Political Science

The doctoral program in political science at Washington University is one of the top programs in the country. Graduate students take classes and engage in research with a faculty recognized nationally and internationally as among the most expert, active, and productive in the country.

Our graduate program is relatively small. We admit around eight to 10 students into the PhD program each year, and most of these complete the doctorate, generally in five to six years. There are approximately 40 graduate students currently in residence.

Washington University’s PhD program in Political Science is designed to prepare students for academic careers in research and teaching at major institutions across the country. While our program stresses the importance of political methodology (applied statistics) and formal theory (game theory and mathematical modeling), our program is designed to teach all students in these methods, regardless of their mathematical background.

We have active research groups in American politics and institutions, comparative politics, international political economy, positive and normative theory, and political methodology. It is important to emphasize that we do not regard these subfields as separate entities. Many of our faculty have research and teaching interests that transcend political science subfields, as well as traditional disciplinary boundaries. We have strong connections with other departments at Washington University, including economics, anthropology, the law school, and with various interdisciplinary research centers on campus.

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Degree Requirements

PhD in Political Science

Students in the PhD program are expected to acquire:

- a broad understanding of several fields of political science as a discipline,
- methodological competence sufficient to be productive professionals, and
- specialized expertise in a particular field of concentration.

The procedures and requirements described below are designed to facilitate achievement of those objectives. In addition to the formal requirements stated here, we provide a list of recommendations that students should follow to succeed in the program. For a detailed year-to-year outline of requirements and recommendations, please refer to the section "Specific Requirements for Each Year in the Program" at the end of the Guide to Graduate Studies, located on the Graduate Program website (http://polisci.wustl.edu/graduate).

Exceptions to any of these requirement must be approved by the director of graduate studies (DGS) in consultation with the Graduate Committee and, as needed, the respective Field Committee.

General Course Requirements

In general, all students must successfully complete — with a grade of B or better — the following core courses:

- Math Camp: August before first semester
- Mathematical Modeling in Political Science (5052): first semester
- Research Design (540): first semester
- Quantitative Methods I (581): second semester
- Game Theory (505): second semester
- Quantitative Methods II (582): third semester
- Research Workshop I and II (TBD): a year-long course taken in student's fifth and sixth semesters

According to the Probation and Dismissal Policy, if a student fails to obtain a B in one of the required courses, they will be placed on probation and have the opportunity to retake the course in the following year. Failure to obtain a B the second time will result in dismissal from the program. Furthermore, failure to obtain a B in another required course while on probation is considered extreme underperformance and will result in dismissal from the program.

In addition to required courses, students will be taking courses in different fields. Courses are mainly concentrated in the first two years. Students should plan to take four courses per semester in their first year and three courses per semester in their second year.

Incompletes

Students are strongly discouraged from accumulating incompletes. The Graduate School prohibits more than 9 credit hours of incomplete. The department supports this policy and will consider the number of incompletes that students have accumulated in evaluating their work and in making decisions on financial support.

Fields

The department divides the discipline of political science into six fields:

- American politics,
- comparative politics,
- formal theory,
- international politics,
• political and social theory, and
• quantitative methods.

Before writing the dissertation, students must pass a qualifying examination (refer to next section) and fulfill requirements for certification in one major and one minor field. The major and minor field certifications are intended to ensure that students possess broad familiarity with the literature and material in the fields presented.

Field requirements are met by completing the required courses with a grade of B+ or better. A major field requires completing five courses in that field with a grade B+ or better; a minor field requires completing three courses in that field with a grade B+ or better.

Students are expected to complete course requirements for the major and minor by the end of their fourth semester. Exceptions can be granted by the DGS on a case-by-case basis but not beyond the student’s sixth semester.

The field requirements are as follows:

American Politics:

• Major: Students must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least five graduate-level seminars in American politics, including American Political Institutions (520) and American Political Behavior (5678).
• Minor: Student must satisfactorily (with a grade B+ or better) complete at least three graduate-level seminars in American politics, including American Political Institutions (520) and American Political Behavior (5678).

Comparative Politics:

• Major: Student must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least five graduate-level seminars in comparative politics, including Approaches to Comparative Politics (510).
• Minor: Student must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least three graduate-level seminars in comparative politics, including Approaches to Comparative Politics (510).

Formal Theory:

• Major: Student must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least five graduate-level seminars in formal theory, including Game Theory (505), Seminar in Political Economy (5551), and three other 500-level courses requiring one of the above as a prerequisite or offered in the economics department.
• Minor: Students must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least three graduate-level seminars in formal theory, including Game Theory (505), Seminar in Political Economy (5551), and one other 500-level course requiring one of the above as a prerequisite or offered in the economics department.

International Politics:

• Major: Students must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least five graduate-level seminars in international politics. This includes the 500-level graduate sequence and 400- and 500-level political science and economics courses authorized by the International Politics Committee.
• Minor: Students must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least three graduate-level seminars in international politics. The includes the 500-level graduate sequence and 400- and 500-level political science and economics courses authorized by the International Politics Committee.

Political and Social Theory:

• Major: Student must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least five graduate-level courses in political theory; the theory faculty recommends at least two of the History of Political Thought courses (5090, 5092, 5093) and at least two seminars in political theory.
• Minor: Students must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least three graduate-level courses in political theory authorized by the Political Theory Committee.

Quantitative Methods:

• Major: Student must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least five methods courses, including the required sequence (581 and 582) and additional elective methodology courses authorized by the Quantitative Methods Committee.
• Minor: Student must satisfactorily (with a grade of B+ or better) complete at least three methods courses, including the required sequence (581 and 582) and an additional elective methodology course authorized by the Quantitative Methods Committee.

According to the Probation and Dismissal Policy, if a student fails to meet field requirements because of grades or for other reasons by the end of their fourth semester, then they will be placed on probation for one semester. Failure to meet the field requirements by the end of that semester results in dismissal from the program.

Qualifying Exams

All students must take a qualifying exam covering all required courses (including math camp, math modeling, research design, quantitative methods I and II, and game theory). The exam is scheduled for the month of January before the start of the student’s fourth semester. The aim of this exam is to ensure a minimum level of competence in basic research practices for all students. Successful completion of this exam does not satisfy requirements for methods, formal, or any other field.

The exam will include a technical component and an applied component. The latter will consist of analyzing a dataset to
answer a substantive question. The substantive questions offered to the students will be related to the American, Comparative, and International Relations (IR) classes offered over the previous three semesters. The committee for the qualifying exams is not field-specific and can include any of the tenured or tenure-track faculty.

The committee will assign grades of pass or fail, and students will be notified of the results of the exam by the DGS.

According to the Probation and Dismissal Policy, failing to pass this exam will result in the student being put on probation and a second exam administered two months later (in March) at a date specified by the DGS. Failing the retake will result in dismissal from the program.

**Research Paper Requirement**

In their second and third year, students are required to produce a solo-authored research paper. The expectation is that this paper will be in the same field as the student's dissertation and at the level of quality of submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

Students need to identify two advisers (i.e., research paper chair and second reader) and obtain their signatures on the Research Paper Proposal Form after taking the qualifying exam (i.e., by the end of January of their second year). In consultation with these advisers (i.e., the committee), they need to develop a research design (motivation, theory, design, data sources) by the last day of classes of the spring semester of their second year. By the end of the spring semester, the student needs to schedule a formal defense of the proposal with their committee, and submit a form with advisers’ signatures after the defense to the departmental administrative assistant responsible for graduate affairs.

The third-year paper is due to the committee by the first day of classes of the third year. The committees will grade these submissions within the first two weeks of the semester. At this point, students will either receive a "revise and resubmit" or a "reject and resubmit" from their committee. A reject and resubmit is a judgment by the faculty that the paper does not reflect satisfactory progress toward the research paper. Students receiving this evaluation will be placed on academic probation, and a failure to significantly improve the project will result in dismissal from the program. In extraordinary circumstances, a "conditional accept/high pass" can be granted.

Students will enroll in a year-long Research Workshop in their third year. The fall semester of this workshop is devoted to helping students develop their dissertation prospectuses.

The final papers are due to the DGS and both readers by the start of the sixth semester. Students are required to defend this paper publicly. The DGS will organize a public presentation for all research papers within the first three weeks of the semester.

The Third-Year Committee will evaluate the quality of the research paper and its potential for submission and acceptance at a peer-reviewed journal. Students who received a "reject and resubmit" in the first round should anticipate stricter scrutiny from faculty at this stage. The paper can be graded as pass or fail. A failing grade in this defense by students who previously received a "reject and resubmit" will result in dismissal from the program. A failing grade without a prior "reject and resubmit" will result in the student being placed on probation until they resubmit and successfully pass the research paper requirement, which must occur before the end of the spring term. Failing to do so will result in dismissal from the program.

In the event of disagreement between the chair and the reader, the DGS will select a third reader in consultation with the faculty in the student’s area of study to evaluate the paper and decide about the final grade. The research paper chair and the reader(s) will inform the student and the DGS about the final grade, together with an explanation, within two weeks after the defenses have been completed.

**Dissertation Committee and Prospectus Requirement**

Students are required to form a Dissertation Committee consisting of at least three faculty members by the start of the fifth semester/January of their third year. Forming a committee requires selecting a dissertation chair and at least two other faculty members and submitting the Dissertation Committee Proposal Form, which consists of signatures of all committee members. With the assistance of the DGS, students will make sure the composition of the committee also meets the Graduate School requirements.

Students will enroll in a year-long Research Workshop in their third year. The spring semester of this workshop is devoted to helping students develop their dissertation prospectuses.

Students are required to have defended the dissertation prospectus by the end of the sixth semester/end of third year. Dissertation prospectus defenses will be announced in advance and will be open to the public. Students who fail to schedule a defense or fail the defense will be put on probation and may re-defend their prospectus by August 1. Failing to schedule or failing the re-defense results in dismissal from the program.

Students are encouraged to apply for the NSF Dissertation Improvement Grant and other outside funding agencies to pursue additional financial support for their dissertation research.

**Summary Timeline**

(Please refer to “Specific Expectations for Each Year in Program” in the Guide to Graduate Studies for more details.)

- End of second semester: Evaluation of class performance and meeting with the DGS
- End of third semester: Required courses (with the exception of the Research Workshop) completed
• Beginning of fourth semester (January): Qualifying exam; submit Research Paper Form (seeking chair and reader)
• End of fourth semester: Major and minor field requirements completed; defend research paper prospectus to chair and second reader
• Before the start of fifth semester (August): Submit research paper
• Beginning of sixth semester (January): Resubmit and defend research paper; submit Dissertation Committee Proposal Form
• End of sixth semester: Defend Dissertation Prospectus (Resubmitted prospectus must be defended before the start of the seventh semester)

Dissertation and Defense
The requirements for completion of the dissertation are described in the general Degree Requirements (https://graduateschool.wustl.edu/degree-requirements-0) by the Graduate School, which are applicable to all Washington University doctoral candidates.

Graduation
Students need to graduate by May of their seventh year. Failure to do so results in the student being placed on probation. The student then has a chance to finish their dissertation by August of their seventh year. Failing that, they will be dismissed from the program.

Foreign Language Requirement
There is no uniform foreign language requirement set by the Graduate School or by the department. The extent and substance of foreign language competence required shall be determined by the Graduate Committee in consultation with the student and their adviser.

Mentored Teaching and Research Experience Responsibilities
Students collaborate with a faculty member in a mentored teaching experience (MTE) or in a mentored research experience or as a combination of the two, depending on their stage of development.

Mentored teaching responsibilities vary from course to course, but in all cases may consist of attending class and grading papers and assignments. Examples of other responsibilities include running discussion sections or reviews, disseminating course materials, and holding office hours.

Research experiences vary across faculty members, but in all cases consists of participating in research activities.

Graduate students are expected to participate in the mentored teaching experience an average of 13.5 hours per week. In some weeks this will be considerably less, and in other weeks (usually around midterms or finals) considerably more hours.

Faculty are expected to set expectations on the grading at the beginning of the semesters, and graduate students should plan accordingly for weeks of heavier grading or other responsibilities.

According to the Probation and Dismissal Policy, poor performance in fulfilling mentored teaching or research responsibilities will result in the student being placed on probation. Lack of improvement while on probation will result in dismissal from the program.

Teaching Certification Requirement
All students need to meet the Graduate School’s teaching requirement by the time they graduate. This requirement includes:

• Participating in departmental intellectual life which includes, but is not limited to, meeting with outside speakers, attending talks and in-house conferences, presenting their own research, assisting in graduate student recruitment, helping to organize in-house conferences (such as CPAC, etc.);
• Participating in an MTE for a “core” class in student’s field of study (this includes intro classes, Quantitative Political Methods (QPM), or other classes considered “core” by the DGS);
• Giving at least one supervised guest lecture or presentation;
• Participating in the mentored teaching experience or teaching a class with regular interaction with students.