

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
GRADUATE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS  
Effective August 2016

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).

### **Requirements for the PhD**

Doctoral students must complete 72 credits. This includes a minimum of 48 hours of course work. The remaining hours consist of thesis credit (PSCI 379 for pre-candidates and PSCI 399 for PhD candidates).

Doctoral students are required to complete 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 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 (if offered); and completion of a comprehensive exam. In Political Methodology, students must complete 3 courses beyond the two required methods courses (PSCI 355 and 356). 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:
  - a) any two courses in a major field of political science (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, or Political Theory). OR
  - b) two courses in Political Methodology beyond PSCI 355 and 356. These can be other methods course within the Department, or approved courses outside the department (including the ICPSR Summer Training Program). OR
  - c) 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 these field requirements, all students are required to complete the two core methods courses (PSCI 355 and 356).

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.

Doctoral students typically take 300-level courses. Students may take up to two 200-level courses for credit toward the degree; any additional 200-level 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.

### **The First Year and the First-Year Review**

Doctoral students enter with two service-free semesters. Students, in consultation with their faculty advisors and the DGS, may select when to use these service-free semesters.

First-year students in the fall semester may take 3 courses and work as either a Research Assistant or Teaching Assistant or they may elect to take 4 courses and use one of their service-free semesters.

In the spring semester, first-year students take 9 credits of coursework (i.e., 3 courses) and typically work as an RA/TA for a faculty member.

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.

### **The Second Year, the Plan of Study, and the Second-Year Review**

Second-year students typically take 9 credits of coursework (i.e., 3 courses) and work as an RA/TA in both the fall and spring semesters.

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 preliminary examinations; and d) 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.

## **The Third Year, Comprehensive Exams, and the Qualifying Examination**

The third year is a transition period for graduate students. Most students advance from pre-candidate status to candidacy (or “All But Dissertation,” ABD status) by the end of the third year. The third year marks the end of required coursework and the beginning of dissertation work.

### *Comprehensive Exams*

Students take their two comprehensive exams in the fall of the third year. 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).

### *Coursework*

Third -year students typically take 9 credits of coursework (i.e., 3 courses) and work as an RA/TA in both the fall and spring semesters.

If students fall short of 9 credits in a given semester, third-year students can elect pre-candidate dissertation credits (upon consultation with the student’s major advisor). The pre-candidate dissertation credits are taken as PSCI 379, with the student’s major advisor serving as the course section instructor.

## *Qualifying Examination*

To advance to candidacy (or “All But Dissertation,” ABD status), students must pass an oral Qualifying Exam, where they defend the prospectus. Ideally, students will defend the dissertation proposal by the end of the third year. The dissertation proposal should be defended no later than the end of the fourth year of study.

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 Department of Political Science. One member of the QE committee must be an “outside member,” who is a member of the Graduate Faculty<sup>1</sup> at Vanderbilt or a faculty member at another institution.<sup>2</sup>

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, students have two chances to pass the QE.

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](#).

## **The Fourth Year**

Fourth-year students typically work as an RA/TA in both the fall and spring semesters. Some students will request to use one or both of their service-free semesters in the fall or spring of this year to work on the dissertation. Requests to elect a service-free semester must be made in consultation with the student's advisor and will be granted by the DGS when possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Graduate Faculty at Vanderbilt include faculty members who are tenure-track or tenured in departments or programs offering the MA or PhD.

<sup>2</sup> 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](#)

<sup>2</sup> 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.

Pre-candidates should specify 9 credits of PSCI 379 in the fall semester, with the student's major advisor as the course instructor. For the spring semester, pre-candidates should specify as many as credits as are needed to reach 72 total credit hours (in typical cases, this would be 6 credit hours).

Candidates should specify 9 credits of PSCI 399 in the fall semester, with the dissertation advisor as the course instructor. For the spring semester, candidates should specify as many as credits as are needed to reach 72 total credit hours (in typical cases, this would be 6 credit hours).

Faculty assign grades of "S" (Satisfactory) or "U" (Unsatisfactory) to students enrolled in PSCI 379 or 399. Receipt of one grade of "U" in PSCI 379 or PSCI 399 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.

Fourth-year students will typically apply for external and internal grants to support dissertation research.

### **The Fifth Year and the Dissertation Defense**

Fifth-year students typically work as an RA/TA in both the fall and spring semesters. Some students will request to use a service-free semester in the fall or spring of this year to work on the dissertation.

Candidates who have reached the required 72 credits should specify 0 credits of PSCI 399, with the dissertation advisor as the course instructor.

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](#).

### **Progress towards the Degree**

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

- a) maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.3 in the first semester of the program and 3.4 thereafter;
- b) finish any incomplete by the end of the next semester;
- c) submit the *Plan of Study* and participate in the Second-Year Review by the end of their fourth semester in the program;
- d) complete the normal load of organized courses, as described above;
- e) complete comprehensive exams by the end of year 3;

- f) complete the Qualifying Exam by the end of year 4;
- g) maintain satisfactory progress (receive an "S" grade) in 379/399 coursework;
- h) 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.

## **Teaching/Research Assistantships**

Doctoral students typically receive full funding for five years: two semesters are "service-free" without any obligations to RA/TA. The funding for the remaining eight semesters is awarded in return for satisfactory performance as an RA/TA. Students who have secured outside funding (i.e., NSF predoctoral awards) should consult with the DGS about expectations and opportunities for RA/TA positions.

Working as an RA/TA consists of a 20-hour weekly commitment to the assigned faculty member(s). 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.

## **Requirements for the MA**

1. Doctoral students remaining in the program: Ph.D. students can earn a "Masters in Passing" after passing the Qualifying Examination. 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](#).
2. Doctoral students leaving the program: For a handful of students who entered as doctoral students but are not continuing in the program, the Terminal Master's (MA) can be awarded after 33 hours of course work (including PSCI 355 and 356), if the student maintains a 3.0 average in 300-level courses (which must comprise at least 27 of the 33 hours).
3. "4+1": 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 300-level course work 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 hours, students must have completed the two course sequence in methods (PSCI 355 and 356) and at least 6 hours in one field.