



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 information about our M.A. policies and procedures. Although many departmental regulations are specified within this handbook, please note 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 students begin their course of study, questions or concerns are bound to arise. The faculty and staff are available to provide assistance in any way possible. The department faculty and students extend a warm welcome to the program and wish all incoming students success in their studies.

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

Graduate Director

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/>

Table of Contents

Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities

Aims and Scope of a Master's Degree

Admission Requirements

Application Requirements

Application Deadlines

Graduate English Examination/English Proficiency Testing

Academic Plan and Academic Plan Committee

Coursework

Thesis or Creative Component/Deadlines

Final Oral Examination

Class Registration Process

Canceling Registration

Withdrawing From Iowa State University

The Master of Arts Curriculum Requirements, as of Fall 2026 (30 credits minimum)

The Master of Arts Curriculum Requirements, prior to Fall 2026 (30 credits minimum)

Course Distribution Worksheet

Financial Aid

Graduate Assistantships

Graduate Student Awards

Important Contact Information

As of Fall 2024, Iowa State University processes are conducted in Workday. ISU affiliates can find training materials for Workday at [this link](#). Please contact the Graduate Director at mshelley@iastate.edu for assistance.

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.

Aims and Scope of a Master's 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.

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.

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.

Admission Requirements

Prerequisites for full admission to the M.A. program typically include completion of at least 12 credits in Political Science or related course work. For students in the American Government and Policy and the Global Politics and Policy concentrations, the program requires Statistics 5101 for graduation; that course assumes successful completion of a prior introductory statistics course (equivalent to Statistics 1010). Full admission is rarely granted to students with less than a 3.00 (on a 4.00-point scale) undergraduate grade point average; such 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 political science courses required for one of the three concentrations. 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. For admitted applicants, the application fee may be waived for applicants with exceptional records or payment may be deferred to the first university billing, at the discretion of the department.
5. 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 550 on the Paper Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), 79 on TOEFL Internet, 6.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), 53 on Pearson English Tests (PTE), or 115 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 or summer. However, the department may accept late applications for admission and financial aid. Those considering applying after the deadline should contact the Graduate Director.

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 are required to take the [English Placement Test](#) at the beginning of their first semester. The minimum exemption scores are as follows: 550 on the Paper Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), 79 on TOEFL Internet, 6.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), 53 on Pearson English Tests (PTE), or 115 on the Duolingo English test. 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

To be considered for a Teaching Assistantship (TA), international graduate students must 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 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)

Students not in Level 1 have restricted eligibility for teaching assistantships.

Academic Plan and Academic Plan Committee

The Graduate Director will assist incoming students in outlining their Academic Plan (AP), which lists all courses to be taken throughout the program for the M.A. degree, and in contributing to the student's Academic Plan Committee (APC). For the thesis option, a student's APC consists of the major professor and a minimum of two other members of the Graduate Faculty, one of whom is affiliated with a department other than Political Science or in a different area of teaching and research in Political Science than the other committee members. The major professor, who must be a member of the graduate faculty in Political Science, serves as chair of the APC. Faculty with the word 'Professor' in their title in the [department directory](#) are eligible to serve on the APC, although faculty whose title in the directory also includes the word "Teaching" have some restrictions related to serving on the APC. Check with the Graduate Director to be sure who is eligible to serve on the 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 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 Graduate Director prior to selecting 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 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, 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 Graduate Director 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.

The completed AP must be submitted to the Graduate College for approval and should list all courses that will fulfill the 30-credit requirement for the M.A. degree. The AP must include all courses transferred into the program, courses already completed as a graduate student at ISU, and courses that are planned for future semesters..

Coursework

During the Fall and Spring semesters, graduate students must be registered for a minimum of nine credits each semester 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 seven credits to be considered full-time students or 3.5 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. This can include up to nine credits (three classes) at the 4000 level, although only six credits (two classes) can double count for both BA and MA for ISU undergraduates according to current Graduate College rules. Three to six credits of thesis credit (Political Science 6990) or two to three credits of creative component credit (Political Science 5990) may be applied toward the 21-hour minimum. Please note that students enrolled in dual-listed (4000- and 5000-level simultaneously) classes must be registered for 5000-level credits for the course to count toward degree requirements.

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 Graduate Director or the student's APC, and any exceptions must be approved by the APC.

Thesis or Creative Component/Deadlines

All students are required to defend a thesis or creative component successfully. 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 Graduate Director 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 at the 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 registration means dropping ALL 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](#) or call 515-294-1840.

-

Withdrawing From Iowa State University

Withdrawing from the university means dropping ALL classes on or after the first day of the term. Advisors and the college must be notified when a withdrawal from the university is initiated. Contact the advisor for Workday directions. Tuition adjustments are based on the date the withdrawal process begins.

Starting Fall 2026, the information on this page will constitute the official curriculum requirements for the Master of Arts in Political Science. Continuing, students may choose either this or the previous option (see below).

The Master of Arts Curriculum Requirements, as of Fall 2026 (30 credits minimum)

Required Courses:

- I. Three Concentration Area Required Courses (9 cr.)
- II. One Concentration Area Elective (3 cr.)
- III. POLS 5010 Political Analysis and Research (3 cr.)
- IV. Thesis or Creative Component (3-6 cr. for thesis, 2-3 for creative component)

Concentration Areas:

The M.A. program features three concentration areas: American Politics and Policy, Global Politics and Policy, and Foundations of American Politics. Each concentration area includes three required core courses and one elective course chosen from the *Elective Courses* list below, most of which are offered alternate years. Deviations from the curricular requirements, such as counting courses not listed below as concentration-area electives, require approval from the Graduate Director or the APC.

Required Courses in Each Concentration Area:

Core Courses:

American Politics and Policy

- POLS 5070 (Proseminar in Public Policy)
- POLS 5080 (Policy Implementation)
- POLS 5250* (American Politics and Policy) [*Note that this course number may change.]
- In addition, STAT 5101 (Statistical Methods for Data Analysis) is required for this concentration area)

Global Politics and Policy

- POLS 5070 (Proseminar in Public Policy)
- POLS 5080 (Policy Implementation)
- POLS 5040* (Global Politics and Policy) [*Note that this course number may change.]
- In addition, STAT 5101 (Statistical Methods for Data Analysis) is required for this concentration area)

Foundations of American Politics

- POLS 5070 (Proseminar in Public Policy) **or** POLS 5800 (Ethics and Public Policy)
- POLS 5250 (American Politics and Policy)
- POLS 5330X (American Political Thought)

Elective Courses:

American Politics and Policy

- POLS 5100 (State Government and Politics)
- POLS 5710 (Organizational Theory in the Public Sector)
- POLS 5740 (Policy and Program Evaluation)
- POLS 5750 (Management in the Public Sector)
- POLS 5800 (Ethics and Public Policy)
- POLS 5870 (Cyberpolitics)
- POLS 5900A (Special Topics: American Politics)
- POLS 5900D (Special Topics: Public Policy)

Global Politics and Policy

- POLS 5220 (International Law)
- POLS 5430 (Energy Policy)
- POLS 5520 (Comparative Foreign Policy)
- POLS 5530 (International Organization)
- POLS 5800 (Ethics and Public Policy)
- POLS 5900D (Special Topics: Global Politics)
- POLS 5900G (Special Topics: Public Policy)
- POLS 6100D (Graduate Seminars: Global Politics)
- POLS 6100G (Graduate Seminars: Public Policy)

Foundations of American Politics

- POLS 5100 (State Government and Politics)
- POLS 5340 (Legal and Ethical Issues in Cyber Security)
- POLS 5350 (Contemporary Political Philosophy)
- POLS 5710 (Organizational Theory in the Public Sector)
- POLS 5770 (Government, Business, and Society)
- POLS 5800 (Ethics and Public Policy)
- POLS 5870 (Cyberpolitics)
- POLS 5900A (Special Topics: American Politics)
- POLS 5900J (Special Topics: Theory, Law, and Methods)
- POLS 6100A (Graduate Seminars: American Politics)

Students who entered the program prior to Fall 2026 may complete degree requirements using either the new configuration or the prior configuration detailed below.

The Master of Arts Curriculum Requirements, prior to Fall 2026 (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.3-6 cr. for thesis, 2-3 for creative component)

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 Graduate Director or the APC.

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.

The AP course distribution must include at least 12 5000-level credits in Political Science. Students may take up to 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 AP only if they are not cross-listed with Political Science.

Please be aware that if a course is offered at both the 4000 and 5000 levels, the credits cannot be counted as 4000-level if the undergraduate distribution limit of nine credit hours has already been used.

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, and 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.

Financing Graduate Education

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 or you can find more detailed information [here](#). Students who would like to be considered for an assistantship should apply by March 1st for consideration for the following academic year and indicate in their application they would like to be considered for an assistantship. Off-cycle applications for assistantships are considered if funding is still available.”

Graduate Assistantships

Two types of Graduate Assistantships (GA) are available: Teaching Assistantships (TA) and Research Assistantships (RA). These positions are limited to budgetary constraints, so early application for an assistantship is recommended. 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 1st 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, and more.

[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

Phone: (515) 294-4531

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

[Office of International Students and Scholars](#)

4530 Memorial Union

Phone: (515) 294-1120

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

[Political Science Department](#)

503 Ross Hall

Phone: (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

Phone (U.S.): 1-800-262-3810

Phone (Local): (515) 294-5836

Email: admissions@iastate.edu

[Office of Student Financial Aid](#)

0210 Beardshear Hall

Phone: (515) 294-2223

Email: financialaid@iastate.edu

Contact this office with questions about financial aid.