



**PennState**  
College of the Liberal Arts

## **DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

### **GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**2025 - 2026**

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# General Administrative Policies and Procedures

## The Graduate Studies Committee

The Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) and other related graduate committees are composed of faculty members chosen by the department head. The GSC and related committees are chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies, and their work is assisted by the Graduate Staff Coordinator. The main functions of these committees are:

- to assist in administering the graduate program,
- to propose and consider revisions in the program and the curriculum,
- to make recommendations on departmental awards, including travel awards, and scholarships,
- to review and accept applicants for admission to graduate study in political science, and
- to make recommendations concerning the renewal of graduate student assistantships.

## Health Insurance

Graduate assistants and fellows are eligible to receive University-subsidized health insurance through the Graduate Assistant and Graduate Fellow Health Insurance plan. The University pays 80% of the premium for students in this plan. The remaining 20% of the student premium is deducted from September through May stipend checks. The coverage runs through the summer, with deductions for summer (June and July) taken out of spring stipend checks. By default, every graduate assistant and fellow is automatically enrolled in the health insurance plan every year. Information about waiving enrollment can be found in students' LionPATH or Workday accounts. Students must be sure to follow the proper procedure by the appropriate deadline to waive health insurance or to add their dependents to the plan. The University also offers subsidized dental and vision plans (these are not mandatory for international students or their dependents). Again, by default, each graduate assistant and fellow is automatically enrolled in the dental and vision plans every year. To secure medical ID cards, students should access My Account at [uhsr.com/myaccount](https://uhsr.com/myaccount). Graduate students must go to the University Health Services first for treatment or a referral, during hours of operation <https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/health>. If an emergency or the office is closed, graduate students can go to Mount Nittany Medical Center.

Domestic students are required to submit their health insurance coverage information via LionPATH after registering for classes. International students can provide proof of coverage through LionPATH after they register for classes and after open enrollment begins.

The University pays 76% of the premium for partners and children, with the remaining 24% deducted from September through May stipend checks. **Students with dependents must re-enroll them every fall semester. Dependents are not automatically reenrolled.** To enroll dependents, fill out a Dependent Enrollment Form by the appropriate deadline every academic year. For more information on this form, contact Student Health Insurance at 302 Student Health Center (814/865-7467). Please see the Student Insurance Office website at <https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/health-wellness/health-insurance/graduate-assistant-fellows-and-trainees> or contact the Student Insurance Office at [uhs-insurance@psu.edu](mailto:uhs-insurance@psu.edu) for additional information or questions.

## International Students

The Directorate of International Student and Scholar Advising (DISSA) provides students with many services (e.g., assistance with government regulations regarding immigration and taxes; academic adjustment and personal counseling; emergency loans). In addition to the services which international

students can expect from DISSA, students have a responsibility to provide DISSA with current information, including changes in academic programs or status, and plans to bring family from the home country. In general, the DISSA office should be kept apprised of student activities.

International students with student visas must normally maintain full-time academic status during the fall and spring semesters. Full-time status is maintained by registering for a minimum of nine credits. Exceptions to full-time study must be cleared in advance through the Foreign Student Advisor in the DISSA office. Specific questions regarding visas, academic status, work permits, and the like should be directed to the DISSA office.

### **Department Facilities, Services, and Supplies Available to Graduate Students**

Office space for graduate assistants are located in Susan Welch Liberal Arts Building (SWLAB). Six students will have desks in the SoDA space, 421 SWLAB, determined by the department.

The other graduate students are assigned to the grad suite at the east end of the building, which is SWLAB room 446. We have to assign seats in the space to document we are using all/most of the space so the university does not assign other units' students to desks in our space. We have a limited number of shared computers throughout the 446 SWLAB space for students to use as needed. All students will be able to print to the Ricoh copiers in both the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floor mailrooms. If you are assigned as a TA or instructor the copier can be used to copy during the semester. The Ricoh copier can be used as fax machine. If you need assistance with the copier functions, see a staff member in 401 SWLAB.

While no limits exist on printing, students are asked to be judicious in their printing, and the department will occasionally monitor printer usage. Students who abuse their printing privileges will be warned and continued abuse of printing privileges may lead to elimination of printing privileges.

Graduate student mailboxes are located in 401B SWLAB. Students are expected to check their assigned boxes often. Outgoing mail can be placed in the outgoing box in 401 SWLAB, it will be collected during normal business hours (Monday-Friday).

Graduate students can use their PSU ID cards to access the graduate office space and mailroom 24/7/365. There is a kitchen area located in the 446 grad suite, that is available at your convenience. Please keep the area clean and be considerate of others in the office. If you need cleaning supplies, see a staff member in 401 SWLAB.

### **Guidelines for Graduate Student Absences or Leaves**

Unless students have received explicit approval from the Director of Graduate Studies or the Department Head, graduate assistants are expected to be in residence and available during the regular academic year. There are university policies pertaining to short-term absences, medical and family leaves, and parental leaves. Students concerned about longer leaves should consult the Fox Graduate School policies on absences and leaves for graduate assistants at <https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gsad/gsad-900/gsad-906-graduate-student-leave-of-absence> which pertain only to issues related to the individual as a graduate assistant.

### **Residency Requirement**

Graduate assistantships are provided to degree-seeking students enrolled in residence in the Fox Graduate School at The Pennsylvania State University as aids to completion of advanced degrees. As such, students on assistantships or fellowships are expected to be in residence during the academic year unless they have

received prior permission from the Director of Graduate Studies. The University has specific rules about the ability to work off campus which must always be followed.

Students who need to take short trips away from campus for personal or research-related reasons should discuss the trip with both their advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies so arrangements can be made to complete any GA-related responsibilities during their absence. The Fox Graduate School has a policy (GSAD-906) that governs such leaves of absence.

The Department will consider favorably requests from students on fellowship who have research-related responsibilities (e.g., fieldwork) requiring them to be away from campus. Still, students should receive permission from the Director of Graduate Studies before being away from campus for an extended period.

Additionally, students—including those who plan to fund their own studies—should be aware of the University's graduate residency requirement (GCAC-701) which must be satisfied in order to graduate.

### **Short-Term Absences**

If a student needs to take a short-term leave of absence, typically less than one-week in duration, the graduate assistant should make arrangements with their supervising professor. In the cases of foreseeable events, the student should inform their supervisor as soon as the circumstances and dates of needed leave are known. For unforeseeable events, notification should be made as soon as possible once the need arises.

Graduate students teaching their own classes are expected to follow university guidelines about course meetings and mode of instruction. If a student knows in advance they must be absent from a class for reasons such as attending a conference, they are expected to notify the department head and Director of Graduate Studies ahead of time and inform them how the class will be handled in their absence in line with university policies regarding course instruction and course mode.

### **Medical and Family Leave Policies**

If a graduate assistant is unable to fulfill the duties of their assistantship appointment because of illness, injury, or needing to care for an immediate family member for a longer duration, the graduate assistant must submit a written request to the Director of Graduate Studies. The request should be made by the student as soon as it is known that an extended leave will be required. If the leave is approved, the graduate assistant's stipend can be maintained for up to six weeks or until the end of the appointment (whichever occurs first) in the case of personal illness or injury and up to three weeks or until the end of the appointment (whichever occurs first) to care for an immediate family member. Requests for paid leave are generally granted but may be denied for reasons including but not limited to inadequate documentation, repeated requests for paid leaves, documented unsatisfactory performance, or incompatibility with funding source guidelines.

### **Parental Leave Policies**

Penn State's policy is to reasonably accommodate the needs of its graduate assistants when they become parents. A graduate assistant who becomes a parent is eligible for paid leave upon the birth of a biological child or when an adoptive child is placed within the individual's custody and adoption proceedings are officially underway. Graduate assistants desiring a new parent paid leave must submit a written request to the Director of Graduate Studies. Where medical leave is required prior to the birth of a child, or because of complications that may arise during or following the birth of a child, these leave requests are to be handled in the same manner as other illnesses or injuries.

### **Denial of Leave**

Should a request for paid leave of any type be denied, the graduate assistant has the right to appeal such a decision by submitting an appeal in writing to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. This appeal must be submitted within 10 days of receiving the notification that the original request has been denied.

### **Academic Standards**

The department of political science follows the College of the Liberal Arts Graduate Student Academic Integrity Interim Policy. All students in any of the department's graduate programs are subject to that policy. The policy is available through the College's Academic Integrity webpage, <https://la.psu.edu/current-students/academics/academic-integrity/>. Students who have questions about academic integrity issues should contact their advisors, another faculty member, or the Director of Graduate Studies.

Students who wish to submit the same (or a similar) paper in order to satisfy the requirements for more than one seminar must consult with and receive prior approval from the faculty who are leading each of the relevant seminars.

### **Use of Generative AI Tools**

Unless specifically allowed by course instructors or qualifying exam examiners, students in graduate-level political science courses may not use generative AI tools, such as Chat-GPT. To do otherwise would be a violation of academic integrity standards. The use of generative AI tools in research projects, such as M.A. theses, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Projects, or dissertations, should be discussed and approved by a student's committee members, and either cited appropriately in the paper, thesis, or dissertation or acknowledged in a preface to the research product.

### **Graduate Assistant Evaluations**

All faculty supervising teaching or research assistants are asked to provide a written evaluation of the student's performance at the end of each semester of service. These evaluations are placed in the student's permanent file and will be consulted in all decisions for assistantship renewal and for appointment as an instructor.

### **Grade Complaints**

Graduate students may contest a grade they received in any of their classes. Grade complaints must be initiated within ten days of a grade being posted, so students are advised to check grades promptly at the end of each semester. If a student thinks they want to contest a grade they received, they should inform the Director of Graduate Studies.

### **Department Appeals Procedure**

Decisions of a faculty advisor or committee may be appealed to the Director of Graduate Studies and then to the Department Head. With all appeals, the decision of the Department Head is final.

### **University-Level Graduate Student Problem Resolution**

Expectations for graduate student conduct, procedures for adjudication of allegations of violation of the University's code of conduct, and procedures for resolving concerns and disagreements involving graduate students at the university level are contained in the University's Graduate Education Policies

(GCAC-801 and GCAC-802: <https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/>).

### **Termination of Graduate Study**

The procedure for termination of a graduate student for unsatisfactory scholarship is set forth in the University's Graduate Education Policies (GCAC-803 and GCAC 804: <https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/>).

A graduate student will not be permitted to continue in the Department of Political Science if they:

1. Fail to attain a grade point average of at least 3.0 by the end of the second semester of full-time study (or 18 credits of coursework), and every semester thereafter.
2. Fail to complete successfully the qualifying or comprehensive examinations.
3. Fail to adhere to the University Code of Conduct.

### **Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention Training**

The department requires all graduate students to comply with university policy regarding sexual harassment in the workplace. This policy (AD85) is outlined on the following website: <http://guru.psu.edu/policies/AD85.html>

As part of this compliance, graduate students are required to complete Title IX training within 30 days of employment at Penn State.

### **Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Training**

The department requires all graduate students to follow university policy regarding mandatory reporting of child abuse. This policy is stated below:

All Penn State employees and Authorized Adults are required to complete a Reporting Child Abuse training every three years (See Penn State Policies [AD72](#) and [AD39](#)). After you complete the training, you are required to maintain and/or produce a current certificate upon request. If you are classified as an Authorized Adult, you also need to share a copy of the certificate with your program director, manager, or supervisor.

## **The M.A. Degree**

The Department of Political Science does not offer a separate program of study leading to the M.A. degree. Instead, students complete their M.A. as one of the steps toward the Ph.D.

### **Course Requirements**

Requirements for the M.A. degree consist of a total of 30 credits. Of these 30 hours, students may take a maximum of 6 credits for work in independent studies and internships (PLSC 595 and 596). The one exception is 596 credits that are taken at ICPSR. Students should generally complete the M.A. requirements within four semesters.

### **Core Courses**

As a part of the general requirements for the M.A. degree, students must complete three mandatory courses – PLSC 501, 502, and 503, and satisfy all SARI requirements. These courses are generally taken in the first year of study.

Students must also take 511 – the 1.5 credit “Professional Norms in Political Science” in their first year in the program. This course includes completion of online CITI programs and additional training in issues of scholarship and research integrity. Students must receive a passing grade in this class to receive their MA degree. Since 511 is only 1.5 credit hours, students will not have the full 30 credits they need by the time they defend their MA unless they also take PLSC 513: Writing and Professional Development in Political Science, in their third semester.

### **Seminar Requirements**

The M.A. candidate must complete 18 credits in political science graduate courses beyond the mandatory courses including two of the department’s proseminars (PLSC 504, 540, 550, or 560).

### **Dual-Title Students**

The only dual-title M.A. degree the department offers is with Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Students pursuing this dual-title M.A. must complete only complete 12 credits in political science seminars beyond the mandatory course requirements (e.g., 501, 502, 503, 511, and 513). One of these courses must be a proseminar. Students must also complete 12 credits in WGSS. The dual degree in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies also requires that the student take WMNST 501, 502, and 507 prior to completing the M.A. Finally, for dual-title MA students, the M.A. thesis must address a WGSS-related topic.

### **M.A. Thesis**

Students are required to complete a major research paper, written under the supervision of their master’s thesis advisor. The thesis may originate as a seminar paper initiated in connection with formal course work. It should demonstrate significant research accomplishment and have the scope and length of a major journal article.

### **Committee Formation**

The student’s master’s committee will consist of their master’s essay advisor and two additional members of the graduate faculty. For students completing a dual M.A. with Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, one faculty member from that department must be included on the master’s committee. Students pursuing a dual Ph.D. degree with African Studies, African American and Diaspora Studies, or Asian Studies are encouraged to pick a topic reflecting their interdisciplinary focus.



### **Oral Defense**

Students are required to successfully defend their M.A. thesis before their master's committee in order to receive their M.A. Candidates for an M.A. degree will schedule the oral defense of their M.A. thesis after (a) submitting a complete draft of the thesis to their advisor and receiving the advisor's approval to move ahead with the defense; and (b) submitting a complete draft of the thesis to the other members of the master's committee. The thesis will be the primary focus of the oral exam. In some cases, the master's committee may also wish to discuss a student's essay-related coursework.

The M.A. thesis defense may be held fully in-person or with partial remote participation. The student, advisor, and Committee Chair/Co-Chairs should generally be physically present for the examination. If necessary, other members of the committee may participate remotely with the agreement of the student and advisor.

If the student, advisor, and/or committee chair/co-chair is not able to participate in-person due to extenuating circumstances, the Director of Graduate Studies may approve the remote participation of one or more individuals or approve a fully remote examination. If the Director of Graduate Studies does not approve the request for remote participation, either the student or advisor may appeal to the Department Head.

Students are responsible for arranging a date and time for the oral examination with their committee, and for providing this information to the Graduate Staff Coordinator *at least three weeks prior to the M.A. thesis defense*. At the MA thesis defense, the faculty committee will vote on whether the student's MA thesis passes or fails the defense, and then will also score it as one of the following: Superior, Above Average, Average, Below Average, Fail.

# **The Ph.D. Degree: Students Entering Before 2023**

## **Course Requirements**

The department requires a minimum total of 60 credits of coursework. At least 45 credits must be in political science (with exceptions for dual-title students, noted below). Students also are required to complete the mandatory courses (PLSC 501, 502, 503, 511, 513 and at least two proseminars) before their oral comprehensive exams.

### **Major and Minor Requirements**

All students in the Political Science Ph.D. program must complete coursework in a major field as well as *either* completing coursework in a political science minor field (the “first minor”) *or* in a dual-title program. Students should consult with their advisor about their selection of fields. Major and first minor fields may be selected from the following: American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, and Political Methodology. Political Methodology may not be used as a major field if the student chooses to pursue a dual-title Ph.D. in Political Science and Social Data Analytics.

Students must take the proseminar in their major and first minor (if applicable) field. The proseminars offered in the political science department are PLSC 504 (Political Methodology), PLSC 540 (American Politics), PLSC 550 (Comparative Politics), and PLSC 560 (International Relations).

The department requires each student complete a minimum of 15 credits of course work in their major field, and nine credits in their minor fields. Credits earned in the proseminar may apply toward this requirement. Only courses beyond the 501-502-503 sequence can count toward a major or minor field in Political Methodology.

When a graduate research seminar is cross listed within the department in two different subfields (e.g., a course is offered for credit in either American or comparative politics), students must decide when they register in which subfield credit is to be assigned. Once a subfield is selected for the credit to be assigned, a student’s seminar research project must be in that same subfield (i.e., if a cross-listed course is taken for credit in comparative politics, any research project completed in that class must be in comparative politics). Assignment of credit should be consistent with the student’s areas of specialization and program of study. Assignment of credit must be approved by the course instructor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Second minors, i.e., “third fields,” are fields defined by the student and that are relevant to the student’s academic interests. The third field may be one of the program’s existing fields, or it may be comprised of courses from a range of fields or academic disciplines. Three courses are sufficient to meet this third-field requirement. The coherence and relevance of those three courses should be established to the student’s committee’s satisfaction, however “third field” courses may not double-count with a student’s major, minor, or dual-title degree requirements.

### **Methodology Core Requirement**

Students must complete PLSC 501 (Methods of Political Analysis), PLSC 502 (Statistical Methods for Political Research), and PLSC 503 (Multivariate Analysis for Political Research), generally in the first year of the program. There are no exceptions.

### **Professional Development**

Students are required to complete two, 1.5 credit professional development seminars and complete the

University's Scholarship and Research Integrity (SARI) requirement. The first of these seminars is taken in the student's first year (Professional Norms in Political Science) and includes completion of online Collaborative IRB Training Initiative programs and additional training in issues of scholarship and research integrity. The second professional development course (PLSC 513: Writing and Professional Development in Political Science) is taken in the student's second year of the program. These three credits are Pass/Fail and do count towards the student's required 60 credits of coursework for the Ph.D.

### **Dual Title Programs**

The department offers dual-title Ph.Ds with African American and Diaspora Studies, African Studies, Asian Studies, Social Data Analytics, and Women's Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Students should consult the *Graduate Bulletin* (<https://bulletins.psu.edu/graduate/programs/majors/political-science/#dualtitlestext>) for specific requirements for each dual-title degree. Students are encouraged to reach out to the Director of Graduate Studies in their dual-title program of interest early in their graduate career to assist with course selection and admission into the dual-title program.

### **Internships and ICPSR**

Students are permitted to take a maximum of 12 credits of coursework in internships (PLSC 595 and 596). PLSC 596 credits taken for attending ICPSR will not count against the 12-credit maximum.

### **Doctoral Committee**

Within one calendar year of having passed the Qualifying Exam, each student is required to have constructed a Doctoral Committee (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-602-phd-committee-formation/>) to provide advice leading to a successful dissertation. Typically, one member of the department's graduate faculty is selected to serve as the primary doctoral advisor. In some cases, it is possible to arrange for two members of the department's graduate faculty to serve as co-advisors. The doctoral committee consists of at least three members of the Department of Political Science and at least one member from another department (the outside member). The doctoral advisor must be in the student's major field. For students in dual-degree programs, the doctoral committee must include at least one member who is affiliated faculty in each of the student's dual majors. A committee member with a joint or affiliate appointment in both programs may count as both a political science advisor and a dual degree advisor. In cases where the most appropriate advisor is a faculty member who is not tenured, a co-advisor arrangement may be permitted subject to approval by the Director of Graduate Studies or the department head.

### **Written Comprehensive Examination**

Students must pass written comprehensive examinations in (a) their major and (b) first minor field or dual-title field (as applicable). Additionally, the student must also submit a portfolio of work from courses comprising the second minor (known as the third field portfolio).

### **Comprehensive Exam Tracks**

Student may choose to write a dissertation prospectus prior to taking the written comprehensive exams (the "Prospectus Track" or "Track I") or choose not to do so (the "Exam Track" or "Track II").<sup>1</sup> Under

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this document, a "prospectus" is written by a student under the Prospectus Track and submitted to their dissertation committee. The style and length of an acceptable dissertation prospectus varies. Generally, a 15-20 page prospectus is expected, but a doctoral committee may request a longer and more detailed document. The prospectus at this stage is intended: 1) to permit the committee to judge the student's ability to undertake a dissertation in political science; 2) to determine whether the proposed dissertation topic is promising; and 3) to

the Prospectus Track, a student will submit a prospectus to the departmental members of their dissertation committee **no later than** two months prior to the scheduled major field written comprehensive exam for approval. The committee within two weeks of that submission must approve or reject the prospectus. An affirmative vote by a majority of the committee is required for approval of the prospectus; the committee chair must be included in that majority. If the prospectus is approved, the student may opt out of the afternoon portion of the major field written comprehensive examination in political science.

If the prospectus is not approved, the student must take the morning and afternoon portions of the major field written comprehensive exam. A student whose prospectus is not approved cannot delay taking their written comprehensive exam while revising their prospectus in hopes of trying again.

A student wishing to pursue the Prospectus Track is required to get their advisor's written approval by the end of the second week of the semester in which the prospectus will be submitted.

### **Timing and Format**

The written comprehensive examination should be scheduled within the third year of study in order to provide students with timely assessment of their ability to complete their dissertation, but it must be scheduled no later than five years following the passing of the qualifying examination. The written comprehensive examination requires the student to demonstrate mastery of critical literature and key debates in the field, to summarize and synthesize arguments across the literature, to apply their knowledge of the literature to answer questions about the state of the discipline, and to identify gaps in and directions for further research.

Written comprehensive exams are offered two times each year, in January and in May. Under special circumstances and in consultation with their advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies, students may also receive permission to take exams in August. Students should plan to take their comprehensive exams as soon as they are ready, as determined in consultation with their advisors. Students entering Penn State with a bachelor's degree or master's degree in political science should take exams in January of their third year; the exam also could be taken in May after completion of the third year of study.

At the time that the written comprehensive examination is administered a student must have a minimum graduate GPA of 3.00 (at Penn State) and have no deferred grades.

The major field examination will be a full day exam, while the minor field exam is typically half a day. *Exceptions:* 1) students in dual degree programs take a full day exam in their dual major, with the exception of students with a dual major in Social Data Analytics, who will take a half-day exam in that field; 2) students taking the political methodology qualifying exam as their major field will also give an oral presentation on an advanced methods topic; and 3) a student who has had a prospectus accepted

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demonstrate mastery of the literature relevant to the proposed research.

The "proposal" is written by all students, regardless of the track chosen, and submitted to the doctoral committee prior to the oral comprehensive exam. The amount of specificity in a proposal will vary from case to case and ultimately will depend on the judgment of the doctoral advisor and doctoral committee. In some cases, the doctoral advisor will urge the committee to approve a short, general proposal that permits the student wide latitude in exploratory research. In others, the committee may desire a very specific plan before encouraging a student to invest time and effort in field research, data collection, or analysis. Given this wide range of expectations, students are advised to maintain frequent communication with their primary doctoral advisors as the dissertation idea evolves.

Generally, it is expected that a student pursuing the Prospectus Track will incorporate much of the prospectus into the proposal. The prospectus is intended to provide a foundation for the proposal and to facilitate the proposal's rapid development and completion.

under the Prospectus Track need not take the afternoon session of the major field exam in political science.

Major and minor field examinations typically are administered approximately five days apart.

### **Grading Written Comprehensive Exams**

The written comprehensive examination questions for each field are written and graded by two or more subfield examiners appointed by the department head. In the case of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies minor qualifying exam, at least one examiner each will be appointed by the political science department head and one by the WGSS program head.

Each examiner gives a grade of "Pass," or "Fail" to the written examination. To pass, both examiners must give a grade of "Pass." In cases where there are more than two examiners, at least two-thirds must vote to pass. If the examiners are unable to agree about whether an exam is a "pass" or a "fail," the Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the Department Head, will appoint an ad hoc committee of supplemental readers who will provide the DGS with an up-or-down "pass" or "fail" evaluation of the exam as a whole. The majority vote of this ad hoc committee will constitute the result of the exam.

Students may review past written comprehensive exam questions. These questions are available from the Graduate Staff Coordinator.

Students who fail their major and/or minor comprehensive examinations may petition the Director of Graduate Studies for permission to re-take the examination(s) at the next regularly scheduled administration. Under no circumstances will a third attempt be permitted.

A student who has failed the written comprehensive exam must retake the exam in the same format. That is, a failed exam taken in the Exam Track must be retaken under the Exam Track format; a failed Prospectus Track exam must be taken under the Prospectus Track exam format.

### **Oral Comprehensive Examination**

The oral comprehensive examination is administered by the doctoral committee. The examination focuses on the dissertation proposal (see below), as well as the student's preparation to undertake dissertation research as evidenced by the student's written comprehensive examinations, third field portfolio, course preparation, research experience, and overall record of performance in the program.

#### **Format**

Students are responsible for arranging a date and time for the oral comprehensive examination with their committee, and for providing this information to the Graduate Staff Coordinator *at least three weeks prior to the oral exam*. The three-week window is needed to process and submit the appropriate forms to The Fox Graduate School.

At the time that the oral comprehensive examination is administered a student must:

- satisfy the English competency requirement
- satisfy the Department's foreign language/research skill proficiency requirement and
- register as a full-time or part-time student.

The doctoral committee grades the student's oral comprehensive examination performance using the scale "Superior," "Above Average," "Average," "Below Average," or "Fail." In order to pass the exam, two-

thirds of the committee must provide grades of “below average” or higher. In cases where a student fails an exam and the failure is due to a specific weakness in preparation, the doctoral committee shall explain this in a memo to the Director of Graduate Studies and propose a timetable for the student to address this weakness and retake the oral comprehensive examination.

Passage of the comprehensive examination denotes advancement to ABD (all but dissertation) status.

### **Timing**

***The oral comprehensive exam must follow the written comprehensive exam within the same semester.***

Students are encouraged to complete the oral comprehensive exam as soon as possible after passing the written comprehensive exam. The oral comprehensive exam must be completed no later than the end of the semester in which the written exam was completed. Thus, students taking the written comprehensive exam in May must check with each member of their doctoral committee in advance to ensure that all members will be in town during an appropriate period in the summer.

### **Mode**

The oral comprehensive examination may be held fully in-person, fully remote, or hybrid with some individuals participating in-person while others participate remotely.

Student preference for delivery mode should be strongly considered, but the student and advisor must agree on the mode. If the student and advisor cannot agree on the mode, the Director of Graduate Studies will make the final decision. Either the student or advisor can appeal the decision of the Director of Graduate Studies to the Department Head.

## **Dissertation Proposal**

At the oral comprehensive examination, students will also present and defend their dissertation proposal. Within six months of the oral comprehensive exam the student must submit to the Director of Graduate Studies a signed approved by the members of the student’s doctoral committee of the dissertation proposal. In some cases, the initial proposal presented at the oral comprehensive examination will be approved and satisfy this requirement. In other cases, however, the doctoral committee will require a revised proposal to contain more detail about the conduct of the dissertation research.

As some superior dissertations require more time to formulate than others, the six-month period may be extended by the Director of Graduate Studies upon request by the student’s doctoral advisor. This request must describe the student’s progress to date and an anticipated timetable for submitting an approved proposal.

In some (perhaps most) cases, the doctoral advisor may request that the committee reconvene for a formal oral defense of a revised proposal.

The proposal requirement must be met for the student to be in good academic standing and eligible for departmental financial assistance, teaching assignments, or use of the placement service.

## **Dissertation and Final Oral Defense**

The dissertation must meet at least two minimal requirements. First, it must represent an original contribution to our knowledge and understanding of politics. Second, it must be sufficiently ambitious to demonstrate the candidate’s ability to undertake and competently complete original and independent research projects after completing the degree.

**Timing**

The final oral defense is administered by the doctoral committee. Students are responsible for arranging a date and time for the final oral defense with their committee, and for providing this information to the Graduate Staff Coordinator *at least three weeks prior to the defense*. The three-week window is needed to process and submit the appropriate forms to The Fox Graduate School.

The Graduate Staff Coordinator will announce each student's oral defense to members of the department. The defense is open to the public and anyone may attend. The defense will start with a presentation by the student about their dissertation research. This will be followed by a question-and-answer session with audience members. After a decent interval (determined by the dissertation advisor), the audience will be excused, and the dissertation committee will question the student about the dissertation.

If six years elapse between passing the oral comprehensive examination and completion of the degree program, the student must re-take and pass an eight-hour written comprehensive exam and another oral comprehensive examination in the student's major field before the final oral defense of the dissertation will be scheduled.

**Mode**

The final oral examination (dissertation defense) may be held fully in-person or with partial remote participation. The student, advisor, and Committee Chair/Co-Chairs should generally be physically present for the examination. If necessary, other members of the committee may participate remotely with the agreement of the student and advisor.

If the student, advisor, and/or committee chair/co-chair is not able to participate in-person due to extenuating circumstances, the Director of Graduate Studies may approve at their discretion the remote participation of one or more individuals or approve a fully remote examination. If the Director of Graduate Studies does not approve the request for remote participation, either the student or advisor may appeal to the Department Head.

# **The Ph.D. Degree: Students Entering in 2023 or After**

## **Course Requirements**

The department requires a minimum total of 60 credits of coursework. At least 45 credits of work must be in political science. Students also must complete the designated required courses (PLSC 501, 502, 503, 511, 513 and the proseminars in their chosen fields of study) before taking their oral comprehensive exams.

### **Seminar Course Requirements**

Students should select their courses in consultation with their advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Students who are not pursuing a dual-title Ph.D. must take at least 24 credits in political science coursework beyond the required courses (501, 502, 503, 511, and 513). At least six credits must come from proseminars: PLSC 504 (Political Methodology), PLSC 540 (American Politics), PLSC 550 (Comparative Politics), and PLSC 560 (International Relations).

Students who are pursuing a dual-title Ph.D. must take at least 15 credits in political science coursework beyond the required courses (501, 502, 503, 511, and 513). At least three credits must come from proseminars: PLSC 504 (Political Methodology), PLSC 540 (American Politics), PLSC 550 (Comparative Politics), and PLSC 560 (International Relations). A student who pursues a dual-title in a SoDA may not count any political methodology seminars toward this 15-credit requirement and cannot count 504 for their proseminar course requirement.

### **Methodology Course Requirements**

Students must complete PLSC 501 (Methods of Political Analysis), PLSC 502 (Statistical Methods for Political Research), and PLSC 503 (Multivariate Analysis for Political Research), generally in the first year of the program.

### **Professional Development**

Students are required to complete two 1.5 credit professional development seminars. The first of these seminars is generally taken in the fall of the student's first year (Professional Norms in Political Science) and includes completion of online Collaborative IRB Training Initiative programs and additional training in issues of scholarship and research integrity. Students must complete other SARI requirements on their own. The second professional development course is taken in the student's second year of the program (Writing and Professional Development in Political Science).

### **Elective Course Requirement**

In addition to all of the course requirements listed above, students must take an additional 9 hours of elective credit in political science or another academic discipline. These elective courses generally may not be fulfilled through courses numbered 596 or 600; students taking courses outside of political science to fulfill this requirement should check with the Director of Graduate Studies to ensure their selected courses will satisfy this requirement. Additionally, these courses may not double-count with a student's major, minor, or dual-title degree requirements.

### **Dual Title Programs**

The department offers dual-title Ph.Ds with African American and Diaspora Studies, African Studies, Asian Studies, Social Data Analytics, and Women's Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Students should consult the *Graduate Bulletin* (<https://bulletins.psu.edu/graduate/programs/majors/political->



[science/#dualtitletext](#)) for specific requirements for each dual-title degree. Students are encouraged to reach out to the Director of Graduate Studies in their dual-title program of interest early in their graduate career to assist with course selection and admission into the dual-title program.

### **Internships and ICPSR**

Students are permitted to take a maximum of 12 credits of coursework in internships (PLSC 595 and 596). 596 credits taken for attending ICPSR will not count against the 12-credit maximum.

## **Ph.D. Qualifying Examination**

The qualifying exam in political science has two parts. First, prior to the beginning of the second year, students will sit for a written exam. Second, students will meet with an advisory committee in the fall of their second year for an oral exam. Students must pass both the oral and written qualifying examinations to advance to candidacy.

### **Written Qualifying Exam**

This is a 4-hour exam covering material from the required first-year courses: PLSC 501, 502, and 503. The exam will be written by a committee of faculty and graded by that committee with anonymized versions of the written exams.

Each examiner gives a grade of “Superior,” “Above Average,” “Pass,” or “Fail” to the written examination. To pass, a majority of examiners must give a grade of “Pass” or higher. Students who fail their written qualifying examinations may petition the Director of Graduate Studies for permission to re-take the examination. Under no circumstances will a third attempt be permitted. If permission to re-take the exam is granted, the written qualifying exam will be re-taken at the beginning of the spring semester in January.

### **Oral Qualifying Exam**

Each student must sit for an oral qualifying exam during the fall semester of their second year in the program. This exam takes the form of a meeting with the student’s advisor and two other faculty members. This session has two main objectives. First, the session offers the advisory committee an opportunity to assess a student’s initial progress in the program, to provide feedback on that student’s progress, and to work with them to plan a future course of study. Second (and relatedly), it is the occasion for the student’s committee to formally recommend whether the student should be admitted to doctoral candidacy.

The outcome of the oral qualifying exam is either pass, fail, or decision deferred. If a student passes, they are officially a candidate for the Ph.D. A failure in the oral qualifying exam reflects the examining committee’s view that the student should not continue to pursue a Ph.D. at Penn State. A deferred decision means that the committee is uncertain about whether the student is a promising candidate for the Ph.D. If the decision is deferred, the committee will indicate a time for reassessment (see below). In the event the student has failed the written qualifying exam, the oral qualifying exam will still be held, but the decision will be deferred pending any re-taken exam results the following January. If the written qualifying exam is retaken, the oral qualifying exam committee will again meet with the student after the re-taken exam results are available, and a final decision of pass or fail will be reached.

### ***Advisory Committee***

The advisory committee must consist of three members of the department faculty: the student’s advisor, a faculty member of the student’s choosing with whom the student has taken (or is taking) a class, and a member of the Graduate Studies Committee. Students in dual-title degree programs must include a member of the dual-title program on the advisory committee. This person could be a fourth committee

member or one of the three departmental committee members could “double” as the dual-title member.

### ***Mode***

The oral qualifying examination may be held fully in-person, fully remote, or hybrid with some individuals participating in-person while others participate remotely.

Student preference for delivery mode should be strongly considered, but the student and advisor must agree on the mode. If the student and advisor cannot agree on the mode, the Director of Graduate Studies will make the final decision. Either the student or advisor can appeal the decision of the Director of Graduate Studies to the Department Head.

### ***Format***

Students should discuss with their advisor both the materials they are preparing for the session, and the format of the session. A memo regarding qualifying exams will be distributed to students and faculty in early fall.

As noted above, the session has two objectives. One of these objectives is to give students’ committees a chance to assess their initial progress in the program, to provide feedback on their progress, and to work with students to plan a future course of study. The materials in a student’s file, as well as the materials a student circulates to their committee will provide the basis for this assessment and discussion. Students should be prepared to discuss: their first two and a half semesters in the graduate program; their ideas about research interests and plans; the course work students plan to undertake in order to write and complete both a master’s essay and dissertation; a proposal for their master’s thesis and/or eventual dissertation research; students’ summer plans; and any other topics students feel it is important to discuss. Students should also come to the session with questions about their program of study.

The second objective is to assess a student’s qualifications to pursue the PhD. In addition to the results of the written qualifying exam, a student’s record and the ensuing discussion of it in the advising session, serves as the basis for the advising committee’s assessment of a student’s likelihood of success in the Ph.D. program, and thus their suitability for continuation in the program. If the committee determines that a student is doing well in the program, they will be admitted formally to doctoral candidacy. If a student has had significant problems – for instance, with course work or with GA responsibilities – the advisory committee may recommend steps a student can take to address these problems in the short term. The advisory committee may follow up on any deficiencies discussed in the session by requiring a second assessment session at a later date (in which case the oral qualifying exam decision is deferred). In the case of serious deficiencies or problems, the committee may recommend that a student complete a terminal master’s degree, or that a student leave the program at the end of the semester (under either of these circumstances, a student would obviously not be formally admitted to the PhD program).

*A decision to pass* means the student shows promise for completing the Ph.D. at Penn State. Students who pass the qualifying exam will have positive seminar evaluations, they will have done well in their courses, and they will be able to articulate a relatively clear research topic or area of interest.

*A decision to fail* reflects the examining committee’s view that the student should not continue to pursue a Ph.D. at Penn State. Students who fail the qualifying exam include those who are struggling in their courses, show insufficient motivation in seminars, and/or cannot articulate research interests. Students who fail the qualifying exam may continue in the program to complete their master’s degree.

*The decision is likely to be deferred* if the committee is uncertain about whether the student is a promising candidate for the Ph.D. If the decision is deferred, the committee will provide a clear statement of what the student will need to accomplish to demonstrate adequate progress and fitness to pass the exam. The

committee also must indicate a time for reassessment. Any reassessment should be completed prior to the end of the third semester of coursework (not including summer session). Advisors will prepare a written summary of the advising committee's recommendations. The summary will be added to each student's file.

### **Doctoral Committee**

Within one calendar year of having passed the oral qualifying exam, each student is required to have constructed a Doctoral Committee (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-602-phd-committee-formation/>) to provide advice leading to a successful dissertation. Typically, one member of the department's graduate faculty is selected to serve as the primary doctoral advisor. In some cases, it is possible to arrange for two members of the department's graduate faculty to serve as co-advisors. The doctoral committee consists of at least three members of the Department of Political Science and at least one member from another department (the outside member). The doctoral advisor must be in the student's major field. For students in dual-degree programs, the doctoral committee must include at least two members who are affiliated faculty in their dual major. In some cases, a person with a joint or affiliate appointment in both programs may count as both a political science advisor and a dual degree advisor. In cases where the most appropriate advisor is a faculty member who is untenured, a co-advisor arrangement may be permitted subject to approval by the Director of Graduate Studies or the department head.

### **Third Year Project/Written Comprehensive Exam**

The Fox Graduate School requires that all PhD students successfully pass a written comprehensive exam. Formerly the political science department used a written examination requiring students to answer questions about the literature in political science, with the exam created and graded by a committee of faculty. Starting in the 2025-2026 academic year we are substituting a "third year project" as the written comprehensive exam. To be clear, the third year project serves as the written comprehensive exam, so the two terms can be used interchangeably. Since doing so is confusing, for the rest of this document only the term third year project will be used.

At the second-year annual evaluation meeting, one of the main topics of discussion will be ideas the student has for their third year project. At this point the student will have completed nearly four semesters of graduate studies, should be done or nearly done with their MA thesis, and will thus have many research ideas and a good sense of the area within which their dissertation project will be undertaken. The reason we switched from a traditional exam to a project is to allow students another opportunity to develop ambitious research projects to fill out their research portfolio.

### **Third Year Project Formats**

Third year projects can be completed in one of three formats.

#### ***Research Format***

Students completing their 3<sup>rd</sup> year project via the research format will produce a high-quality research article. If this format looks like another Master's thesis, that is intentional. While students are discouraged from pursuing a mere re-write of their MA thesis as their 3<sup>rd</sup> year project, it is likely that while undertaking their MA research students will encounter some anomaly in their findings, or some implication of their research that suggests a follow up study. Alternatively, 3<sup>rd</sup> year projects in the research format could be entirely original and have no connection to the student's MA thesis. The goal here is

another high-quality research project that is well conceived, rigorously executed, and offers an important contribution to what we know about political science.

Some students might write an article expanding research opportunities rather than developing and testing propositions. That is, they might develop a new methods technique, devise new software, or collect an innovative dataset that adds to the infrastructure of political science research. Success in this version of the research format will require producing a paper introducing and describing the new technique, software, or dataset. Articles introducing such innovations are frequently published in a variety of journals. Having a project included in referred conference proceedings is another acceptable publication target within this format.

This format will likely be attractive to students interested in an academic career at an R1 or in a career in the public/private sector prioritizing their skills as a researcher. In many cases it will be desirable for a student writing a three-article dissertation to produce a first version of one article in their MA thesis and similarly produce a first version of a second article in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year project. Having two advanced drafts at the start of their time dissertating will allow students to be ambitious in planning their overall dissertation.

### ***Pedagogy Format***

Students completing their 3<sup>rd</sup> year project via the pedagogy format will build credibility as a course designer and instructor. For this reason, the students most likely to pursue this format are those hoping to secure a job at a liberal arts/teaching college. The end result of this version of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year project will be a fully designed course (syllabus, lectures, assessments) students will teach during their 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year in the program. In addition to fully designing (and eventually teaching) their own course, students will enhance their teaching portfolio by being certified as having taken the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence's Instructional Foundation Series. Students interested in a career focused on teaching should also plan to take the Schreyer Institute's Course in College Teaching and earn their Penn State CIRTTL Teaching Certificate. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> year project at least one of these accreditations is required. Further, students must produce a written statement explaining the choices they made in designing their course. "I chose these assigned readings because...I ordered the topics the way I did because...I chose to assess student learning the way I have because..." This narrative statement can later be revised into the teaching statement all students seeking a faculty position include in their application portfolio. Because it is often hard for us to schedule PLSC 497 classes with sufficient enrollment, students pursuing this 3<sup>rd</sup> year project format will design a version of one of our existing already-numbered classes. The expectation is that students will be offering a great deal of original course content and thus will not be making only minor changes to an existing version of one of these courses. It goes without saying that designing a course in the general topic area as the student's dissertation is a good way to maximize return on their time investment. Finally, if there is any way for a student to leverage what they learn while designing and eventually teaching their course into an article for a pedagogy journal (*Journal of Political Science Education*, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, etc.), that will add considerable bling to their portfolio for teaching positions.

By getting a head start on the pedagogical aspects of a teaching career, students pursuing this format will burnish their bona fides as educators, and have important material to showcase in their teaching portfolio. Again, it is expected students pursuing this format will desire careers at teaching schools.

### ***Alternate Format***

Since the goal of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year projects is to help students enhance their chances on their preferred version of the job market, we leave open the possibility that a student might have a good idea for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year project that does not easily fit within either the research or pedagogy formats. Students interested in doing something different should coordinate with their advisor, speak to the DGS, and propose a plan of their own. Because approval of an alternate format 3<sup>rd</sup> year project is not guaranteed, students devising such should also have a traditional format 3<sup>rd</sup> year project in mind as a Plan B.

### **Timing**

Third year projects are due in late March. By a specific date in March (announced the previous fall), each student will prepare and display a poster describing their 3<sup>rd</sup> year project at a time and place arranged for all posters to be displayed. All faculty and graduate students are encouraged to visit this session and ask questions about students' 3<sup>rd</sup> year projects. Additionally, simultaneously with the poster presentations, students will provide their doctoral committees the paper prepared as their third year project. Students pursuing the pedagogy format will submit their syllabus, assessments, lecture slides, and written statement explaining why they designed their course the way they did. To be clear, students have successfully completed their third year project when they present their poster and provide the appropriate material about their third year project to their doctoral committee.

Not participating in the poster session will mean the student is not making adequate progress toward their degree. Excuses will be accepted for mitigating circumstances. In such instances, the student, their advisor, and the director of graduate studies will meet to discuss how to get the student back on track.

At the time the third year project/written comprehensive examination is completed a student must have a minimum graduate GPA of 3.00 and have no deferred grades. If the student's GPA is too low, or there are outstanding deferred grades, the student cannot complete their third year project on time. While this does not mean the student cannot continue in the program, it does mean they are not in good academic standing, and that condition can affect funding decisions.

### **Oral Comprehensive Examination**

The oral comprehensive examination is administered by the doctoral committee. The examination focuses on the third year project and the dissertation proposal (see below), as well as the student's preparation to undertake dissertation research as evidenced by the student's course preparation, research experience, and overall record of performance in the program.

Students are responsible for arranging a date and time for the oral examination with their committee, and for providing this information to the Graduate Staff Coordinator *at least three weeks prior to the oral exam*. The three-week window is needed to process and submit the appropriate forms to The Fox Graduate School.

At the time that the oral comprehensive examination is administered a student must:

- satisfy the English competency requirement
- satisfy the Department's foreign language/research skill proficiency requirement and
- be registered as a full-time or part-time student.

In the oral comprehensive exam the doctoral committee grades the student's third year project using the scale "Superior," "Above Average," "Average," "Below Average," or "Fail." In order to pass the exam, two-thirds of the committee must provide grades of "below average" or higher. In cases where a student fails an exam and the failure is due to a specific weakness in preparation, the doctoral committee shall explain this in a memo to the Director of Graduate Studies and propose a timetable for the student to address this weakness and retake the oral comprehensive examination. If the student fails to pass the oral comprehensive exam on the second attempt, they will not be permitted to try again. Thus, a second failed oral comprehensive exam will terminate the student's enrollment in the graduate program.

Passage of the comprehensive examination denotes advancement to ABD (all but dissertation) status.

### **Timing**

The oral comprehensive exam must be completed no later than the end of the semester in which the Third Year Project was completed. Students unable to complete their oral comprehensive exam by the end of their sixth semester in the program must consult with their advisor and the director of graduate studies about when they will satisfy this requirement.

### **Mode**

The oral comprehensive examination may be held fully in-person, fully remote, or hybrid with some individuals participating in-person while others participate remotely.

Student preference for delivery mode should be strongly considered, but the student and advisor must agree on the mode. If the student and advisor cannot agree on the mode, the Director of Graduate Studies will make the final decision. Either the student or advisor can appeal the decision of the Director of Graduate Studies to the Department Head.

## **Dissertation Proposal**

In addition to assessing the student's third year project, at the oral comprehensive exam the student will also defend their dissertation proposal. In some cases, the proposal will be approved by the doctoral committee at the oral comprehensive exam. In other cases, however, the doctoral committee will require a revised proposal to contain more detail about the conduct of the dissertation research before being approved as the dissertation proposal. Within six months of passing the oral comprehensive examination, a student must submit to the Director of Graduate Studies a proposal approved by the members of the student's doctoral committee.

As some superior dissertations require more time to formulate than others, the six-month period may be extended by the Director of Graduate Studies upon written request by the student's doctoral advisor. This request must describe the student's progress to date and an anticipated timetable for submitting an approved proposal.

In some (perhaps most) cases, the doctoral advisor may request that the committee reconvene for a formal oral defense of a revised proposal.

The proposal requirement must be met for the student to be in good academic standing and eligible for departmental financial assistance, teaching assignments, or use of the placement service.

## **Dissertation and Final Oral Defense**

The dissertation must meet at least two minimal requirements. First, it must represent an original contribution to our knowledge and understanding of politics. Second, it must be sufficiently ambitious to demonstrate the candidate's ability to undertake and competently complete original and independent research projects after completing the degree.

### **Timing**

The final oral defense is administered by the doctoral committee. Students are responsible for arranging a date and time for the final oral defense with their committee, and for providing this information to the Graduate Staff Coordinator *at least three weeks prior to the defense*. The three-week window is needed to process and submit the appropriate forms to The Fox Graduate School.

The Graduate Staff Coordinator will announce each student's oral defense to members of the department. The defense is open to the public and anyone may attend. Requirements for the dissertation are noted in

the *Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin* (online at <https://bulletins.psu.edu/graduate/>).

If six years elapse between passing the oral comprehensive examination and completion of the degree program, the student must take and pass additional written and oral comprehensive examinations before the final oral defense of the dissertation will be scheduled. The additional written comprehensive examination will be an eight hour essay examination about the literature in the student's primary field of research. That is, if six years elapse between the previous oral comprehensive examination and the completion of the degree program, that student must pass an old-style written comprehensive exam, after which they must meet with their doctoral committee for a second oral comprehensive exam. If they are successful in these re-taken examinations, they may defend their dissertation and complete the program.

### **Mode**

The final oral examination (dissertation defense) may be held fully in-person or with partial remote participation. The student, advisor, and Committee Chair/Co-Chairs should generally be physically present for the examination. If necessary, other members of the committee may participate remotely with the agreement of the student and advisor.

If the student, advisor, and/or committee chair/co-chair is not able to participate in-person due to extenuating circumstances, the Director of Graduate Studies may approve the remote participation of one or more individuals or approve a fully remote examination. If the Director of Graduate Studies does not approve the request for remote participation, either the student or advisor may appeal to the Department Head.

## **Advising, Coursework, and Registration**

### **Selecting and Changing Advisors**

A student's first year advisor is selected by the Director of Graduate Studies prior to the start of classes. Students should remain in frequent contact with their advisors regarding fields of study, course selection, timing of examinations, and the completion of degree requirements.

Throughout their tenure in the program, the choice of advisor is up to the student and may be changed by the student at any time (normally after consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies). Once a student begins to work on their master's thesis, the thesis advisor typically replaces the initial academic advisor. Similarly, as a student begins to draft a dissertation proposal, the faculty member(s) who will (or are expected to) advise the dissertation and chair the doctoral committee becomes the student's advisor. This advisor should be selected by the time the student defends the dissertation proposal as part of their oral comprehensive exam.

To change advisors, students submit to the Graduate Staff Coordinator a form indicating a change in their advisor. Every student must have an advisor who has a budgeted appointment in the Department of Political Science, though that person need not be that student's sole advisor.

Advisor changes that occur any time before a student passes their oral comprehensive exam and advances to ABD (all but dissertation) status need only be submitted to the Graduate Staff Coordinator using the department form. Once students are ABD, any changes to their advisor or doctoral committee require the submission of a form to The Fox Graduate School. Students should contact the Graduate Staff Coordinator to initiate the submission of this form.

## **Annual Advising Session**

All students must arrange a meeting with their advisory committees each year in March or early April. For all students, the advising committee is comprised of the student's primary advisor and at least one other faculty member (if second year or beyond the additional faculty member should be from their MA or PhD committees). The advising meeting is used to review student performance (particularly in the past year), to gauge student progress toward an MA or PhD, and to discuss students' plans for the upcoming summer and subsequent academic year.

Advisors will draft a written summary of the advising session and submit it to the Graduate Studies Committee prior to the annual meeting in which GSC discusses graduate students. Advisors may be asked to modify the advising summary based on the discussion in the GSC meeting. The summary will then be added to the student's file (and available to the student) after the GSC meeting. If appropriate, advisors will be asked to meet again with students who are having difficulty.

The annual advising session may be held fully in-person, fully remote, or hybrid with some individuals participating in-person while others participate remotely. Student preference for delivery mode should be strongly considered, but the student and advisor must agree on the mode. If the student and advisor cannot agree on the mode, the Director of Graduate Studies will make the final decision. Either the student or advisor can appeal the decision of the Director of Graduate Studies to the Department Head.

## **Course Selection and Course Load**

Courses for the first semester in the program will be selected in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies during or prior to an initial advising session that occurs prior to the start of fall semester classes. A student's advisor should be consulted prior to all subsequent course registration.

All graduate students in the political science department are required to take at least nine credits per fall and spring semester until they have completed the course credit requirements for a Ph.D. (or a master's degree if they are leaving the program after receiving a master's degree). Nine credits are necessary to maintain full time status, which is a necessary condition for receipt of a graduate assistantship.

The Fox Graduate School requires students receiving assistantships to register for no more than 12 credits per semester. Students may apply for one credit beyond this limit, provided they have the approval of their academic advisor and the department head. Course overload is routinely checked by the Fox Graduate School and a satisfactory explanation is required for any violation. Students who have successfully passed their oral comprehensive exams may register for 3 credits (as an auditor only) in addition to signing up for the appropriate 601 course hours. Students wishing to take an additional course for credit must apply to the department for approval to do so. The Fox Graduate School does not allow students with ABD status to register for more than 3 additional credits.

The Fox Graduate School requires students to have a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better to graduate. However, the department generally expects students to maintain a grade point average of 3.4 or better to be considered in good standing for receiving graduate assistantships.

## **Speech Communication and Writing Courses**



The Fox Graduate School requires that the department evaluate each student's English competency in speaking and writing. Spoken and written proficiency in English is made on the basis of oral presentations and written assignments in all graduate seminars. Students whose spoken and written English is judged unsatisfactory are required to enroll in a speaking course in a summer session or upcoming fall. These courses fill up quickly and students will need to consult with their advisor and the director of graduate studies. Students will need to inform the Graduate Staff Coordinator if planning to enroll in the course. After satisfactorily completing the required course, students will make a formal presentation (oral or written, depending upon the deficiency) to their advisor early in the fall semester (or early spring if the course is taken in the fall). Students who fail to receive a satisfactory rating from their advisors may not continue in the program.

In addition, all international graduate students who have been offered assistantships must take and pass an oral language proficiency test. Penn State's American English Oral Communicative Proficiency Test (AEOCPT) is administered at the beginning of each semester (January, June, and August), but students can only take the test once in a 12-month period. Students' test scores determine when they may assume teaching duties as a teaching assistant. Depending on the score, a student may be required to complete ESL 115G, ESL 117G, and/or ESL 118G before serving as a teaching assistant. See the Linguistics and Applied Language Studies website for additional information (<http://aplng.la.psu.edu/programs/about-the-aeocpt>)

### **Scholarship and Research Integrity (SARI) Requirements**

All graduate students in the College of Liberal Arts entering graduate programs on or after Fall 2009 are required to complete a unit on Scholarship and Research Integrity that is appropriate for their field of study prior to receiving a Master's or Ph.D. from Penn State. In the department of Political Science, the SARI requirement is fulfilled by a) successfully completing PLSC 511 (Professional Norms in Political Science) with a passing grade; b) attending at least one departmental brownbag on a SARI-related topic; c) attending at least one workshop sponsored by the Office of Research Protection (ORP) and d) receiving certification in the CITI On-Line course. Proof of completion of these requirements must be provided to the Graduate Staff Coordinator so that the department can certify a student's completion of the requirement to the Fox Graduate School.

Attendance will be taken at all departmental sponsored SARI brown bags. Students are responsible for providing proof of attendance at ORP sponsored workshops to the Graduate Staff Coordinator. No substitutions can be made for these two requirements without prior approval of the Director of Graduate Studies. Students must provide certification that they passed the CITI On-Line course in "Social and Behavioral Human Subjects Research" with a grade of 80% or better. Instructions for enrolling in the on-line courses are found here: <http://www.research.psu.edu/training/sari/citi>.

### **Special Course Registration**

Several courses graduate students may enroll in require assistance from the Graduate Staff Coordinator. These courses are:

PLSC 594: supervised research projects; to be taken for a non-quality grade of R during the summer.

PLSC 595: supervised off-campus internships.

PLSC 596: individual/independent study and non-thesis research; a specific title may be entered on a student's transcript if the 596 is arranged at least six weeks prior to the start of the semester in which the course is to be taken.

PLSC 599: graduate-level foreign study at an overseas institution.

PLSC 600: thesis credit; to be taken by students who are doing research on campus and who have *not* passed the oral comprehensive exam (students should register for a minimum of nine credits of PLSC 600). **Notes:** Students registered for PLSC 600 will not receive a “quality” grade (i.e., A, B, C, etc.). Rather, the symbol R will be used to indicate “that the student has devoted adequate effort to the work scheduled” (Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin, p. 42). R grades do not affect a student’s GPA.

PLSC 601: thesis credit; to be taken by students who are on campus, doing thesis work for the Ph.D., *who have passed* the oral comprehensive examination. Students registered for PLSC 601 may take up to three additional credits of course work for audit without formal approval by the department or college. Students may also take up to 3 credits for graded course credit after passing comprehensive exams, but this must be approved prior to registration by the Department and College of Liberal Arts. Enrolling in three credits either for audit or credit will be the maximum a student may take along with PLSC 601 without additional special approval by the Fox Graduate School.

PLSC 610: thesis credit; to be taken by students who are doing research off campus (students can maintain *continuous enrollment* while off campus with one credit of PLSC 610 but doing so does not constitute full-time status).

PLSC 611: thesis credit; to be taken by students who are engaged in part time thesis research, and who meet all the requirements for PLSC 601. Students who enroll in PLSC 611 may *not* register for other courses.

# Assistantships and Support for Students

## Graduate Assistantships

Assistantships are contracts to provide services to the department in the form of research or teaching assistance for which a stipend is received. A half-time assistantship (the typical assistantship awarded) provides students with a monthly stipend during the fall and spring semesters plus a grant-in-aid of resident education tuition in exchange for research and teaching assistance responsibilities that occupy approximately twenty hours per week. Students with assistantships schedule 9-12 credits of coursework each semester. A student's specific assistantship duties will be determined by the faculty member to whom that student has been assigned. See Appendix B "General Criteria for Awarding & Renewing Graduate Assistantships and Fellowships" for additional information.

Penn State is on a semester calendar system. The period of instruction each semester is fifteen weeks. ***Graduate assistants are appointed for eighteen weeks of activities each semester.*** Although assistantship responsibilities begin and end each semester, the academic year appointment (thirty-six weeks) begins on the Monday following the last day of Summer Session final exams and continues until the last day of exams for the spring semester, less the period of time classes are suspended at Thanksgiving, over the December holidays, and during Spring Break.

It is a general policy to assign graduate assistants largely scholarly tasks that will give them useful teaching and research experience in their fields of study. For the most part, research assistants are students supported by faculty with externally funded research projects or departmental funding. Continuation of a research assistantship depends on the quality of the work performed and the availability of funds. Students may also be assigned to teaching assistantships, helping instructors with undergraduate or graduate courses. Advanced students may also be assigned to be the sole instructor of an undergraduate course. Assistantship duties may also include tasks involved in conducting the work of the department (e.g., collecting data for departmental reports to the College). In making assignments effort is made to match student interests with available assistantships, but students may be assigned assistantships outside their areas of interest.

***A graduate assistant may not accept concurrent employment inside or outside the University unless special permission is obtained from the Director of Graduate Studies or department head.***

Assistantship stipends are paid monthly. For the fall semester, graduate assistants will be paid one fifth of the semester stipend at the end of August (if processed in time), and then monthly through December. For the spring semester, graduate assistants will receive one fifth of the semester stipend at the end of January (if processed in time), and then monthly through May.

Students can normally expect funding for five academic years so long as they maintain a strong academic record and make timely progress through the program. The department often provides funding for a sixth year, with preference given to students who have excelled academically; in some cases, preference will be shown to students highly qualified to meet specific department needs (e.g., teaching a course on a particular topic).

In addition to receiving a grant-in-aid of tuition during the period of appointment, a graduate student may be eligible for other forms of tuition assistance or loans.

## **Membership in the American Political Science Association (APSA)**

When graduate students are on the market the department will pay their membership dues for the American Political Science Association. As members, graduate students will receive the *American Political Science Review* (the discipline's leading journal), as well as *PS* (a journal providing information about the profession and the APSA) and *Perspectives on Politics* (a journal that publishes issue- or problem-focused research, as well as book reviews). Additionally, as members graduate students on the job markets will have access to job advertisements exclusive to the APSA.

## **Summer Tuition Assistance Program (STAP)**

This program, funded by The Fox Graduate School, provides tuition assistance to graduate students who have held assistantships or full fellowships for two consecutive semesters (Fall and Spring) so they can continue graduate studies during the summer. Students previously appointed as graduate assistants or fellows may enroll for a maximum of 9 credits during the summer. STAP funding is competitive and requires an application from eligible graduate students. The application can be found online (<https://secure.gradsch.psu.edu/stap/>). Students may submit an application beginning in February, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis. The College of the Liberal Arts receives limited STAP funds, therefore, **students seeking summer tuition assistance are advised to apply early.**

## **CIC Programs Available to Graduate Students**

Penn State is a member of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), an academic consortium of the Big Ten Universities, plus The University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. The CIC sponsors the Traveling Scholars Program which provides Ph.D. candidates and honors undergraduates the opportunity to study for a year at another CIC university. Supplemental support to attend CIC summer programs is available from the department (and sometimes from the University as well). In addition, the Course Share program allows students to enroll via distance learning in courses at other universities. Many less commonly taught languages can be studied in this way. You can contact the graduate office for more information.

## **Job Placement Assistance**

Placement assistance is available for students who are completing (or have completed) their Ph.D. In the months before the job search process begins, the Director of Graduate Placement works with students to help them prepare their job packet materials (e.g., curriculum vitae, cover letters, teaching portfolio), to arrange mock job interviews, and to develop and schedule practice job talks.

Additionally, the Department's placement service coordinates the transmission of confidential materials (e.g., letters of recommendation and transcripts) to hiring departments. Students are responsible for applying for jobs well before each job's deadline. When a student has applied for a job, they should notify the Graduate Staff Coordinator. The Graduate Staff Coordinator will provide these materials to the hiring department under separate cover. The Graduate Staff Coordinator should be given at least one week's notice to provide those materials to a hiring department.

## **Graduate Student Awards**

### **Outstanding Graduate Student Award**

The Outstanding Graduate Student Award within the Department of Political Science rewards continuing graduate students who have achieved an excellent record of performance in their graduate studies. In recognition of their achievements, funds are made available to students in the form of research accounts

to be spent at the student's discretion on educationally relevant expenses. All currently enrolled students are eligible and will be considered for this award by the graduate studies committee, though past winners are re-selected very rarely.

### **Friedman Teaching Award**

The Friedman Teaching Award within the Department of Political Science rewards an outstanding student instructor. In recognition of their achievement, funds are made available to the student in the form of a research account to be spent at the student's discretion on educationally relevant expenses. Students who have taught in the department in the past year are eligible and will be considered for this award by the graduate studies committee.

### **Best MA Essay Award**

The Best MA Essay Award within the Department of Political Science is awarded to one student each year. In recognition of their achievement, funds are made available to the student in the form of a research account to be spent at the student's discretion on educationally relevant expenses. The graduate studies committee selects the winning nominee after considering all MA theses successfully defended in the spring semester.

## **Support for Graduate Student Research**

### **Support to Attend Summer Programs**

All graduate students receive at least partial support to attend special summer programs for at least one summer (for the study of subjects crucial to the student's program of study, such as foreign languages or advanced statistics). Tuition is also covered for most programs at Big Ten/CIC universities.

### **Graduate Student Conference Travel Grant Program**

The Department of Political Science awards grants throughout the year to help fund students to present research at national or international professional conferences. All currently enrolled students presenting papers or posters are eligible to apply.

### **Graduate Research Support Program**

The Research Support Program within the Department of Political Science offers awards to continuing graduate students for specific research-related activities that are tied to their professional development and progress toward the Ph.D. Both the department and the College of the Liberal Arts have funds available to support student research. Several awards may be made each year. College awards are limited to \$2000; the department provides funding at a slightly higher level. All currently enrolled students are eligible to apply, though preference is given for research supporting MA theses, third year projects, and dissertations.

### **Summer Graduate Research Award**

The Department of Political Science Summer Graduate Research Award within the Department of Political Science supports continuing students for the purpose of collaborative faculty/student research leading to a joint or sole student-authored publication. The award pays the student a summer stipend. All currently enrolled students who plan to enroll in the following fall are eligible to apply.

### **Program in Comparative Politics Graduate Research Award**

These research awards are given to students studying comparative politics to enhance their research. The program in Comparative Politics awards funds for travel to international conferences or to engage in field work. Graduate students studying comparative politics are eligible to apply for funds in any year and may receive an award more than once. Applications for the award will be considered by a committee

designated by the Program in Comparative Politics.

### **Departmental Fellowships**

#### **PEIR Fellowship**

This IR Pre-Doctoral Fellowship frees the recipient from all formal assistantship duties during one of the semesters in the academic year following the student's selection as a PEIR Fellow. Each year one graduate student studying IR is selected by the graduate studies committee.

#### **Program in Comparative Politics (PiCP) Fellowship**

This PiCP Fellowship is available to outstanding graduate students in the Comparative Politics subfield. Recipients receive a one-semester release from TA and RA duties. The semester is chosen by the student in collaboration with the Director of Graduate Studies.

#### **Center for American Political Responsiveness (CAPR) Fellowship**

This CAPR Fellowship is available to outstanding graduate students in the American Politics subfield. Recipients receive a one-semester release from TA and RA duties. The semester is chosen by the student in collaboration with the Director of Graduate Studies.

#### **Florence and Angelo Paterno Graduate Fellowship in the Liberal Arts**

This Paterno Fellowship is designed to support an outstanding graduate student or students enrolled full-time in the Political Science department. This fellowship frees the recipient from all formal assistantship duties during the academic year or semester it is awarded. This award has no flexibility as to when it is taken. The Graduate Studies Committee or the Recruitment Planning Committee select the recipient each year as appropriate.

#### **Bruce R. Miller and Dean D. LaVigne Graduate Fellowship in Political Science**

The Miller/LaVigne Fellowship supports an outstanding graduate student enrolled full time in the Political Science department. This fellowship frees all formal assistantship duties during the academic semester or year it is awarded to the student. The fellowship is awarded by the Graduate Studies Committee or the Recruitment Committee, as appropriate.

# **Appendix A**

## **Criteria for Awarding & Renewing Graduate Assistantships/Fellowships**

### **Overview**

The responsibility for admission to the graduate program and appointment as a graduate assistant is vested in the graduate faculty of the department, acting through the Graduate Studies Committee. For students completing all Ph.D. requirements during their period of funding eligibility, the Committee also recommends (to the Department Head) appointments to the position of Fixed-Term Instructor. The Committee, together with the Director of Graduate Studies and the Department Head, shares responsibility for administering the graduate program, consistent with the rules of the Fox Graduate School and the University. The criteria outlined below are designed to ensure the highest degree of excellence and to assure fair treatment to all promising applicants who qualify for both admission to the program and a graduate assistantship.

The number of qualified applicants invariably exceeds the number of available positions. Thus, many qualified applicants will be denied admission to the program. In addition, because assistantship awards are competitive, renewal is not automatic and failure to receive a renewal may reflect the relative merits of those in the applicant pool.

### **Disqualifying criteria**

Disqualifying criteria include:

- Continuing students who have completed two or more semesters of full-time study with a graduate GPA below 3.4.
- Students with more than one deferred grade (DF). For these purposes, an “administrative F” shall be defined as a deferred grade.
- Students who do not pass the qualifying exam, complete their master’s essay, pass their oral comprehensive exam, or make progress on their dissertation in a timely fashion (see below).
- Unprofessional performance as a graduate student or teaching/research assistant shall disqualify a student from renewal of an assistantship. Unprofessional performance may include (but is not limited to):
  - Repeated absence from class responsibilities or office hours.
  - Repeated evidence of poor preparation for class.
  - Repeated missing of deadlines including (but not limited to) supervisor deadlines for completing assistantship tasks.
  - Violation of University rules and policies including (but not limited to) those pertaining to academic integrity and sexual harassment.

### **Competitive criteria for awarding assistantships**

Letters of award, and annual letters of renewal, indicate a period of eligibility for graduate assistant

support. Typically, this period is five years. During this period, financial assistance requires demonstration of satisfactory skills and performance as a graduate assistant and demonstration of academic excellence combined with timely progress towards degree completion.

Two important criteria for ranking students for assistantship renewals are academic excellence and progress towards degree completion (initial assistantship awards consider academic excellence). Given these criteria, assistantship decisions will consider the following aspects of a student's portfolio:

1. Academic performance in the graduate program at Penn State as indicated by grades, faculty seminar evaluations, evaluations of qualifying exam, and of comprehensive examinations/third year projects.
2. Research accomplishments such as internal and external research grants, conference participation, and scholarly publications.
3. Timely completion of coursework, distribution requirements, and examinations. Except in extenuating circumstances, the following schedule represents expected progress towards the degree:

<b>Schedule of progress:</b>	<b>Students entering with a bachelor's or a master's degree:</b>
Ph.D. qualifying exam	November of year 2
Defense of M.A. Essay	April/May of year 2
Written comprehensive exams / Third year projects	March of year 3
Proposal and oral comprehensive exam	April/May of year 3

Students failing to meet these goals shall be given lower priority for graduate assistant support, but students may provide evidence of mitigating circumstances. These may include personal or medical circumstances as well as scholarly ones (e.g., an especially ambitious dissertation may require unusual preparation).

Performance as a teaching or research assistant is assessed each semester by supervising faculty. In teaching assistant and lecturer assignments student teaching evaluations are made as well. Two or more evaluations that indicate below average performance, unprofessional conduct or unreliability shall be taken as evidence of below average performance. Although below average performance does not automatically disqualify a student, students with below average performance shall be renewed only when financial resources are ample.



## **Appendix B**

### **Summary of Program Milestones**

#### ***First Year***

- Annual Advising Session (Late Spring)

#### ***Second Year***

- Written and Oral Qualifying Exams
- M.A. Defense (by end of April)
- Annual Advising Session (Late Spring)

#### ***Third Year***

- Dissertation Committee Formed (mid-Fall)
- Written Comprehensive Exams
  - Pre-2023 Students: Written Exam (January or May)
  - Beginning 2023 Students: Third Year Project (March)
- Oral Comprehensive Exam (End of Written Exam Semester)
- Annual Advising Session (Late Spring)

#### ***Fourth Year***

- Dissertation Proposal Approved (Six Months from Oral Exam date)
- Job Market Notification (Winter)
- Annual Advising Session (Late Spring)

#### ***Fifth/Sixth Year***

- Apply for Jobs
- Dissertation Defense
- Annual Advising Session (Late Spring)

## Appendix C

### Summary of Degree Requirements

	Pre-2023 Requirements		Post-2023 Requirements	
	No Dual-Title	Dual-Title	No Dual-Title	Dual-Title
Required Courses	501-503, 511, 513	501-503, 511, 513	501-503, 511, 513	501-503, 511, 513
First Field	5 Major-Field Courses	5 Major-Field Courses	8 PLSC Seminars (including 2 of 504, 540, 550, 560)	5 PLSC Seminars (including 1 of 504, 540, 550, 560) <sup>2</sup>
Second Field	3 Minor-Field Courses	Dual-Title Requirements	---	Dual-Title Requirements
Third Field	3 Add'l Courses	3 Add'l Courses	3 Add'l Courses <sup>3</sup>	3 Add'l Courses <sup>4</sup>
Credit Requirement	60 Credits	60 Credits	60 Credits	60 Credits
Qualifying Exam	Advising meeting w/ 3 faculty	Advising meeting w/ 3 faculty	Exam over PLSC 501-503	Exam over PLSC 501-503
Written Comprehensive Exam	Major and Minor Field Exams (Often with prospectus)	Major Field and Dual-Title Exams (Often with prospectus)	Third Year Project	Third Year Project; Dual-Title Sets Own Requirement
Oral Comprehensive Exam	Proposal Defense	Proposal Defense	Proposal Defense	Proposal Defense

<sup>2</sup> A student who pursues a dual-title in a SoDA may not count any political methodology seminars toward the 5-seminars requirement. This preserves the rule that students cannot “major in methods” and complete a SoDA dual-title degree

<sup>3</sup> Students must take three additional courses beyond the PLSC (and, if applicable, dual-title) minimums. These courses may be in Political Science or another department. There is no requirement they constitute a “Third Field.”