail for this course after you defend your thesis. These three credits count toward the 30 hours needed for graduation. If you do not successfully defend your thesis within the semester scheduled, you may take POLS 6990, continuing graduate advisement, each semester thereafter, for which you receive a pass/fail grade. You may take as many of these credits (typically three per semester, unless you are not using University facilities) as you need to in order to finish your thesis. If you have not finished your thesis and will not be in the area to use university resources then you need a letter from the Department Head to the graduate dean indicating non-use of university facilities. You will in this case, pay only \$15 per semester until you utilize university resources or complete your thesis.

After you defend your thesis the Committee signs the **Record of Examination Form** which you take to the Graduate Office. Your committee obtains the Record of Examination Form for you, and will give it to you at the time of your defense. You must also have a **Signature Page** to accompany your thesis. You should get this signed at your defense when all committee members are present as tracking everyone down for signatures at a later date often proves tricky. The department requires a signature page on all Plan B theses, and the graduate school requires it on Plan A theses.

Word of Advice: Defending at the beginning of the semester rather than in the middle of the semester gives you plenty of time to complete your paperwork by the School of Graduate Studies deadlines for spring commencement.

CIRCUMSTANCES TO AVOID

1. **Extended delays in program completion.** Even though the program is designed as a two-year program, there are some students who do not complete their course work and thesis within that time period. Extended delays in program completion can result in termination from the program. The School of Graduate Studies requires that students complete Master's programs within 6 years from the time they begin taking classes. Beyond 8 years, course work goes out-of-date. Any class that is more than 8 years old loses its certification. In accordance with Political Science Department policy, if a student loses course certification and does not have, or no longer has, sufficient credit hours for completion of degree, the student will be discontinued from the Master's program.

Recertification programs are allowed under the rules of the School of Graduate Studies, but will be considered by the Political Science Department's Graduate Committee only under the following conditions:

- A student's program was delayed because of long-term illness or extreme circumstances of a comparable severity.
- The Political Science Department Graduate Coordinator has been kept up-to-date about the progress of the illness or extreme circumstances, especially as the 6-year deadline approaches and thereafter. If regular reports are not received, the student will be discontinued from program.
- Political Science faculty members with appropriate expertise have agreed to assist and supervise a recertification program.
- A petition is submitted to the Political Science Department's Graduate Committee spelling out and documenting the nature of the illness and/or circumstances and their impact on the student's program. The petition must also include support statements from faculty who have agreed to supervise a recertification program and the details and timetable of a recertification program.

The Graduate Policy Committee will approve or disapprove a recertification petition based on the following criteria:

- The student's performance in the program prior to the extenuating circumstances that led to prolonged enrollment.
- The debilitating nature of the illness or circumstances.
- The amount of out-of-date course work.
- The length of time course work has been out-of-date.

- The merits of the recertification program (a course can be recertified by retaking the course or a similar course, or by passing a written or oral exam over the content of the course--provision must be made for each and every course that is out-of-date).
- The resources available for completing the recertification program.
- The student's current circumstances affecting prospects for completing the recertification program.
- Acceptance by the School of Graduate Students of the recertification program.

If the Graduate Committee disapproves a student's recertification petition, the student will be discontinued from the Master's program. If a student's petition is approved, that approval remains conditional on the student meeting the timetable of the recertification program. If the student fails to meet the deadlines spelled out in the recertification program, the student will be discontinued from the program.

2. **Low grades.** Students must maintain a cumulative 3.0 GPA. Grades below a C will not be accepted for credit. Grades below a B- are undesirable. The policy of the Political Science Department states that receipt of two grades below B- inside or outside the Department, or receipt of a GPA below 3.0 for two semesters, will result in termination from the program. P grades are not counted for graduate credit except for thesis research or continuing graduate advisement.
3. **Ignorance.** It is critical to be aware of Political Science policies relevant to the graduate program. Most of the Political Science policies described in this booklet are consistent with The School of Graduate Studies policies but may be more strict and usually supersede the School of Graduate Studies policies. See the Graduate section of Catalog for details of general policies.
4. **Late paperwork.** Paperwork needs to be completed in a timely fashion otherwise it places a burden on staff and jeopardizes program completion. Students must be prepared to accept the consequences if their paperwork is late.

THESIS REQUIREMENTS

Plan A vs. Plan B

Both the MA and MS degrees require the successful defense of a thesis. The departmental expectation is that students will complete a Plan A thesis, though a Plan B option is available.

The following two paragraphs draw from the Graduate School's Degree Completion Compass Document with a few additions for clarity.

The thesis for a Plan A master's degree is to be a contribution to the field of knowledge, based on the student's own research or a treatment and presentation of known subject matter from a new perspective. The student and major professor should decide upon a problem or subject for the thesis study by the end of the student's second semester of graduate study. The Plan A thesis is not necessarily longer than the Plan B thesis, but it is expected to generate new knowledge through original research and thus may be viewed by some as more challenging. This is the traditional path to a master's degree. The Plan A student must complete 6-9 thesis credit hours. The Plan A thesis proposal must go through the graduate school. Additionally, the Plan A thesis must conform to the graduate school's formatting requirements and be approved by them and signed by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

The Plan B master's option requires the production of a paper or creative work of art. At least two credits of thesis research are required but no more than three credits of thesis credit can be included on the Program of Study form. The Plan B paper is usually a review of literature with conclusions drawn after conceptualizing an area of inquiry, planning a systematic search, and analyzing and critiquing the acquired information. The summary and conclusions developed should enhance knowledge in the discipline. Plan B papers and reports should follow the same format specifications as theses and dissertations and are expected to reflect equivalent scholarship standards, even though they may be less intensive and not demand the originality of a Plan A thesis. Plan B papers are defended, but are not reviewed by the assistant dean or signed by the dean of graduate studies. Plan B papers must be submitted to the Merrill-Cazier Library, and the binding receipt must be returned to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies. The Political Science Department requires a formal written proposal for a Plan B paper, but it will not go to the graduate school. The department also requires a signature page for all theses.

All theses, Plan A or Plan B should meet high quality scholarship standards. For a Plan B thesis, consult with your committee chair about a particular style to use in preparation of the thesis. A

sample signature/title page may be found on the last page of the booklet. For a Plan A thesis the graduate school's requirements for style, formatting, and signature pages can be found on their website.

Once your committee chair indicates your thesis is ready to be defended, you should circulate final drafts to other committee members and arrange a meeting of your committee to defend your thesis. If the committee votes to approve your thesis, you have completed the last major step in your program. The Thesis Coordinator of the School of Graduate Studies does not review Plan B theses and the Graduate Dean does not need to sign it. These things are required for the Plan A thesis option. The University does not require a bound copy of the final copy of a Plan B thesis but the Political Science Department requests that a bound copy be submitted for reference in the political science library. An unbound copy of the final Plan B must be submitted to the Special Collections Department at the Merrill Library. Give the School of Graduate Studies the clearance slip before you can be closed out. Plan A theses must be sent to the library, the department, and you may keep one for yourself.

THESIS PROPOSAL

The thesis proposal can take a variety of forms. Your committee chair will be the one who specifically gives guidance on what form your proposal should take. The departmental requirement is simply that it must be orally defended with all members of the committee present. You must submit a copy of your completed proposal to all members of the committee one week before the scheduled defense. You must submit a **MS Proposal Approval Form** to the graduate school following the proposal defense.

A thesis proposal defense will involve you sitting down with members of your committee for about 30 minutes. It need not be a public meeting, but the student or committee members may invite additional attendees at their discretion. The proposal defense will involve the student making a brief presentation of their proposed work followed by questions and answers from members of the committee. The committee may dismiss the student briefly to deliberate on approving the proposal or stipulating revisions.

Your thesis proposal is important because it is, in essence, a contract between you and your committee. If you do all of the things you have indicated you would do in an approved proposal, you have a guarantee of passage. If you do not do what you proposed, you should approve changes from the proposal with all members of your committee or you may be at risk of failing your thesis defense.

Like any contract, the more detailed and specific it is, the clearer it will be what is expected of you. Additionally, the longer and more detailed your proposal, the less work you will have left to do in the writing of your actual thesis. Students are often able to use a significant portion of the writing in their proposal in the actual thesis.

A proposal might include a statement of the research question, a brief literature review, a description of the significance of the research, a statement of data to be collected, a statement of sources to be consulted, discussion of proposed methodology, and a timeframe for completion. While the average length of a proposal would probably be around 5 pages, approval is at the sole discretion of your committee—they may require a longer proposal or they may require a shorter proposal.

THESIS DEFENSE

A defense is an oral examination by your committee of your final thesis document. You defend the work submitted in your thesis and answer questions from your committee. Commonly, candidates are asked to make revisions in the thesis before a letter of completion is sent on to the School of Graduate Studies.

The format of the defense is determined by your committee. Typically, a candidate is asked to make a 10-20 minute presentation followed by questions from committee members. The candidate is then asked to leave the meeting room while the committee votes on whether the thesis is acceptable. The candidate is invited back to the meeting room and informed of the committee decision and of any alterations which need to be made.

FINANCIAL AID

The department normally appoints a number of teaching assistants with an annual stipend and tuition waivers. Renewal is dependent on performance and the availability of funds.

INTERNSHIPS

Internships are another source of funding as well as an excellent learning opportunity. An internship may be used for political science graduate credit if:

- 1) The internship has academic content **and** the basis for the grade is a meaningful research paper.

- 2) The internship is reasonably related to the career you intend to pursue.
- 3) Credits for the internship are approved by your supervisory committee and the Department Head. Internship credits cannot be used to fulfill section requirements.

DEGREE COMPLETION DEADLINES

Degree completion deadlines are set by the graduate school. It is the responsibility of the student to be familiar with these deadlines. Visit the graduate school's website for specific information.

THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE

The thesis signature page/title page must be done according to the graduate school's requirements. The format and style requirements can be found on the graduate school's website: <http://rgs.usu.edu/graduateschool/forms>

STUDENT PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

All students will be evaluated for their performance in the program each semester. This performance will evaluate both your academic progress in your classes and also (for those who receive financial aid) in your role as a TA. Two consecutive semesters of poor evaluations may be grounds for loss of your TA stipend, tuition assistance, and your continued enrollment of the program.

TIMELINE AND FORMS

The timeline is designed to keep students on track and provide DGS oversight of the mentoring process. It will require the following forms to be forwarded to the DGS. The logic of the timeline is that students will complete a Plan A thesis and be able to conduct research in the summer following their second semester in the program. The same deadlines apply if a student pursues a Plan B thesis. Deviation from the timeline may be interpreted as failing to make adequate progress towards your degree and have a negative impact upon the award of graduate assistantship stipends and tuition waivers.

In addition to the forms that must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, the following forms must be signed by your thesis advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Fall Semester Year 1:

- By the end of week 12 complete the *initial thesis question form*.

Spring Semester Year 1:

- Within the first five weeks complete the *notification of make-up of committee form*.
- Prepare a research proposal.
- **Complete Supervisory Committee Approval Form, MS Proposal Approval Form, and Program of Study Form for the School of Graduate Studies.**
- By the end of week 12 of the semester complete the *outcome of committee planning meeting form*.

Fall Semester Year 2:

- By the end of week 3 of the semester complete the *report of summer research activities form*.
- Complete a thesis outline.
- Beginning writing portions of thesis.
- By the end of week 12 of the semester complete the *report of submission of thesis outline and progress meeting form*.

Spring Semester Year 2:

- By the end of February *complete the notification to DGS of scheduled defense date form*.
- Full focus on writing thesis.
- By week 15 of the semester complete the *thesis defense outcome form*.

INITIAL THESIS QUESTION FORM

I have submitted a one paragraph description of my initial research question to my thesis advisor and they have agreed that I am making good progress.

Date: _____

Student

Thesis Advisor

Director of Graduate Studies

NOTIFICATION OF MAKE-UP OF COMMITTEE FORM

In consultation with my thesis advisor I have formed my thesis committee. All members of the committee have agreed to serve.

Date: _____

The committee is:

Advisor: _____

Political Science Faculty Member: _____

Faculty Member from Outside the Political Science Department: _____

Other Committee Member(s) (optional): _____

Student

Thesis Advisor

Director of Graduate Studies

OUTCOME OF COMMITTEE PLANNING MEETING FORM

I have circulated a written research proposal to my thesis committee. The committee and I met on _____ and discussed the research proposal, enabling me to begin my research this summer.

Date: _____

Student

Thesis Advisor

Director of Graduate Studies

REPORT OF SUMMER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES FORM

On _____ I met with my thesis committee and gave an oral report of my summer research activities and the progress I made on my thesis.

Date: _____

Student

Thesis Advisor

Director of Graduate Studies

REPORT OF SUBMISSION OF THESIS OUTLINE AND PROGRESS MEETING FORM

On _____ I met with my thesis committee and discussed with them an outline of my thesis. My advisor and committee are satisfied with my progress.

Date: _____

Student

Thesis Advisor

Director of Graduate Studies

NOTIFICATION OF SCHEDULED DEFENSE DATE FORM

In consultation with my thesis committee members I have scheduled my thesis defense for
_____.

Date: _____

Student

Thesis Advisor

Director of Graduate Studies

DEFENSE OUTCOME FORM

I defended my thesis on _____ and the committee's decision was _____.

Date: _____

Student

Thesis Advisor

Director of Graduate Studies

THESIS
TITLE

by

Your Name

A thesis proposal submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE (OR ARTS)

in

Political Science

Approved:

Type name of major professor
Major Professor

Type name of committee member
Committee Member

Type name of committee member
Committee Member

Type name of committee member
Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

Semester year