



Master of Arts Program in Political Science

Welcome to the Master of Arts (M.A.) program in Political Science at Iowa State University!

This handbook will provide you with information about our M.A. policies and procedures. Although many departmental regulations are specified within this handbook, you should be aware that there are additional requirements set forth by the Graduate College. These are outlined in the Graduate Student Handbook, which has information and guidelines to facilitate progress through the entire graduate program. The handbook is online at: <https://www.grad-college.iastate.edu/handbook/>.

As you begin your course of study there are bound to be questions or concerns you will have. We want to assure you that the faculty and staff will be available to assist you in any way we can. The department faculty and students welcome you to the program and wish you success in your studies.

For further information about the M.A. program, contact:

Director of Graduate Education

Mack Shelley

549 Ross Hall

Iowa State University

Ames, IA 50011

PHONE: 515-294-1075

EMAIL: mshelley@iastate.edu

WEB PAGE: <https://pols.iastate.edu/academics/graduate/>

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As of Fall 2024, Iowa State University processes are conducted in Workday. You can find training materials for Workday at [this link](#).

Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities

All student rights and responsibilities, information dealing with academic probation, grievance procedures, etc. can be found in the Graduate College Handbook, Chapter 8: Rights and Responsibilities. Students who do not maintain a grade point average of 3.00 will be placed on academic probation, which can affect continuation in the program, graduation, and assistantship support. The Political Science graduate program follows all rules and procedures as set forth by the Graduate College. Please be sure to review this information.

Guidelines for Pursuing Your Master of Arts Degree

The department offers work for a Master of Arts degree (M.A.), with a major in political science, and minor for students in other departments. The Political Science department additionally serves as a home department for the Master of Science in Cyber Security (more in-depth information for the M.S. in Cyber Security is presented later in this handbook). Detailed requirements for all graduate degrees may be obtained from the department office or at the department's [web page](#).

The M.A. program is designed to enable graduates for careers in research, public service, private industry, teaching, or further graduate study. Graduate students may also pursue certification for teaching at the high school or community college level.

A thesis or creative component is required for the M.A. degree. The department also has a Master of Arts/Juris Doctorate (M.A./J.D.) program with the Law School of Drake University. Detailed information for the M.A./J.D. can be found at the ISU Political Science web page as well as the Drake Law School [website](#). Students wishing to pursue this joint degree must submit separate applications to Drake University and Iowa State University and be accepted by both institutions.

M.A. graduates have a broad substantive understanding of the political process and the academic study of politics. They also have in-depth knowledge of one or more subfields in political science. Graduates are skilled at conducting research, able to identify and address complex political questions, and can account for ethical, legal, economic, and social issues of policy.

Admission Requirements

Prerequisites for full admission to the M.A. program typically require completion of at least 12 credits in Political Science or related course work. It also requires completion of Statistics 5101, which assumes successful completion of a prior introductory statistics course (equivalent to Statistics 1010). It is highly recommended that students also have successfully completed one year of a single foreign language (equivalent to eight semester hours). Full admission is rarely granted to students with less than a 3.00 (on a 4.00-point scale) undergraduate grade point average; otherwise, students may be offered restricted admission.

Students in other graduate programs may obtain a minor in political science by completing at least nine graduate-level credits of political science courses, including one of the proseminars. Interested students should consult the Graduate College Handbook for additional information on graduate minors.

Application Requirements

1. At least three letters of recommendation. Normally these would be from individuals who are competent to evaluate the applicant's past academic performance and potential for graduate study.
2. A 250–500-word essay. This essay should explain why the applicant wants to pursue the Master of Arts degree and what areas or topics in political science they would like to study in the program.
3. Transcripts from previous undergraduate and graduate institutions.
4. Application fee. The fee is assessed only if an applicant is offered admission, and may be waived for applicants with exceptional records or deferred to the first university billing.

International students: Students whose first language is English or who have earned a degree from countries where the only official language is English are exempt from the language proficiency requirements. (Please see [this list](#)). Applicants whose native language is not English must demonstrate proficiency through an examination. The department normally does not consider applicants whose native language is not English who have scores lower than 563 on the Paper Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEF), 85 on TOEFL Internet, 6.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), 57 on Pearson English Tests (PTE), or 105 on the Duolingo English test. Nonnative English speakers with undergraduate or graduate degrees from the United States are not required to take the TOEFL.

Application Deadlines

The application deadline for fall admission is May 1 and the deadline for spring admission is October 1. The departmental financial aid deadline for students wishing to be considered for an assistantship is March 1. Assistantships are not generally awarded to students entering in the spring. However, the department may accept late applications for admission and financial aid. If you are considering applying after the deadline, contact the Director of Graduate Education.

Deadlines

Fall by **May 1**

Spring by **October 1**

Summer by **March 1**

Department Financial Aid Deadline

Fall/Spring by **March 1**

(complete application: all requirements fulfilled and in Political Science office)

Graduate English Examination/English Proficiency Testing

Reading and writing in the English language are essential skills for succeeding in graduate school at Iowa State University and essential for future success in careers that require a graduate degree. An English proficiency examination is required only for students whose native language is not English.

Graduate students whose native language is not English and who did not earn a degree from countries where English is the only official language, or who do not meet the exemption TOEFL or IELTS score level must take the English Placement Test at the beginning of their first semester of enrollment. This test is administered by the Department of English. A student who does not pass this examination is assigned to one or more courses in the English 1010 series. This course work must be completed during the first year of study.

Oral English Certification Test – for International TAs

All international graduate students who are offered or considered for a Teaching Assistantship (TA) are required to take the Oral English Certification Test (OECT). The OECT consists of two sections: the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) section and the TEACH teaching-simulation section. The OPI is rated by an interviewer and two or three other raters. The TEACH portion usually consists of two or three raters and a proctor, including at least one ISU student. The raters individually assign a score for the overall comprehensibility and effectiveness of the spoken language and listening ability. The scores of OPI and TEACH are combined, and the result is reported to students and departments as one of four possible levels of certification:

- Fully certified (Level 1)
- Conditionally certified (Level 2)
- Certified with restrictions (Level 3)
- Not certified (Level 4)

Potential international TAs who demonstrate English proficiency on the TOEFL iBT, IELTS, or Test of Spoken English (TSE) are exempt from taking one or both sections of the OECT. Students in these four categories are each appointed to different teaching duties.

Your Academic Plan and Your Academic Plan Committee

The DOGE will assist incoming students in outlining their Academic Plan (AP), which lists all courses taken throughout the program for your M.A. degree, and in contributing to your Academic Plan Committee (APC). For the thesis option, a student's APC consists of the major professor and a minimum of two other committee members (one member must be from outside the major). The major professor, who must be a member of the graduate faculty in the student's declared major, serves as chair of the APC. All tenured and tenure-track faculty are permanent members of the graduate faculty; other ("term") faculty typically have temporary appointments to the graduate faculty—check with the DOGE to be sure who is eligible to serve on your APC. The other member(s) of the APC provide relevant specialized knowledge or a different perspective helpful to the planning, execution, and reporting of research. If a graduate minor has been declared, a graduate faculty member from the minor program or interdepartmental minor must serve on the APC. The major professor and the representative from the minor field may not be the same person. For students who select the creative component option, the APC may consist of one, two, or three members. It is important to consult with the DOGE prior to selecting your APC member(s).

The student and the major professor develop the AP with the consultation and approval of the APC. This agreement between the student and the Graduate College should be submitted as early as possible for approval. It is recommended that the APC be formed as early as the second semester of graduate study. At this time, the student needs to meet with the APC to plan the remainder of courses in the selected degree program. In no case can the APC be formed later than the term before the final oral examination. Students can create their AP directly in Workday, using [these steps](#). Students can submit their APC membership in Workday using the *Manage Committee Membership* task. Instructions for this task are available [here](#). Each student's AP should be designed to correct deficiencies in academic preparation, allow study of subject matter that most interests the student, and avoid repetition in areas where the student is well prepared. The APC assures that program requirements are met before the AP can be approved.

The AP needs to be approved by the student, APC member(s), and the DOGE of the major, minor, or interdepartmental major/minor, as appropriate, before submitting it to the Graduate College through Workday. There the AP is reviewed for adherence to the standards of the Graduate College and is submitted to the Dean of the Graduate College for approval.

An exemplary planning document to help lay out the AP is shown in Table 1 below. The completed AP must be submitted to the Graduate College for approval, listing all courses to be taken to fulfill the 30-credit requirement for the M.A. degree. The AP must include all courses transferred into the M.A., taken as a graduate student at ISU, and to be taken, along with additional information.

Course Work

During the academic year, graduate students must be registered for a minimum of nine credits to be considered full-time students or five credits to be considered half-time students. During the summer term, graduate students must be registered for a minimum of five credits to be considered full-time students or three credits to be considered half-time students. M.A. students are expected to complete the degree program within five years. However, completing the M.A. in two years is routine.

Students must complete at least 30 credit hours that count toward the degree. A minimum of 21 of these hours must be taken in the Department of Political Science. Six credits (two classes) of 4000-level course work and three credits of thesis credit (Political Science 6990) or creative component credit (Political Science 5990) may be applied toward the 21-hour minimum. Please- note that if you take dual-listed (4000- and 5000-level simultaneously) classes, you must be registered for 5000-level credits for the course to count toward degree requirements.

Table 1: Exemplary Academic Plan Outline (Fall 2025-Spring 2027)

Department Name	Course Number	Semester Credits	Course Title	Grade	Year
POLS	5010	3	Political Analysis and Research		F25
STAT	5101	4	Statistical Methods for Data Analysis		F25
POLS	5080	3	Proseminar in Policy Implementation		F25
POLS	5800	3	Ethics and Public Policy		S26
POLS	5740	3	Policy and Program Evaluation		S26
POLS	5600	3	Proseminar in American Political Institutions		F26
POLS	5070	3	Proseminar in Public Policy		F26
POLS	5900	2	Special Topics		F26
Elective	5000-level	3	Graduate-level course outside Political Science (e.g., SOC 5400: Comparative Social Change)		S27
POLS	6990 or 5990	3	Thesis or Creative Component		S27
	Total Cr.	30			

Students may take courses outside of Political Science that relate to their area of interest. To facilitate timely degree completion, it is advisable that such courses count toward fulfilling degree requirements. These courses must be approved by the DOGE or the student's APC, and any exceptions must be approved by the APC.

Thesis or Creative Component/Deadlines

All students are required to write and successfully defend a thesis or creative component. As a first step in this process, the APC must approve a written proposal. A thesis or creative component is considered complete when it is approved by the APC and the Graduate College following a final oral examination.

Final Oral Examination

After completion of all the requirements for the M.A. degree, the student will be administered a final oral examination (approximately two hours) by the APC. The examination may cover all courses taken by the student and the material related to the thesis or creative component. There are several important deadlines for the final oral examination and for graduation. The Application for Program Completion must be submitted in Workday by the first Friday of the semester in which a student is planning to graduate (and preferably before). The Request for Graduate Oral Exam task must be completed in Workday three weeks prior to the actual date of the final oral examination. In addition, there is a Graduate College deadline each semester for the last date to take the final oral examination. Please see the [Graduate College Deadlines](#), and be sure to scroll down to find the deadline information.

Class Registration Process

The following information on registration policies and “how to register” for classes can be found [here](#). A registration overview for Workday can be found [here](#). For more information please visit the [ISU home page](#) and the [Graduate College home page](#).

Admitted students should consult the DOGE or major professor prior to registering for classes. Students early in their M.A. program should give priority to core and methodology classes when making course selections. Advanced students should focus on connecting their concentration with their thesis or creative component, in conjunction with their APC. The ISU course catalog is [here](#). Detailed information about the availability of all classes for a specific semester is available at [Schedule of Classes](#) and through the Course Section Offering report in Workday.

Registration can be accomplished online through Workday, which requires an ISU ID and password. Deadlines and other related information are provided in the [Academic Calendars](#). An alternate registration procedure is a walk-through system in Room 10, Enrollment Services Center.

Many students take some of their courses at a distance. Registration for distance classes can be done through the [Registrar's Office](#).

Non-admitted students may register for graduate classes as well, through the non-degree program. However, students who are not admitted should be aware that a strict limit of nine credits may be transferred into the AP after being accepted into the M.A. program.

Credits transferred from another institution must be approved by the student's APC. See the [Graduate College Handbook](#) for more information on transfer credits.

Canceling Registration

Canceling your registration means you are dropping ALL your courses before the first day of the term. Other deadlines apply for some courses, such as half-term courses that do not begin at the start of the semester. For further information please see [Cancel Registration | The Office of the Registrar | Iowa State University \(iastate.edu\)](#) or call 515-294-1840.

Withdrawing From Iowa State University

Withdrawing from the university means that you are dropping ALL your classes on or after the first day of the term. You must notify your advisor and your college when you decide to withdraw from the university. Contact your advisor for Workday directions. Your tuition adjustment is based on the date you begin the withdrawal process.

The Master of Arts Curriculum Requirements (30 credits minimum)

Required Courses:

- I. Two Concentration Area Required Courses (6 cr.)
- II. One Concentration Area Elective (3 cr.)
- III. POLS 5010 Political Analysis and Research (3 cr.)
- IV. STAT 5101 (strongly recommended) (4 cr.)
OR
Two years of a single foreign language (16-20 cr., which do not count at the graduate level)
- V. Thesis or Creative Component (3 cr.)

Concentration Areas:

The M.A. program features three concentration areas: American Politics, Global Politics, and Public Policy. Each concentration area includes two required core courses, which are offered alternate years, and one required elective course chosen from the list below, most of which also are offered alternate years. Deviations from the curricular requirements, such as counting courses not listed below as concentration area electives, require approval from the DOGE or the Committee.

Required Courses in Each Concentration:

American Politics: 5250 (Proseminar in American Political Behavior), 5600 (Proseminar in American Political Institutions)

Global Politics: 5040 (Proseminar in International Politics), 5050 (Proseminar in Comparative Politics)

Public Policy: 5070 (Proseminar in Public Policy), 5080 (Proseminar in Policy Implementation)

Elective Courses:

American Politics: 5100 (State Government and Politics), 5870 (Cyberpolitics), 6100A (Graduate Seminars: American Politics)

Global Politics: 5220 (International Law), 5520 (Comparative Foreign Policy), 5530 (International Organization), 6100D (Graduate Seminars: Global Politics)

Public Policy: 5340 (Legal and Ethical Issues in Cyber Security), 5350 (Contemporary Political Philosophy), 5430 (Energy Policy), 5710 (Organizational Theory in the Public Sector), 5740 (Policy and Program Evaluation), 5750 (Management in the Public Sector), 5770 (Government, Business, and Society), 5800 (Ethics and Public Policy), 5870 (Cyberpolitics), 6100G (Graduate Seminars: Public Policy)

Required Course Distribution:

30 graduate credits are required for the degree, of which 21 credits must be from Political Science; of the 21, up to nine credits may be from 4000-level classes in the Political Science Department.

The total number of credits from classes numbered below the 5000 level that may be used on the AP is nine (eligible courses in Political Science must be 4000-level and courses in other departments must be at least 3000-level). The required courses above count toward this distribution based on the department in which the class is taken.

Your AP course distribution must include at least 12 5000-level credits in Political Science. You also may take as many as nine 4000-level credits in Political Science or split those 4000-level credits across departments. A 3000-level course on the AP must be from another department. Note that 3000-level courses in other departments are eligible for the Academic Plan only if they are not cross-listed with Political Science.

Please be aware that if you choose to take a course that is numbered at both 4000 and 5000 levels you could not count those credits as 4000-level if you have already used up your undergraduate distribution limit of nine credit hours.

It is important to understand that credits for foreign language (e.g., German 1010, 1020, 2010, and 2020; Chinese 1010, 1020, 2010, and 2020) are not acceptable for graduate credit, so do not count toward the minimum of 30 credits required to receive the M.A., whereas the four credits for Statistics 5101 do count as graduate credit and are applied toward the 30 credits required for graduation. Students whose first language is not English normally will not be expected to take two years of another foreign language, but in such cases are required to take Statistics 5101. See Section 5.1.2 of the [Graduate College Handbook](#) for further information.

**Graduation Checklist for Required Courses
(write course department and number in blank)**

_____	<u>Concentration Required Course 1</u>	(3 cr.)
_____	<u>Concentration Required Course 2</u>	(3 cr.)
_____	<u>Concentration Elective</u>	(3 cr.)
_____	<u>POLS 5010 Political Analysis and Research</u>	(3 cr.)
_____	<u>Statistics 5101 (or 16-20 credits of a single foreign language)</u>	(4 cr.)
_____	<u>Thesis or Creative Component</u>	(3 cr.)

Course Distribution Worksheet

In this column, list at least 21 credits taken in the Department of Political Science. Classes listed above may be repeated on this list. Only two 5900 courses may be taken except by permission of the DOGE.

In this column, list at least nine additional credits. These may be taken outside of political science and should be relevant to your field of study. Students who use a language in place of Statistics 5101 will need additional credits in this section.

Course	Credits	Course	Credits
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
Total	_____	Total	_____

Things to Note and Do to Help Ensure Your Timely Graduation with the M.A. Degree

- _____ No more than nine credits below the 5000-level can be used to reach the total of 30
- _____ The Graduate English Examination is required of graduate students whose native language is not English and who did not graduate from a U.S. institution, or who do not meet the exemption TOEFL or IELTS score. The Exam needs to be taken before completion of 12 course credits.
- _____ Meet with the DOGE and set up your APC
- _____ Meet with the members of your APC
- _____ Submit your written thesis or creative component proposal to the members of the APC
- _____ Schedule and pass the Final Oral Examination of your Thesis or Creative Component

Financial Aid

Some students may be eligible for financial aid. Financial aid applications are available in the Student Financial Aid Office, Room 0210, Beardshear Hall. 515-294-2223. The departmental deadline for completed financial aid/graduate applications is March 1 for consideration for the next academic year.

Graduate Assistantships

Two types of Graduate Assistantships (GA) are available: Teaching Assistantships (TA) and Research Assistantships (RA). These positions are limited within budgetary constraints, so it is important that you apply for an assistantship early in the year. These assistantships provide a unique opportunity for students to gain valuable experience while providing them financial support through the school year. The assistantships include a medical insurance package through Blue Cross-Blue Shield. A dental plan is also available for an additional fee. Students may apply for assistantships by submitting completed program application with financial aid materials by March 1 for consideration for the next academic year.

Graduate Student Awards

Through its generous alumni donors, the Department of Political Science provides a number of competitive awards for students who are active in the program. These include:

- Philip R. Baumann Graduate Scholarship
- Dwight Ink Graduate Scholarship
- James Socknat Scholarship
- Whitaker-Lindgren Scholar in Political Science Award
- Early Achievement in Graduate Research Award

The application deadline is March 1. Dollar amounts of the awards vary.

Additional awards are determined through faculty review without self-nomination:

- Dr. Yong S. Lee Excellence in Public Management Scholarship
- Iowa State University Teaching Excellence Award
- Iowa State University Research Excellence Award

Important Contact Information

Iowa State University website: Most university information can be obtained at this site. Includes an index for easy tracking of information, student information, etc.

Iowa State Online: Phone (515) 294-3916

Main office: iowastateonline@iastate.edu

Tech Support: solution@iastate.edu: Phone (515) 294-4040

Drake University Law School, Des Moines, IA 50311

Joint degree in Political Science: M.A./J.D.

Admissions: (515) 271-2782

Graduate College, Room 1137 Pearson Hall (515) 294-4531

All graduate applications, forms, handbooks and general information can be found at the Graduate College website. The Graduate College has information on departmental deadlines, financial assistance, GRE requirements, etc., as well as a directory of graduate programs.

Office of International Students and Scholars, 4530 Memorial Union (515) 294-1120

International students should check out the website for information on visas and other required procedures.

Political Science Department , 503 Ross Hall (515) 294-7256

In-depth information on the Political Science graduate programs can be found at the departmental website.

Office of Admissions, 100 Enrollment Services Center. 1-800-262-3810 (in U.S.) or (515) 294-5836

Admissions questions can be sent by e-mail to: admissions@iastate.edu

Office of Student Financial Aid, 0210 Beardshear Hall (515) 294-2223

E-mail: financialaid@iastate.edu