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University of California, Irvine

DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE

GRADUATE PROGRAM RULES & REGULATIONS

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Graduate Program in Political Science Requirements, Rules, and Regulations

Updated 10/15/2025

This handbook is prepared for Graduate Students in the doctoral program in the Department of Political Science. It is revised when appropriate by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), in consultation with the department chair and manager. It is meant to offer information and guidance on the department's doctoral program, to augment the list of program requirements detailed in the [UCI General Catalogue](#).

Always consult the General Catalogue first. Ensure you refer to the Catalogue that corresponds with the year you entered the program (previous catalogue editions [here](#)). The Catalogue also details courses taught in the department [here](#). Updated campuswide Graduate Policies and Procedures can be found [here](#).

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Your First Year in the Program

The department structures socialization and professionalization from the beginning of your Ph.D. program.

- **Colloquium**

Graduate students are required to enroll in Colloquium (POL SCI 210). This one-credit course introduces new graduate students to the department's faculty and other graduate students, and it professionalizes them into the discipline of political science.

- **Advisor**

The DGS will assign each graduate student a provisional faculty advisor for consultative purposes, especially regarding the substance of the student's program. After the first year, the provisional assignment expires. At this point, students may ask another faculty member to be their advisor. This is a reciprocal process of agreement.

Fulfilling Ph.D. Requirements

I. Coursework

Graduate students must complete a minimum of 18 graduate courses (72 units) of which at least 12 (48 units) must be in the Department of Political Science and up to 6 (24 units) may be in cognate disciplines. Students must receive a grade of "B" or better to count toward meeting your required courseload. Students may petition to waive a maximum of 3 courses if they have taken a comparable course from a previous MA or degree-granting program. The DGS will solicit and review petitions for course waivers. It is ideal to complete this process in your first year. The objective of this rule is to facilitate training here with our faculty experts.

First Fields: Students must designate a first and second field of study. First fields must be one of the four traditional subfields in political science: American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, and Political Theory. Course requirements vary across the subfields but generally require a student to take the field seminar and a number of electives. All students (except students whose first field is Political Theory) are required to take Research Design.

Please consult Appendix 1 for specific details on your first field.

Second Fields: Students are required to take 3-5 electives in a **second field**, which can be:

- One of the first fields
- An area of faculty strength. These may include:
 - Public Law (Mary McThomas)
 - Methodology (Ines Levin)
 - Citizenship & Migration (Sara Goodman)

- Critical Theory (Kevin Olson)
- Race and Ethnicity (Davin Phoenix)
- Ethics (Kristen Monroe)
- Or a specialized area of interdisciplinary study. This area must be approved by the student's advisor and the DGS.

Before choosing the second field, students should talk to the coordinator to confirm reasonable course availability in the field over their course of study. Only one course may count for two fields.

During the first two years in the doctoral program, students must successfully complete **three field seminars**. These typically include the field seminar in the student's first and second fields, as well as a third seminar, to obtain breadth of knowledge in the discipline. Field seminars are offered in American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, and Political Theory.

Electives in and outside of the department fulfil the remainder of coursework.

Research Competence

As your first and second field coursework provides you with a foundation in empirics and theories of the discipline, it is balanced with classes to obtain skills in research. This requirement should be fulfilled before advancing to candidacy. Students should select a skill whose mastery is necessary for preparation of the dissertation. Students may:

- Demonstrate **mastery of a foreign language** by passing a proficiency test (where the student will translate a professional article in the foreign language into English, in limited time, using a dictionary, with summarizing permitted for much of the material). See DGS for arrangements. Must be completed before the Ph.D. is awarded.
- Complete three courses of graduate-level (or upper-level undergraduate with prior approval from DGS) coursework in **quantitative methods**.
- Complete three courses of graduate-level (or upper-level undergraduate with prior approval from DGS) coursework in **qualitative methods**
- Students may also obtain **mixed-method** proficiency, combining qualitative and quantitative courses to meet this requirement.

*You are advised to obtain DGS approval before taking coursework to ensure they fulfil the requirements. Also note: This requirement is in addition to the department's **statistics requirement**, which requires students to complete Statistics I and Statistics II. The statistics requirement is only waived (with DGS approval) if students successfully completed three undergraduate statistics courses or two graduate classes elsewhere. Also, if you meet the statistics requirement with undergraduate coursework, it does not count toward your 18 credits.*

II. Qualifying Paper

In addition to coursework, students must complete one **qualifying paper**. The purpose of this is to prepare students to produce work of publishable quality, making a theoretical and/or empirical

contribution. This may be completed at any time, but ideally by the end of their 8th quarter (and must be completed before the Prospectus defense/Advancement). Two faculty members will assess the paper, evaluating in the manner of the peer review process (See Appendix 2). Faculty members supervising each paper should be from the Department of Political Science. Outside readers must receive DGS approval.

Please consult Appendix 2 for Best Practices for Qualifying Paper Review.

III. Comprehensive Exam

After completing requisite coursework, a student will take a comprehensive field exam. This written exam assesses a candidate's knowledge in the student's first field. The faculty committee that oversees the field exams are appointed by the DGS, drawing from each subfield. Their composition may vary from year to year.

Field exams will take place in Fall quarter. The exact date and composition of the faculty committee is announced by the DGS at the end of the prior academic year.

The exam format, reading list, and exam committee members will be determined by the Field Coordinator in consultation with field members. Exam committee members may assign the grade of Distinction, Pass, and Fail. If the exam committee is unable to agree on whether a particular exam merits a passing or failing mark, the committee may arrange an oral exam to reach a decision. If a student fails a comprehensive exam, they must retake the exam the following quarter. A student who fails a field exam is allowed to retake the exam once. A second failure in the same field is final and produces a recommendation for dismissal from the graduate program.

IV. Dissertation Proposal Defense (Advancement to Candidacy)

Rules that outline the composition of the doctoral committee are detailed in IR 920, available [here](#). Rules that govern advancement to candidacy are detailed in Senate Regulation 840, Regulation 320, available [here](#).

A dissertation prospectus oral defense is an opportunity for students to assemble their dissertation committee and discuss the research design, motivation, timeline, as well as other features of their planned dissertation. The students should supply the members of the doctoral committee with a research design and/or introduction chapter (requirements and content are at the discretion of the doctoral committee chair). This document should be distributed to doctoral committee members at least two weeks before the prospectus defense date. The committee must consist of a minimum of three members, with a majority from the department. If necessary, committee member changes may be made at a later date. This requires formal approval (refer to the SOP for more information), may take time, and is not always guaranteed, so please plan ahead.

Students must verify with staff that they are eligible to advance before scheduling their prospectus defense. Passing a prospectus defense constitutes advancement to Ph.D. candidacy. Immediately after the prospectus defense, the student should contact staff to initiate the [PhD Advancement to Candidacy form](#). Refer to the Graduate SOP for instructions. Students must advance to candidacy by the end of their 10th quarter in the Ph.D. program.

V. Formal Research Presentation

Each student must give a public presentation on their research before obtaining the Ph.D. degree. This presentation is normally scheduled when the student is preparing for the job market. It can thus serve both as a job talk at which the student can obtain useful feedback and an important socialization tool for other students in the program. A formal research presentation may include: a practice job talk, presentation at a conference, workshop talk, guest lecture, other (with written DGS approval; email gradpolisci@uci.edu). Documentation is required, such as panel logistics, email invitation or announcement.

VI. Dissertation Defense

Students will be examined orally on the dissertation. All members of the doctoral committee must attend this meeting in person or virtually.

All students should complete their degree by the end of their 18th quarter. All students **must** complete their degree by the end of their 21st quarter.

Program Progress and Good Standing

At the end of each year an evaluation of each student will be prepared by the DGS in consultation with the student's advisor and the wider faculty. Students will complete a progress report detailing and documenting their progress through the program, which will serve as a baseline for evaluation. Following a faculty discussion, and a consultation between the DGS and the School's Director of [Graduate Studies](#), a student will be notified of their standing. Students may receive a positive evaluation (good standing), a cautionary evaluation, or be referred to the Graduate Studies office for remediation.

Eligibility to stay on fellowship is a function of good standing, which is a determination made between the Graduate Studies and the DGS. Financial eligibility will be affected if a student falls below good standing.

Optional Master's Degree

Students may opt for a Master's degree on route to the Ph.D. This requires completion of:

- 48 units of graduate course work
- Political Science statistics requirement
- Completion and acceptance of one qualifying paper

Students must submit their request one quarter prior to their petition for the M.A.

Appendix 1: First Field Requirements

AMERICAN POLITICS

The American Politics field explores the theory and practice of politics in the United States. It encompasses governing institutions like Congress and the presidency, electoral behavior like voting and participation, as well as vital questions related to race, ethnicity, and gender, interest groups and lobbying, public opinion, media effects, the bureaucracy, American political development, and on and on.

Beyond its substantive breadth, American Politics scholarship is also noteworthy for its theoretical and methodological diversity. Familiar approaches span a vast analytical landscape, from rational choice models to detailed historical analysis, randomized experiments to survey research, qualitative case studies to large n statistics. Understanding and honing research skills is therefore integral for anyone engaging in American Politics literature, not to mention contributing to it.

The Department of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine offers a five-course American Politics curriculum that introduces students to these various substantive foci and methodological tools, with the primary objective of preparing students to execute sophisticated original research about American Politics. So although the requirements below are purposefully open-ended, students should not merely satisfy them serendipitously; instead, students should fashion a curriculum befitting their own substantive interests and research needs.

AP students must take:

Research Design

Plus at least two of three AP core courses:

American Politics Field Seminar

US in Comparative Context

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Plus at least two elective courses chosen from among (but not limited to):

American Political Development	Political Psychology (POL SCI 128C)
Courts	Postwar Presidents
Legislative Institutions	Public Opinion
Multiculturalism	State & Local Politics
US Ethnic Politics	Elections and Voting Behavior
Political Participation	US Presidency

Note: This elective course list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Courses with a comparative bent, for example, can satisfy this requirement if there is also substantial focus on the United States. As always, the ultimate decision will reside with the AP Field Coordinator.

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

The Comparative Politics field systematically examines the similarities and differences in political structures, processes, and behaviors across diverse national and regional contexts. This encompasses a broad array of substantive areas, including but not limited to: political institutions and regime types; electoral systems and voting behavior; political identities, ideologies, and cultures; public policy formation and implementation; political economy; collective action and social movements; political violence; and processes of protest and revolution. Research may involve within-country analyses, cross-national comparisons, and cross-regional studies. Comparativists employ a wide range of methodological approaches, often grounded in in-depth empirical knowledge of specific countries or regions.

The Department of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine offers a five-course curriculum in Comparative Politics designed to familiarize students with major substantive areas and methodological approaches. The primary objective of this curriculum is to equip students with the theoretical and empirical tools necessary to conduct rigorous, original research in the field of Comparative Politics.

CP students must take:

Field Seminar in Comparative Politics
Research Design

Plus at least three elective courses chosen from among (but not limited to):

African Politics	Southeast Asian Politics
Citizenship	Sovereignty
Democracy and Dictatorship	State Formation
Game Theory	Survey Research Design
Introduction to Voting Theory	US in Comparative Perspective
Migration Politics	Violence
Political Economy of Development	Voting and Elections
Politics of Gender and Development	Weak States

The Comparative Politics Field Coordinator will answer any questions, resolve disputes, and/or grant waivers as needed.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The International Relations field seeks to understand and explain phenomena that transcend national borders by analyzing international, global, transnational and/or regional problems and processes. Topics addressed in IR include war and peace; the relationship between global political and economic processes and their regional and local manifestations; the development and workings of international institutions, organization and law; international human rights; psychological approaches to decision-making, leadership, cooperation, conflict and beyond; international cooperation on the environment, security, migration, health, and other issue-areas; the gendered nature of global relations; and religion, race, ethnicity and other forms of identity that transcend borders.

The Department of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine is methodologically pluralist, using approaches including formal models, statistical analysis, interpretivism, case studies, survey methods, interviews, experiments and beyond. The UC Irvine Political Science Department's IR five-course curriculum is designed to provide graduate students with a strong foundation in the subfields and range of methodologies in the discipline, train students broadly and deeply in the theories and concepts appropriate to specific subfields and issue-areas that cut across them, and allow students to develop and complete innovative dissertations in a timely fashion.

IR students must take:

Field Seminar in International Relations
Research Design

Plus at least three elective courses chosen from among (but not limited to):

Causes of War	Just War Revisited
Constructivism	Managing Conflict and Building Peace
Gender in Conflict	Migration Politics
Global Governance	Morality During War
Global Humanitarianism and its Critics	Political Order
Governing Global Finance	Religion and Secularism in IR
International Environmental Politics	Sovereignty
International Feminist Theory	State Formation
Interpretive/Qualitative Methods	War and Humanism
International Political Economy	Weak States
IR Theory and East Asia	

Note: This elective course list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Courses that have substantial IR content can potentially satisfy this requirement (pending IR Field coordinator approval). When possible, in consultation with the IR faculty group, the coordinator will answer questions and resolve any issues regarding additional or substitute courses. Finally, the IR faculty strongly encourages students to develop competence in at least one foreign language to fulfill the Advanced Skills requirement and to train broadly in methods and research design.

POLITICAL THEORY

The Political Theory subfield explores fundamental questions of political thought. The program is strongly committed to intellectual and theoretical diversity and aims to bridge divisions between various paradigms and traditions of political theory, between the history of political thought and contemporary political theory, and between theoretical and empirical forms of inquiry.

The Department of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine is designed to equip students with sophisticated skills of interpretation and argumentation, a refined understanding of the rich literatures of social and political theory, and a firm grasp of issues of great interest and currency in the field. These include central questions and controversies in the history of political thought, as well as a wide array of developments in 20th century and contemporary political theory. The former encompasses debates about key thinkers and developments in the history of political theory and questions regarding the nature of interpretation and historical explanation. Among the latter are new developments in contemporary European and American political theory; recent disputes in democratic theory, critical theory, and poststructuralism; ongoing controversies regarding multiculturalism, diversity, and identity politics; pressing issues of political ethics, including the ethics of war and peace; critical analysis of key concepts and phenomena, such as colonialism and imperialism, power and freedom, equality and inequality; vigorous discussions of the interplay between language and politics; and lively arguments about the philosophical and methodological foundations of political inquiry.

1. All Political Theory students **must complete four graduate seminars** in political theory. These must include the Political Theory Field Seminar and three additional graduate seminars in Political Theory, Pol Sci 239 or equivalent. The courses chosen to fulfill this requirement must be offered by at least two different faculty members. The Political Theory Field Coordinator will resolve any questions about whether a particular graduate seminar satisfies part of the requirement.
2. All Political Theory students are expected to participate regularly in activities organized by the Political Theory Group.
3. Students pursuing Political Theory as their primary research specialization are expected to acquire broad and deep knowledge of the literature in the field. This will involve additional coursework beyond the four-course minimum, with students devising a program of study that is appropriate to their intended research emphasis in close consultation with their academic advisor. It will also require self-directed reading and may include study in cognate fields and programs outside the department.
4. Students pursuing Political Theory as their primary research specialization are also expected to develop fluency as soon as possible in at least one foreign language to a level sufficient to engage in research in that language.

Appendix 2: Best Practices for Qualifying Paper Review

This process directly mirrors the peer-review process of academic publishing and is essential for helping to socialize students into academic writing with the goal of producing strong dissertations and publications.

When a student gets consent from two faculty to be readers, it is expected that:

1. The review process by a faculty will be *normally concluded within one month from submission with two extra weeks if needed*. If a faculty is on leave or if the paper is submitted shortly before summer break, these deadlines are negotiable.
2. The decision of a faculty member must be one of the following:
 - Accept (A) - No further action by the student is needed in order to conclude the review process by this particular reader. The student is not required to make any changes - they are optional;
 - Revise and Resubmit (R&R) - The student must prepare a revised paper. The student must provide a memo detailing all changes that were (or were not) implemented and why, i.e., unless the reader marks certain comments as not requiring response. When a paper receives R&R, it is normally expected that the next decision will be made within one month after the student submits the revised version. This revision process will be repeated as necessary.
 - Reject (R) - The paper does not meet standards. At this point, the student may abandon the paper or look for another faculty to review it. Every request for reviewing a paper that was rejected in the past must be accompanied by a list of faculty who accepted and rejected the paper before.

The qualifying paper is accepted when it is signed off by two faculty members *and the paperwork submitted to gradpolisci@uci.edu*. The student is responsible for collecting signatures and submitting the required paperwork per procedures detailed in the Graduate SOP.

Appendix 3: Normative Timeline to Completion

Requirements: - 18 courses: 12 (11+ w DGS approval) in department; max 3 transferred - Methods: 2 statistics + 3 advanced research skills classes (quant, qual, mixed) or language exam - Field seminars: 3 (major field, minor field, +1 more)			
Year in Program	Fall Quarter	Winter Quarter	Spring Quarter
1	Research Design (RD) Statistics I Field Seminar I + <i>Colloquium (1 credit)</i>	Statistics II Field Seminar II Elective	Advanced Research Skill Field Seminar III Elective
2	Advanced Research Skill Elective Elective	Advanced Research Skill Elective Elective	Elective Elective Elective
3	Comprehensive Exam	Qualifying paper approval ¹	Oral Prospectus Defense (Advancement to Candidacy) ²
Before defense	Formal Research Presentation and foreign language exam (as a substitute for advanced research skills)		

Electives are used to meet first and second field requirements:

First field:

- ✓ American: Field seminar, RD, 3 electives
- ✓ Comparative: Field seminar, RD, 3 electives
- ✓ IR: Field seminar, RD, 3 electives
- ✓ Political Theory: Field seminar, 3 electives

Second field:

3-5 electives, determined by Field coordinator

¹ Qualifying Paper: Latest end of 8th quarter but before Prospectus Defense

² Latest end of 10th quarter