This document is designed to provide graduate students in Political Science with a concise list of requirements for the program. Please direct any questions to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

Graduate Program Personnel

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Requirements for the PhD

Doctoral students must complete 72 credit hours. This includes a minimum of 48 hours of “quality” or didactic course work including the required courses:

- Two methods courses: PSCI 8355 (Research Design) and PSCI 8356 (Statistics for Political Research I)
- Three courses in field one (fields and requirements described below)
- Three courses in field two
- Two courses in field three
- Electives either in these fields or others to complete the remaining 48 hours

The remaining hours consist of thesis credit (PSCI 8999 for pre-candidates and PSCI 9999 for PhD candidates).

To maintain good standing in the program, doctoral students are expected to:

- maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.3 in the first semester of the program and 3.4 thereafter;
- finish any incomplete course by the end of the following semester;
- submit the Plan of Study and participate in the Second-Year Review by the end of their fourth semester in the program;
- complete the normal load of organized courses, which is a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester;
- complete comprehensive exams by the end of year 3;
- complete the Qualifying Exam by September 1 of year 4;
- maintain satisfactory progress (receive an “S” grade) in 8999/9999 coursework; and
- perform at or above expectations in RA/TA responsibilities.
Students who are out of compliance with these expectations will be put on probation. Students who remain out of compliance after being put on probation will have their funding revoked and can be asked to leave the program.

**Coursework requirements**

*Doctoral students must complete 72 credit hours.* This includes a minimum of 48 hours of “quality” or didactic course work including the required methods courses and field courses. The remaining hours consist of thesis credit (PSCI 8999 for pre-candidates and PSCI 9999 for PhD candidates).

PhD students are required to complete the minimum courses and comprehensive exams in three fields:

- **Field One (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, or Political Theory):** Requires completion of at least 3 courses, one of which is normally expected to be the core course; and completion of a written and oral comprehensive exam. Each subfield may have additional requirements; students are advised to check with the field conveners for subfield-specific requirements.

- **Field Two (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Methodology, or Political Theory):** Requires completion of at least 3 courses, one of which is normally expected to be the core course; and completion of a written comprehensive exam. In Political Methodology, students must complete 3 courses beyond the two required methods courses (PSCI 8355 and 8356). Each subfield may have additional requirements; students are advised to check with the field conveners for subfield-specific requirements.

- **Field Three:** Requires completion of 2 courses, with a grade of B or better in each, which normally includes:
  - any two courses in a major field of political science (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, or Political Theory). OR
  - two courses in Political Methodology beyond PSCI 8355 and 8356. These can be other methods courses within the Department, or approved courses outside the department (including the ICPSR Summer Training Program). OR
  - two courses in a cognate field outside of political science. This option can be taken only with the prior permission of the Director of Graduate Studies and the student's advisor.

In addition to the field requirements, all students are required to complete the two core methods courses: PSCI 8355 (Research Design) and PSCI 8356 (Statistics for Political Research I).

Students who receive a grade of B- or lower in any course must consult with the DGS and a faculty member in the student’s major field to discuss the student’s performance in the course and the program overall. The student may be asked to retake the course. Students receiving two or more grades of B or lower in PSCI courses in any semester OR a GPA lower than 3.3 in the first year or 3.4 thereafter in any semester may be placed on probation for unsatisfactory progress in the program.

Doctoral students typically take 8000-level courses. Students may take up to two upper-level undergraduate courses for credit toward the degree; any undergraduate courses must be approved in advance by the DGS.

Doctoral students seeking to transfer course credit from previous graduate study must consult with the DGS for approval.

Students who have completed their 48 didactic course hours should elect pre-candidate dissertation credits as PSCI 8999 or candidate dissertation credits as PSCI 9999, with the student’s major advisor
serving as the course section instructor. Students should register for research credits up to 72 total hours. Candidates who have reached the required 72 credits should specify 0 credits of PSCI 9999, with the dissertation advisor as the course instructor.

Faculty assign grades of “S” (Satisfactory) or “U” ( Unsatisfactory) to students enrolled in PSCI 8999 or 9999. Receipt of one grade of “U” in PSCI 8999 or PSCI 9999 will result in a student being placed on probation. Receipt of two successive grades of “U” would constitute two semesters out of compliance, which could result in a student being asked to leave the program.

Academic Advisor

Upon entering the program, the DGS will assign to each student a faculty advisor. This assignment will be based on the DGS’s evaluation of appropriate student-faculty matches based on student interests and faculty advising responsibilities. The initial advisor assignment is preliminary in nature and in no way reflects an assumption the advisor will remain an advisor throughout the program. The advisor’s primary responsibilities are as a point person for the graduate student. The DGS has responsibility for advising on course planning, program requirements, student progress, and all other administrative matters. The expectation is that students will ultimately select their own advisor by the third year of the program; the form officially selecting their advisor should be submitted to the graduate school by September 1 of the student’s third year.

RA/TA Requirements

Doctoral students are expected to work up to 19 hours per week each semester as a research assistant or teaching assistant for a faculty member or research center. At the discretion of the faculty member(s), students will assist in research activities or teaching courses.

At the end of the semester, students will be evaluated by the faculty member(s). These evaluations are used to assess the student’s progress in the program and they are also used in awarding Departmental research funds for workshops, training, or travel. Students who receive two unsatisfactory evaluations from two separate professors can have their funding revoked and be asked to leave the program.

Each doctoral student is allowed two service-free semesters during their funding period, in which they do not work as an RA or TA for the semester but remain funded. Students, in consultation with their faculty advisors and the DGS, may select when to use these service-free semesters.

Reviews of Student Progress

Annual subfield discussions.
Each year, the faculty of each subfield will meet in late April or early May to discuss the progress of each student for whom that field is their primary field. The DGS will attend each of these meetings in order to stay informed of all student progress and bring any relevant information from other subfields to the notice of primary mentors.

First-year review.
At the end of the first year, the Graduate Committee will review the progress of each student. Students will receive feedback regarding whether their performance has been satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A student who has made unsatisfactory progress in the first year will be placed on probation.

Second-year review.
At the end of the second year, each student participates in a mandatory Second-Year Review. The purpose of the Second-Year Review is to assess the student’s progress in the program and discuss the student’s next steps in the program.

Prior to the Second-Year Review, students are required to submit a Plan of Study form identifying a) their three fields; b) a list of completed and future courses taken to meet the requirements of the degree; c) when they plan to take the comprehensive examinations; (d) their primary advisor; and (e) the general topic of the dissertation. The form is listed on the Resources for Current Students website on the Department’s webpage.

Students must consult with two faculty members in the first field of study in preparation for the Second-Year Review. In the Second-Year Review, the faculty members, the student, and the DGS will discuss the student’s progress and Plan of Study. Although rare, students making unsatisfactory progress may be asked to leave the program at this point.

**Responsible Conduct in Research (RCR) Requirement**

Research integrity is fundamental to good research. Vanderbilt University has an obligation to model, teach, and actively promote the responsible conduct of research in scholarship and science. The University requires all graduate students to complete online RCR training and participate in a discussion-based session to further explore the issues and challenges in conducting ethical research and scholarship.

To be in compliance with this requirement, all students must complete online CITI training for the social and behavioral sciences during their first semester of study. They must also participate in the A&S discussion session on RCR at the end of their second year; the full-day training is always scheduled for the Monday following graduation in May. These requirements must be fulfilled before a student may enter PhD candidacy.

Information on the RCR requirements can be found on the graduate school website: [https://www.vanderbilt.edu/researchintegrity/rcr.php](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/researchintegrity/rcr.php) and on the BRET full-day trainings: [https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/responsible-conduct-research/](https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/responsible-conduct-research/)

Please note: RCR training is NOT THE SAME as [HSR/IRB compliance](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/researchintegrity/rcr.php) [also completed in CITI].

**Comprehensive Exams**

Students take their two comprehensive exams at the end of the second year (May) and/or the beginning of the third year (August). In rare cases, students can petition the DGS to take comprehensive exams at a different time.

Students should consult with faculty in the subfield for subfield-specific guidance on the content covered by comprehensive exams. Such consultation should occur in the spring of the second year (if not before). Students may not sit for comprehensive examinations if they have incompletes on their academic records.

A student who fails a comprehensive exam must petition the Graduate Committee to retake it in January of the third year. Normally, students can expect a second chance to pass a comprehensive exam. However, students who are out of compliance with Department expectations (weak academic
performance, incompletes, or poor performance in RA/TA work) may be denied that opportunity, and therefore denied further funding and/or asked to leave the program. This decision will be made by the Graduate Committee in consultation with faculty in the student’s first field.

Students may sit for comprehensive examinations no more than twice for the First Field and twice for the Second Field. A second failure of a comprehensive exam in the first field or a second failure in a second field automatically revokes the student’s funding and the student will be asked to leave the program. The student may be eligible to receive a Terminal MA (see requirements listed below).

Qualifying Examination
(i.e., Prospectus Defense)

To advance to candidacy, students must pass an oral Qualifying Exam, where they defend the prospectus. Before a Qualifying Exam may be scheduled, a student must have completed all 48 required didactic course hours, cleared any remaining “incomplete” grades, and passed the required comprehensive exams. Ideally, students will defend the dissertation proposal by the end of the third year. Students who have not successfully defended the prospectus and advanced to candidacy by Sept. 1 of the 4th year in the program will be placed on probation. Students who have not successfully defended the prospectus and advanced to candidacy by May 15 of the 4th year in the program will be denied further funding and/or asked to leave the program. Students may petition the graduate committee for a one-year exception to this rule.

The student must have four faculty on the Qualifying Examination (QE) committee. The composition of the committee should be made in consultation with the student's major advisor, who will serve as chair of the dissertation committee, and the DGS. Three members of the QE committee must be members of the Vanderbilt University Department of Political Science. One member of the QE committee must be an “outside member,” who is a member of the Graduate Faculty at Vanderbilt or a faculty member at another institution.

The Request to Schedule the Qualifying Examination Committee form must be filed with the Graduate School no later than two weeks before the student's Ph.D. Qualifying Examination is to be held. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

After passing the Qualifying Examination, the student must submit the Qualifying Examination Results form to the DGS. All members of the QE committee must sign this form. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website. Per the Graduate School’s rules, a student is allowed only two opportunities to pass the Qualifying Examination.

Shortly thereafter, the student must submit the Request to Appoint the Dissertation Committee form. The Dissertation Committee need not be the same as the Qualifying Examination Committee, but the same rules that govern the composition of the QE committee also apply to the Dissertation committee. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

Admission to PhD Candidacy

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1 Graduate Faculty at Vanderbilt include faculty members who are tenure-track or tenured in departments or programs offering the MA or PhD outside of the Department of Political Science.

2 All others (including individuals who are research-track, clinical, or professional, or who are outside the university) must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School, via the Request to Schedule the Qualifying Examination Committee. Deviations in committee constitution must be approved by the DGS and the Graduate School.
A graduate student may become a candidate for the PhD degree (also known as “All But Dissertation” or “ABD” status), upon recommendation of the DGS and the departmental faculty, by applying to the Vanderbilt Graduate school. Application for admission to candidacy requires the following:

1. Completion of 48 hours of didactic coursework, including required courses, with no outstanding incomplete grades;
2. Completion of the Graduate School’s RCR requirement;
3. Passing the required comprehensive examinations;
4. Approval of the dissertation prospectus and qualifying examination by the student’s approved committee; and
5. Good standing in the PhD program.

All students are required to be in candidacy by May 15 of their fourth year of study. Students not entering candidacy by this date may forfeit their funding and continuation in the program per consideration of the graduate committee and the Graduate School.

**Dissertation Requirements**

A candidate for the PhD degree must present a dissertation demonstrating technical competence in the field and research of an independent character. The dissertation must be completed within four years after a student has been admitted to candidacy for the degree. Upon petition to the political science graduate committee and the Graduate School, a one-year extension of candidacy may be granted. If such a period has expired without successful completion of the dissertation, the student may be dismissed from the Graduate School.

Candidates must file an Intent to Graduate form with the Graduate School at least four months before they intend to graduate. Each graduation date has specific deadlines for filing and defending the dissertation. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

Candidates must file a Request to Schedule Dissertation Defense form with the Graduate School at least two weeks before the date of the defense. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website. The candidate should also submit a copy of the completed dissertation to the PhD committee at least two weeks prior to the dissertation defense. The committee reviews the dissertation and conducts the final examination. Instructions for submitting final copies of the approved dissertation can be found on the Graduate School website.

**Requirements for the MA Degree**

Ph.D. students can earn a "Masters in Passing" after passing the comprehensive exams, completing all course requirements, and successfully defending a dissertation prospectus. Students are encouraged to apply for this degree, when they have met the requirements. Students can file an Intent to Graduate form with the Graduate School at least four months before they intend to receive the Masters in Passing. Each specific graduation date has its own deadline for filing. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

For a handful of students who entered as doctoral students but, of their own volition or as a result of departmental action, will leave the program prior to completing the requirements for PhD candidacy, the Terminal Master’s (MA) can be awarded after 33 hours of course work (including PSCI 8355 and 8356), if the student maintains a 3.0 average in 8000-level courses (which must comprise at least 27 of the 33 hours).

The department admits a limited number of students to a "four plus one" program designed to allow
Vanderbilt undergraduate students to complete the BA and MA degrees in four years of undergraduate study plus one year of graduate study. 4+1 MA candidates must complete 30 hours of 8000-level coursework and submit a thesis or pass a field examination. The thesis is directed and approved by a two-person committee comprised of the student's adviser and one other faculty member. Among the 30 credit hours, students must have completed the two-course sequence in methods (PSCI 8355 and 8356) and at least 6 hours in one field.

A Recommended Course of Study

The following table describes a recommended course of study to complete the program in 5 years of funding. Deviations are applicable by student in consultation with their advisor and the DGS. Deadlines are requirements of the program.

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<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deadlines</strong></td>
<td>First-year review by May 15</td>
<td>Second-year review with proposed plan-of-study by May 15</td>
<td>Comps in August, must be completed by May of third year. Prospectus defense spring, must be completed by Sept 1 of 4th year.</td>
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<td><strong>The Following Summer</strong></td>
<td>Summer training, deepen topic knowledge</td>
<td>Study for comps, prospectus research, hone papers for pub.</td>
<td>Advance dissertation &amp; publications</td>
<td>Write another chapter. Prep job talk and materials.</td>
<td>Move to your new job!</td>
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Graduate Student Awards

*Erwin Hargrove Outstanding TA Award*

The department will present an annual teaching award to a graduate student based on their annual performance. Students self-nominate at the end of each academic year. Nomination materials should include a cover letter, student evaluations, syllabi for courses taught, and a curriculum vita. Faculty observation letters and/or a statement of teaching philosophy are welcomed but not required. A
student may win this award only once in his or her career. The winner of the teaching award will be chosen by the director of graduate studies and the placement director each summer. Depending on departmental resources, the award may include a small monetary prize.

Graduate Research Award
In early summer, the director of graduate studies will compose a committee which will give an award for the best graduate student research paper of the year. Papers presented at scholarly conferences, completed for coursework, or accepted for publication over the past academic year, including the summer before the previous academic year, are eligible. A paper may not win this award twice, that is, it cannot win in one year as a conference paper and in the following year as an article publication, though it will be up to the committee to determine whether or not a submission is sufficiently similar to a previous award-winning paper to be disqualified from consideration. Only papers written by doctoral students are eligible. Students will be invited to self-nominate. A student may only have one paper per year under consideration for this award, and this includes co-authored papers. A paper is eligible only if all co-authors are current Vanderbilt students. Specifically, a paper co-authored with a faculty member or a non-Vanderbilt graduate student is not eligible. Depending on departmental resources, the award may also come with a small monetary prize.

Graduate Studies Committee

The requirements stipulated in this handbook are considered minimum standards. The Graduate Studies Committee of the Department is empowered to add requirements when an individual student's course of study or quality of performance indicates that additional work is advisable. The Graduate Studies Committee shall also be empowered to waive specific requirements when, because of departmental resources or individual student needs, such waivers are advisable. Actions taken by the Graduate Studies Committee are subject to review by the full departmental faculty.