



DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE

GRADUATE HANDBOOK 2025-2026

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

HANDBOOK FOR THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

2025-2026

The Department of Political Science at the University of New Mexico offers both M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, with strengths in American Politics/Policy and Comparative/Latin American Politics. The department also offers a B.A./M.A. shared-credit program for UNM Political Science majors.

This handbook is designed to provide an overview of policies pertaining to graduate education in the Political Science Department. Requirements and course listings can be found in the current UNM Catalog (<https://catalog.unm.edu/>).

General Requirements of Graduate Studies

Graduate Studies (GS) is the central graduate academic administrative unit at the University of New Mexico. Students are expected to meet their general requirements per the UNM Catalog ([Graduate Program Policies](#)).

1. CONCENTRATIONS OF STUDY

The Department offers concentrations in the following areas:

American Politics
Comparative Politics
International Relations
Public Policy
Methodology

A pro-seminar (with the exception of *Methodology*) is offered in each of these concentrations. A pro-seminar is also offered in Latin American Politics as part of the Comparative Politics concentration. M.A. students choose one concentration; Ph.D. students choose a primary and a secondary concentration.

2. M.A. AND Ph.D. TIMELINES

Deadlines for completion of program requirements are based on full-time graduate status. Students in part-time status (averaging less than 8 credit hours per semester) will have their deadlines approved by the graduate committee on a case-by-case basis, according to a student's progress through the program. Ph.D. students have the nearly same coursework requirements for the first two years of the program and earn a M.A. enroute to their Ph.D.; their methods and concentration requirements for the first three years of the program are greater than that of M.A. students.

3. MASTER OF ARTS—CORE & CONCENTRATION REQUIREMENTS

The master's program is designed to introduce students to the breadth of the discipline, while providing tools for in-depth independent research. Students receive training in research methodologies that permit them to pursue original research in their chosen concentration. While the M.A. is offered under three plans, all students are to follow Plan III (32 credit hours of coursework only).

Students pursuing the M.A. must take POLS 581 (Statistics for Social Research), POLS 582 (Political Science as a Discipline and a Profession), and POLS 580 (Introduction to Empirical Research). In addition, they must complete at least three pro-seminars, including one in their chosen concentration. Pro-seminars are designed to be a wide-ranging introduction to the literature of a concentration. They must also complete at least one graduate research seminar in their chosen concentration. The Department discourages students from enrolling in hybrid courses (undergraduate courses for which graduate credit is allowed); hybrid courses may only be taken with approval of the Graduate Director, in consultation with the student's Mentorship Committee when available. All requirements for the Master's degree must be completed within a five-year period.

Students pursuing the M.A. who select the methodology concentration must take POLS 681 (Advanced Statistical Analysis for Social Science Research) and two additional methodology courses in political science or other disciplines, as approved by the Political Science Graduate Director, and one research seminar employing advanced research methods.

Program of Studies

Students are required to submit a Program of Studies (available on the GS website at <https://gradforms.unm.edu>). Subsequently, the Program of Studies must be approved by the student's Major Advisor/chair of the Mentorship Committee, the Department, and Graduate Studies. This form must be submitted prior to Graduate Studies deadlines of March 1st, October 1st or July 1st of the *semester prior* to graduating.

Summary of M.A. Core, Concentration Requirements, and Accompanying Paperwork

<i>Semester</i>	<i>Core Coursework</i>	<i>Paperwork Requirements</i>
(1) Fall	POLS 581 & 582 At least one pro-seminar	n/a
(2) Spring	Concentration Requirements	n/a
(3) Fall	POLS 580 Complete pro-seminars	Program of Studies by Oct. 1 st
(4) Spring	Concentration Requirements	n/a

** This timeline is based on full-time status. Timelines can be adjusted on a case-by-case basis with the approval of the Graduate Committee.*

General Requirements of Graduate Studies for the Master's Degree

Graduate Studies (GS) is the central graduate academic administrative unit at the University of New Mexico. Master's students are expected to meet their general requirements per the UNM Catalog. (See links on page 2 of this Handbook.)

4. DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The goal of Ph.D. training is to produce professionalized independent researchers with expertise in a particular area of inquiry and with comprehension of the existing research within the discipline and relevant research from other disciplines.

Independent researchers can do the following on their own: generate good research questions, develop hypotheses to explore the research questions, identify or develop a theory that provides a convincing account of the phenomena related to the research question, develop a suitable research design, and execute the research design with pertinent methods.

Expertise in a particular area of inquiry emphasizes the depth of substantive knowledge and existing research for their specific dissertation topic, as well as awareness of adjacent literature in political science and the social sciences more broadly.

Comprehension of the broad literature within the discipline relates to their major and minor sub-field concentrations, as well as their knowledge of the overarching theories within political science.

Professionalized emphasizes autonomy gained through preparation and training to become an independent and ethical researcher. These skills can be enhanced through mentoring, professional networking, conference participation, and job market material development (among others).

The Ph.D. requires 48 credit hours of coursework plus 18 hours of POLS 699 (Dissertation credit). All students must complete, at UNM, the methodology sequence (POLS 581, 580 and 681), *Survey of Political Science as a Discipline and Profession* (POLS 582); three pro-seminars (including one in each chosen concentration); at least two research seminars in their primary concentration and at least one research seminar in their secondary concentration. Grades of a “B” or higher must be attained in POLS 581 and 580. All core and concentration courses/requirements must be fulfilled before taking the comprehensive exam.

Students who select the methodology concentration must take two additional methodology courses in political science or other disciplines, as approved by the Political Science Graduate Director, over and above the methodology sequence (581, 580 and 681), and one research seminar employing advanced research methods.

Transfer Work

Students entering the Ph.D. program with an M.A. degree from another institution or department must complete the general coursework and credit requirements listed above for all Ph.D. students. On rare occasion, the Political Science Graduate Committee, may, at its sole discretion, waive a general or specific course requirement upon presentation of evidence that a student’s coursework at a previous graduate institution is fully equivalent to UNM Ph.D.-level Political Science offerings. Transfer work, per Graduate Studies, may not exceed 50% of the coursework applied toward the degree.

Mentorship Committee: Each Ph.D. student shall select a Mentorship Committee no later than the end of their first semester of graduate study. The Mentorship Committee must be comprised of three tenure-track Political Science faculty members or, with the approval of the Graduate Committee, two Political Science faculty and one faculty member from another academic unit. In addition, at least one member needs to have primary expertise on the student’s research topic. Committee membership can change from year to

year reflecting changes in the student's concentrations or research topic. A fourth member from outside the department may be added at any time but will not have voting rights until the dissertation stage (i.e., after the student has passed the dissertation prospectus).

Annual portfolio reviews: Each year in the program, Ph.D. students will present a portfolio to their Mentorship Committee. Each portfolio has a key component that, together with an oral exam, provides the basis for formal evaluation. These key components are: 1. Research Proposal, 2. Research Paper, 3. Standalone Literature Review, and 4. Dissertation Prospectus.

The portfolio shall also contain supplemental material for planning, conversing, and reviewing progress; this includes: a current CV, unofficial UNM graduate transcript, a bibliography (preferably annotated) of everything the student has read in graduate school, and a proposed future reading list regarding the student's research area. Other supplemental material varies by year in the program, including reflection papers or professional statements, teaching materials, proposals for next steps, and memos regarding progress or follow-up from the previous year's Mentorship Committee discussion.

The purpose of these supplemental materials is to help the student grow as a scholar, advancing and developing their ideas and understanding. It also provides a venue for collective mentoring and checking on the progress of the student. This explicitly includes following-up with the student regarding their research paper and standalone literature review (such as whether they have been submitted for a conference or peer-review journal).

The first three portfolio exams are internal to the department. The fourth-year portfolio is the Ph.D. exam before candidacy and is reported to Graduate Studies. The combination of the portfolio's key component and the oral exam is graded as pass with distinction, pass, or fail; serious deficiencies in the supplemental material are grounds for failing a portfolio review regardless of the quality of the key component that is the focus of formal evaluation. Students who fail will be given guidance from their Mentorship Committee on how to correct deficiencies and have one opportunity to retake the portfolio exam. For the first three portfolio exams, the retake must be successfully completed no later than six months after the initial exam; informal meetings with the Mentorship Committee are recommended to make sure the student is on track. A second failure will result in dismissal from the Ph.D. program and cancellation of any contracts. The timeline for the fourth-year portfolio is discussed below. Exceptions to the timeline may be given with the approval of the Graduate Committee.

First-year portfolio: The key component of the first-year portfolio is a research proposal for the second-year research paper. The proposal must identify a research question and outline a research design to gather data to explore the question. The proposal may state hypotheses or describe expected findings from the research. Usually, these hypotheses and expectations are based on existing research. The proposal must describe the empirical evidence the student will assemble to explore the question and outline a method to analyze the evidence. As the research progresses, the student may decide to change the method or to alter the scope or other features of the research question in consultation with their Mentorship Committee.

The purpose of the research proposal is to guide the discussion between the student and the Mentorship Committee so the student has a revised proposal (i.e., after the meeting) that the Mentorship Committee believes the student can execute by the end of their second year. This research proposal should be completed by the end of the student's second semester in the program and be between 2,000 and 4,000 words. The student will further demonstrate their understanding of the research project in an oral exam with the Mentorship Committee.

Second-year portfolio: The key component of the second-year portfolio is a research paper that demonstrates the student's current ability and growth potential as an independent researcher. The paper must present a research question, hypotheses or expectations, discussion of existing research that provides

a basis for the hypotheses or expectations, a research design, and analysis of data. The paper must identify the method used for data analysis. Quantitative or qualitative, positivist or interpretivist, or a combination of multiple methods are acceptable if the student is clear and transparent about the method they choose. Students completing the coursework requirements earn their M.A. enroute under Plan III regardless of the outcome of second-year portfolio.

The purpose of this research essay is two-fold. First, we will assess students' ability to conduct research. Second, we expect that this exercise will assist students to home in on the research question for their dissertation. The research question and research design, therefore, will be determined in collaboration with a student's Mentorship Committee. This research paper should be completed by the end of the student's fourth semester in the program. The research paper should be between 4,000 and 8,000 words. The student will further demonstrate their understanding of the research project in an oral exam with the Mentorship Committee. Ideally, the research paper would become a dissertation chapter; however, it is often the case that students change direction or the research results in a dead end. Provided that the student has passed the second-year portfolio exam, they do not need to backfill this requirement in subsequent portfolio exams with another research paper. The purpose of the portfolio system is to help students move forward.

Third-year portfolio: The key component of the third-year portfolio is a standalone literature review that demonstrates a sufficiently broad understanding of the relevant scholarly literature to the student's research interests in political science and possibly other social science disciplines. This essay should describe what we know about the phenomena being studied, outline the central debates in the relevant field, discuss the development of the field over time, and identify puzzles that still need to be addressed in future research. The purpose of this literature-review essay is two-fold. First, we will assess students' understanding of the broad subfield(s) in which they intend to do research and/or teach. Second, we expect that this exercise will assist students in framing the contributions they expect to make in their dissertation research. The specific subject matter covered in the literature review, therefore, will be determined in collaboration with a student's Mentorship Committee. This review should be completed by the middle of the student's sixth semester in the program. The standalone literature review should be between 5,000 and 10,000 words and have between 75 and 125 references. The student will further demonstrate their understanding of the literature in an oral exam with the Mentorship Committee.

Fourth-year portfolio: The key component of the fourth-year portfolio is the dissertation prospectus. Ph.D. students are required to defend their prospectus before being advanced to candidacy. The prospectus should be between 8,000 and 15,000 words, not including references and/or appendices. A preliminary meeting of the Mentorship Committee shall take place within the first month of the student's seventh semester. The student will present their draft prospectus and portfolio materials. The committee will then decide when the formal defense should be. This can be as soon as one month after the preliminary meeting but no later than the end of the student's eighth semester; any student who does not meet this later deadline will receive a failure. The defense will be in a public forum led by the student's Mentorship Committee. Students are required to submit an Announcement of Exam (available at <https://gradforms.unm.edu>) at least two weeks prior to the defense date. The defense is graded as pass with distinction, pass, or fail. The dissertation proposal must be approved by a majority of the committee and a copy of the approved dissertation proposal is to be placed in the student's file. Students who fail will be given guidance from their Mentorship Committee on how to correct deficiencies and have one opportunity to defend their prospectus successfully no later than one year after their first attempt. A second failure will result in dismissal from the Ph.D. program and cancellation of any contracts. Students who pass their prospectus defense are required to submit their Application for Candidacy before the end of the semester (available at <https://gradforms.unm.edu>) listing their coursework and Major Advisor/Dissertation Chair; this should be done in consultation with the Graduate Academic Advisor or Graduate Director.

Dissertation progress: As Ph.D. candidates, students are required to register for dissertation credits (POLS 699) with their dissertation advisor every Fall and Spring semester. (If they defend their dissertation in the Summer, they would also be required to register for dissertation credit for that Summer term.) Failure to register for dissertation credits two semesters in a row (including Summers) results in automatic disenrollment. During the dissertation stage, normal progress is a chapter of written work for each semester or its equivalent in terms of fieldwork, library research, or data collection and/or analysis. The dissertation advisor assigns a grade of either progress (PR) or no progress/no credit (NC) for each semester based on this definition of normal progress. Accumulation of NC grades will eventually result in Type-2 Probation and/or suspension from graduate school. In addition, the student is responsible for convening a meeting of their dissertation committee at least once a year to provide updates and receive continued mentorship. If, in the opinion of a majority of the Committee, a student's work on their dissertation proposal or dissertation does not show satisfactory progress, the student will be notified, in writing, that their degree candidacy may be terminated.

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Summary of Ph.D. Core, Concentration Requirements, and Accompanying Paperwork

<i>Semester</i>	<i>Core Coursework</i>	<i>Department Requirements</i>	<i>GS Requirements</i>
(1) Fall	POLS 581& 582 At least one pro-seminar	Mentorship Committee	n/a
(2) Spring	POLS 681	First-year Portfolio	n/a
(3) Fall	POLS 580 Complete pro-seminars	Research Paper (draft)	Program of Studies
(4) Spring	Concentration Requirements	Second-year Portfolio	n/a
(5) Fall	Concentration Requirements	Literature Review (draft)	n/a
(6) Spring	Concentration Requirements	Third-year Portfolio	
(7 or 8)	Concentration Requirements and POLS 551/552	Fourth-year Portfolio	Announcement of Comprehensive Exam
			Application for Candidacy
**Variable	Continuous enrollment in POLS 699 (excluding summers)	Dissertation Defense	Announcement of Dissertation Exam
			Checklist of Various Dissertation Forms

* This timeline is based on full-time status and passing the comprehensive exam (i.e., the fourth-year portfolio) on the first attempt. Timelines can be adjusted on a case-by-case basis with the approval of the Graduate Committee.

** Students have five years from the completion of the comprehensive exam to complete the Ph.D. program. Students must show progress each semester (see Dissertation section above) once at the candidacy stage.

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5. ACADEMIC PROGRESS REVIEW

The academic records of all graduate students are reviewed each semester. M.A. candidates must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.2 on all graduate courses taken at UNM, while Ph.D. students must maintain a GPA of 3.5. Failure to meet this requirement will result in academic probation and—if not corrected within two semesters—expulsion from the program. A student may include no more than two ‘C’s in their program, as stipulated on the Program of Studies and Application for Candidacy forms. A student receiving a third ‘C’ or a lower grade (including NC) will suffer automatic suspension. At the dissertation stage, students will receive a grade of “progress” (PR) or “no progress” (NC) from their advisor each semester. Failure to show progress on the dissertation is grounds for termination of candidacy but is not automatic.

6. B.A./M.A. SHARED-CREDIT TWO-STEP APPLICATION PROCESS

The B.A./M.A. Program is designed for undergraduate students to get a head start on their M.A. degree by putting some course credits toward both the Bachelor's and Master's degrees. There is a two-step application process for this program. For the first step, UNM undergraduate Political Science majors who meet the eligibility requirements (see the Eligibility Checklist) may apply to the shared-credit program in their junior year. For the second step, they apply formally to the M.A. program (see Admissions Guidelines and Information) after their first semester taking graduate courses; GRE scores are waived for the formal application to the M.A. program.

The eligibility requirements are (1) completing POLS 2140 (Political Analysis) with a B or better, (2) completing the rest of their departmental core courses, (3) completing at least two upper-division courses with a B or better taught by Department tenured/tenure-track faculty, (4) having a GPA of 3.50 or better in their Political Science courses, (5) having an overall GPA of 3.20 or better, and (6) being able to complete 90 hours toward their B.A. degree by the end of their junior year. The application process for the first step involves the Undergraduate Advisor certifying that these requirements are met followed by approval and advising from the Political Science Graduate Director.

For the second step, students apply to the M.A. program as any other applicant would. However, the GRE requirement will be waived for this application as the student’s grades in our courses provide appropriate screening for the M.A. program.

The graduate coursework for the B.A./M.A. shared-credit program (also known as the 4+1 program) is the same as the coursework for the Plan III M.A. In the fall semester of their senior year, they are expected to take POLS 581, POLS 582, and one pro-seminar. In the spring semester of their senior year, they are expected to take six (6) POLS graduate credits. In order to meet core course requirements, this implies that B.A./M.A. students who have been formally admitted to the M.A. program take POLS 580 and two pro-seminars in the fall of their plus-one year.

7. TRANSFERRING FROM THE M.A. TO THE Ph.D. PROGRAM

Currently enrolled M.A. students may apply to the Ph.D. program at the end of their third semester in the M.A. program. The GRE requirement will be waived for this application as the student’s grades in our courses provide appropriate screening for the Ph.D. program. Admission to the Ph.D. program is competitive. Internal applicants are considered in a pool with external applicants. Successful applicants will be expected to defend a research paper in their fourth semester for their Ph.D. qualifying exam unless an exception is provided by the Graduate Committee. If an exception is provided, students are expected to defend their research paper in the fifth semester (typically Fall) of their program.

8. FINANCIAL AID

Every semester a review is made of each student's progress toward completing degree requirements. Also reviewed are the teaching and research needs of the department. Financial aid decisions are made in light of these considerations. Financial assistance is generally granted in any one of five contexts:

Teaching Assistant – The T.A. is specifically responsible for teaching a section of an undergraduate course for the Department. The Award includes: annual stipends that meet or exceed the minimum salary guidelines set forth by Graduate Studies, a full or partial tuition waiver, and in-state tuition for hours above the waiver allowance. Teaching Assistantships are limited to those who have passed the comprehensive exam in the appropriate concentration or at the department's discretion.

Graduate Assistant – The duties of the Graduate Assistant are related to research and/or instruction, but do not directly involve an autonomous teaching responsibility for a class. The G.A. Award includes: annual stipends that meet or exceed the minimum salary guidelines set forth by Graduate Studies, a full or partial tuition waiver, and in-state tuition for hours above the waiver allowance. Both M.A. and Ph.D. students are eligible for a Graduate Assistantship.

Teaching Associate – A Teaching Associate holds a Master's Degree (or its equivalent) and is hired to teach an independent course or course section. Associates are paid on a per-course basis.

Research Assistant – The R.A. is responsible for the research end of projects conducted within the Department. Stipends vary with available funding, and tuition reimbursements depend on the budget associated with a funded research project.

Other assistantship and fellowship opportunities exist with Graduate Studies, Center for Regional Studies, the Latin American and Iberian Institute, the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute, and the Center for Social Policy. The Department Chair and the Graduate Director will seek to nominate students from the department when invited to do so or will encourage applications for such awards when there is an open competition.

The number of assistantships is limited. The Department's Graduate Committee allocates them to both current and new graduate students. The committee considers GPA, previous teaching and/or research experience, performance in Political Science graduate courses, and evidence of normal progress within the program for enrolled students. For newly admitted students, letters of recommendation, writing samples, prior grades, and statements of academic and career interest are considered.

For M.A. students, financial aid is limited to four semesters. For Ph.D. candidates, aid may be limited to six semesters beyond the M.A. degree at the department's discretion.

Continued financial support depends upon satisfactory academic performance, fulfillment of assigned responsibilities, and department resources. At the end of each semester, the Graduate Committee reviews the academic records of all continuing students, as well as evaluations of the students by faculty members to whom they are assigned. If evidence of a problem emerges, the Graduate Director counsels the student regarding areas of strength and weakness and provides suggestions for improved performance. Students will be notified in writing of any performance failures that might jeopardize continuing their financial support.