ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-2018

HANDBOOK FOR MASTER

OF ARTS DEGREE

IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE M.A. DEGREE

M.A. students in Political Science must choose one of following degree programs:

1. M.A. in Political Science
2. M.A. in Political Science with an Option in Public Administration and Public Policy
3. M.A. in Political Science with a Certificate in Public Planning

Graduation Requirements

In all three M.A. programs, students must complete 32 credit hours, including 4 credits of Research Methods coursework (PLS 5001 and PLS 5053), and a 3 credit Capstone Project (PLS 5940) OR a 6 credit Thesis (PLS 5950). The following general rules apply:

- Students completing the Capstone Project cannot count more than 6 credit hours of independent study (5990), thesis (5950), internship (5980) and special courses and workshops (4980-4999) towards degree requirements.
- Students completing the Thesis cannot count more than 3 credit hours of independent study (5990), internship (5980), and special courses and workshops (4980-4999) towards degree requirements.
- No more than nine credit hours at the 4750 to 4999 level will count toward the M.A. degree.
- No more than nine credits hours below a "B" counts towards the M.A. degree. Graduate students must maintain a 3.0 cumulative g.p.a. to continue in the degree program.
- No course in which a student receives a grade below "C" counts toward the M.A. degree.
- A course used to meet the requirements for one option cannot be counted for another (i.e., no double-counting).
- Up to 3 credit hours taken at the graduate level from a field outside of Political Science may count towards your study plan. The Graduate Coordinator decides whether such a course will count, and may request a syllabus for the course. The course must be applicable to your field of study.

For each of the three degree programs, the following additional courses are required:

- M.A. in Political Science:
    - Two Political Science proseminars (PLS 5373, PLS 5023, or PLS 5433)
    - 6 credits in Political Science courses (PLS 4774, PLS 4853, PLS 5073, PLS 5173, PLS 4933, PLS 5033, PLS 5533, PLS 4903, PLS 4913, PLS 4923, PLS 4943, PLS 5153, PLS 5163, PLS 4823)
    - 6 credits in Public Administration/Public Policy courses (PLS 5843, PLS 5543, PLS 4793, PLS 4873, PLS 4893, PLS 5153, PLS 5163, PLS 4823)
    - 7 elective credits for students completing the Capstone Project, or 4 elective credits for students completing the Thesis. These electives can be from the proseminars and other courses listed above, as well as Independent Study, Internship, or Study Abroad.

- M.A. in Political Science with an Option in Public Administration and Public Policy
  - Two PA/Policy proseminars (PLS 5843 and PLS 5543)
  - 6 credits in Public Administration/Public Policy courses (PLS 5843, PLS 5543, PLS 4793, PLS 4873, PLS 4893, PLS 5153, PLS 5163, PLS 4823)
  - 6 credits in Political Science courses: (PLS 5373, PLS 5023, PLS 5433, PLS 4774, PLS 4853, PLS 5073, PLS 5173, PLS 4933, PLS 5033, PLS 5533, PLS 4903, PLS 4913, PLS 4923, PLS 4943, PLS 5153, PLS 5163, PLS 4823)
  - 7 elective credits for students completing the Capstone Project, or 4 elective credits for students completing the Thesis. These electives can be from the proseminars and other courses listed above, as well as Independent Study, Internship, or Study Abroad.
- M.A. in Political Science with a Certificate in Public Planning
  - 9 credits in GIS courses (GEO 5810, GEO 5860, GEO 5820)
  - 9 credits in Public Administration/Public Policy courses (PLS 4793, PLS 4893, PLS 5153, PLS 5543, PLS 5843). These courses can double-count within either M.A. degree listed above.

Always consult the Graduate Catalog for course titles, descriptions, and up-to-date information on the degree programs.

Advisement

Students must consult with the Graduate Coordinator before registration. Each graduate student has the responsibility to understand the degree requirements, as listed in the *Graduate Catalog*, which is available online. The Graduate Coordinator serves as your primary academic advisor, though other graduate faculty members may be consulted for academic and professional advice. You should consult with the Graduate Coordinator about your study plan, your course selection, internships, independent studies, capstone/thesis options, and any other degree-related questions or concerns. Sample study plans and course checklists are available on the department MA webpage, and the shared files in the Political Science email group.

Thesis versus Capstone Project

All students must complete either a Thesis or a Capstone Project. Students should consult with the Graduate Coordinator and other faculty mentors about the option that is best for them.

- All students will work with a faculty mentor. Be sure to contact this person early—at least five weeks before you enroll in the thesis or capstone, so that they can plan for your project.
- If you intend to defend your thesis or present your capstone project during the summer or during breaks, be sure to consult with their schedules.
- Students with a cumulative graduate GPA below 3.0 may not defend their thesis or present their capstone project.
- For the thesis or capstone, you must use a citation format that is used in Political Science research. Inconsistent citations and references are not permitted. Consult with your chairperson about citations. Consider using Zotero software (or similar software) to organize your citations, and integrate them into word-processing software.

Option 2: Capstone Project

The capstone project is ideal for most graduate students, and includes a wide array of potential projects, including policy or organizational analysis, applied policy research, case studies, or empirical research projects. A capstone must be well-written, demonstrating strong professional writing, methods, and critical thinking skills. A typical capstone projects averages about 20-30 pages.

- The Capstone Project is 3 credit hours
- The student will choose a capstone faculty mentor from the Political Science graduate faculty, and must consult with the Graduate Coordinator and Department Chair in this process. The Department Chair is responsible for registering students for capstone credits.
- The student may submit a capstone proposal to his/her mentor, who must approve the proposal before the student may proceed with the capstone research and writing.
- When the capstone advisor has approved the project in final draft, the student will present the capstone project to their mentor, and to at least two other faculty members in Political Science. Faculty have the right to require revisions of the capstone project before the defense takes place and may require additional revisions at the time of the presentation. For students enrolled in the online option, the capstone project defense may occur online, using appropriate technology.
- Students who have not completed their capstone projects at the end of their 3 credit hours may enroll in PLS 5991 for non-credit independent study hours, which provides access to Booth Library, at no tuition. You have six years from the first semester you enrolled as a graduate student to complete your degree.
- You must provide a copy of your capstone project to your faculty mentor; if he/she approves, a digital copy is acceptable.

Option 2: Thesis

The thesis is ideal for students planning to pursue a Ph.D. You should have a clear idea about a significant empirical research project, implementing quantitative and/or qualitative research methods. Thesis students must be able to manage a major independent project, and should possess excellent writing skills. A thesis must be well-written, demonstrating strong professional writing, methods, and critical thinking skills. A typical thesis averages about 45-60 pages.

- The thesis requires 6 credit hours.
- Prior to enrolling for thesis hours, the student will choose a thesis advisor from the Political Science graduate faculty, and must consult with the Graduate Coordinator and Department Chair in this process.
- The Department Chair is responsible for registering students for thesis credits.
- The student must submit a thesis proposal to his/her thesis advisor, who must approve the proposal before the student may proceed with the thesis research and writing. The proposal is usually about 4-5 pages, and will include a well-defined presentation of the research question, scholarly literature, and research methodology.
- When the thesis advisor has approved the thesis in final draft, the student will submit the thesis to the other two members of his/her committee for their review. One member of the thesis committee may be from another department. The committee has the right to require revisions of the thesis before the thesis defense takes place; the defense will not be scheduled until the committee gives its approval. Committee members may require additional revisions at the time of the defense. For students enrolled in the online option, the thesis defense may be scheduled online, using appropriate technology.

- Students who have not completed their theses at the end of their 6 credit hours may enroll in PLS 5951 for non-credit thesis hours, which provides access to Booth Library, at no tuition. You have six years from the first semester you enrolled as a graduate student to complete your degree.
- The original and first copy of the thesis must be deposited with the University Library; an additional copy must be deposited with the Political Science Department. The University also has very specific guidelines on thesis format, which must be followed to complete your degree. A link to the Graduate School's Thesis Guidelines can be found at the Political Science Graduate Program webpage. You should also provide a copy of your thesis to your thesis chair and committee members; if they approve, a digital copy is acceptable.

Apply for graduation

You must apply to graduate in the semester in which you will defend your thesis or capstone project. This application should be processed as early as possible in your final semester and can be done through PAWS.

Student Research and Professional Development

We encourage you to present your research at an academic conference. A number of presentation opportunities exist at the University and elsewhere. Academic presentations are accomplishments that can be listed on your resume and are especially important to students applying to a Ph.D. program or for government research positions. Students who wish to participate may apply to the department for a partial reimbursement of conference expenses. A number of funding awards, including Williams Travel Grants also exist from the Graduate School, which have historically covered most of the travel costs. The best website for information on academic conferences is found at the American Political Science Association's website at http://www.apsanet.org. The Graduate Coordinator will regularly send out announcements about upcoming conferences to your EIU email accounts.

On-campus students should check their departmental mailbox at least once a week. Many faculty members return graded items there. The main PLS office is open weekdays from 8:30-noon and 1-4:30 pm. Computers are available in the PLS Graduate Assistant office. Graduate Assistants have a priority with computer use for their assistantship work. You may print scholarly journal articles for free on the 2nd floor of Booth Library.

Internships are an excellent method of gaining significant professional experience. Internships are available on-campus, in the local region, and in many communities. Students are responsible for obtaining internships. The Graduate Coordinator will announce opportunities via EIU email. The department chairperson must approve and register students for internships. Students must complete an Internship Policy form and an Internship Application. Both are available on the department webpage and in the shared files of the PLS graduate student EIU email group. The Graduate Coordinator serves as the Internship Coordinator, and will help students complete required forms.

Adjusting to Graduate School

Research and our own classroom experiences indicate that the following factors are important to consider as you enroll in a graduate degree:

- **Class format:** One of the biggest changes is that nearly all your courses will be conducted in a seminar format. This means that the professor will do far less (if any) lecturing, and instead, you (the student) will be engaged much more in the conduct of the course. You must be ready to discuss the material, with substantive comments and critiques about the readings and assignments.
- **Research paper expectations:** You will be asked to complete a major research project in many of your classes. Compared to undergraduate courses, a much larger portion of your grade will likely be determined by your final research paper. We expect that you will proofread and revise your writing. Research papers are typically longer at the graduate level, with higher expectations for the research question, literature review, and methods.
- **On being challenged:** You will be challenged by your professors and held to a much higher standard than you ever were at the undergraduate level. This process will result in a dramatic improvement in your critical thinking, research, and writing skills, but it can be painful at the onset. Such challenges can be frustrating; yet the expectation of professionalism is significantly different from your undergraduate experience.
- **Reading expectations:** You will be reading more than you ever have before. Reading and writing assignments, especially in the first months of graduate school, are often overwhelming. This is a normal feeling, and you will become a better reader and writer the more you work at it.
- **Focus on methods and data become far more prominent:** Graduate school is different in how you assess readings. The focus now moves much more to "how" the research is done, along with what the research adds to scholarship on the subject. We focus more on methods, data, and theoretical/conceptual approaches to studying a subject, versus simply retaining material.
- **Class attendance and engagement:** Attendance is mandatory in all classes, whether online or face-to-face. If you live near campus, you should attend department forums, guest lecturers, and department events. Students should join the EIU Political Science Department's Facebook page, to help them connect with faculty, alumni, and fellow students. These events enhance your learning experience, and help you build mentors and a network of support.

Tips for Graduate School Success

- **Time management:** Our best students have good time management skills. Create a work schedule to keep you on track, and use your weekends and school breaks effectively.
- **For full-time students, limit external employment:** We have the highest completion rate among students who were able to limit the number of hours they worked off campus. Especially if you hold an assistantship at EIU, we strongly advise you against holding another job.
- **Keep healthy:** You will need to find time to take breaks and "recharge." Exercise, healthy eating, and other healthy outlets help relieve stress and remain healthy. Good mental health is also important. Take time to recharge your brain by reading for pleasure, creative pursuits and hobbies, and spending time with friends. Seek professional help if you need it.
- **Allow yourself to be creative:** Graduate school requires creativity, especially when thinking about new research ideas and approaches. Graduate school is not the place for close-minded people. We need you to explore and understand different intellectual, philosophical, and methodological pursuits. We need you to make connections across fields of study and disciplines.

- **Think like an entrepreneur:** Seek out opportunities to expand your skills, including research, presenting at conferences, gaining technical skills, etc. The Graduate School, the Political Science department, and the College of Sciences offer funding for research conferences, and training for computer skills. Take advantage of them. Leadership opportunities exist with the Graduate Student Advisory Council. Check your EIU email regularly!
- **Cultivate faculty and alumni mentors:** Get to know your professors. Visit them during their office hours, and seek out joint research projects. Attend department events to get to know them better. Online students can connect with faculty through email, the department Facebook page, and other communications. When professors get to know you better, they are better able to help with your research and professional goals, write your letters of recommendation, and assist with networking opportunities. Occasionally alumni will serve as mentors—if we request volunteer students, consider saying yes to an alumni mentor!
- **Remain positive:** Graduate school is challenging, but our program has had fantastic successes. We have excellent placement in federal, state and local government, interest groups, non-profits, and the private sector. Our students also have an excellent record for Ph.D. and law school placement. If you are here, we believe you have the skills to succeed.