

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley

College of Liberal Arts Department of Political Science

Political Science Graduate Student Handbook

Master of Arts in Political Science

Fall 2020

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Political Science Graduate Student Handbook

Department of Political Science

INTRODUCTION

If you are interested in a graduate program in political science, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, located in Edinburg and Brownsville, Texas is committed to providing graduates with training and expertise in the following selective subfields: (1) Governance and Policy Process and (2) World and Borderland Politics.

Our commitment to excellence in the field of political science combined with our encouragement of methodological diversity are evident in both our faculty and our curriculum. Our students benefit from the opportunity to work closely with scholars in selected subfields; access to borderland fieldwork; professional development; and strong support for their own scholarship. This mix of content knowledge and research skills will provide graduates with a degree that allows them to advance in the professions of education, government, academia, and the non-profit sector, where this knowledge, as well as underlying research and technical skills are highly valued by employers. A variety of different career paths are available to our graduates, including, but not limited to working in federal and state government agencies, education (secondary and community college), domestic and international non-profit organizations, and journalism, among others.

This Handbook outlines the structure of UTRGV's Political Science graduate program, including admission requirements to the thesis and non-thesis options. This manual has been prepared to assist students and their thesis committee in the preparation of proposals and theses. The primary purpose of this handbook is to provide uniform standards regarding the thesis process. This handbook is designed to be used in conjunction with the style manual of the Graduate College. It is the responsibility of the student to be familiar with the contents of this handbook as well as UTRGV's Graduate College Thesis Manual Instructions. Style guidelines provided by the Graduate College supersede any style guidelines selected by the Political Science Department (for example, APSA, MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) Students are cautioned to avoid using another student's thesis as a model because what was acceptable for previous students may no longer be acceptable for current students.¹ In addition, there may have been changes in the Graduate College policy or in style manual requirements.²

¹ The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Graduate College, Thesis Manual Instructions Concerning the Preparation of Theses, p. 4. <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/for-new-and-current-students/thesis-and-dissertation/index.htm>

² The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Graduate College, Thesis Manual Instructions Concerning the Preparation of Theses, p. 4. <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/for-new-and-current-students/thesis-and-dissertation/index.htm>

ADMISSION DEADLINES AND REQUIREMENTS

Deadlines

Applications will be accepted year-round and prospective students are encouraged to apply at least 2 months before classes start to ensure a timely application review. Applying early will also give prospective students the best opportunity to be considered for scholarships, graduate assistantships, and other possible funding opportunities.

Requirements for Graduate Admission

- 1) Have completed an undergraduate baccalaureate degree (e.g., BA or BS degree).
- 2) Have completed at least 12 hours of undergraduate courses in Political Science and/or Public Policy, including a course on statistics or social science research methods.
- 3) Submit official transcripts with a minimum 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale for the last 60 credit hours completed as an undergraduate
- 4) Provide GRE scores in verbal and quantitative sections.
- 5) Submit three letters of recommendation from individuals who are qualified to judge the student's academic and professional potential.
- 6) Submit a Statement of Purpose (1 or 2 pages) describing the applicant's interest in political science, major field of study, and career goals.
- 7) Submit a curriculum vitae/résumé of educational background, including any volunteer and/or work experience.³

Additional Requirements for Domestic Applicants Who Attended Foreign Universities:

- TOEFL or IELTS Language Proficiency Test with minimum scores: 550 on paper-based, 213 on computer based, or 79 on Internet-based for the TOEFL; 6.5 for the IELTS. TOEFL and IELTS scores are valid for 2 years. For additional information, visit the [Additional Documents for Domestic Applicants who Attend Foreign Universities](#) section of our website.
- Certified English translation of educational records.

Additional Requirements for International Applicants:

- TOEFL or IELTS Language Proficiency Test with minimum scores: 550 on paper-based, 213 on computer based, or 79 on Internet-based for the TOEFL; 6.5 for the IELTS. For additional information, visit the [English Proficiency Exam](#) section of our website.
- Certified English translation of educational records.
- Financial Documentation showing sufficient funds to cover all expenses (living and academic) for the first year of study. For additional information, visit the [Financial Documentation](#) section of our website.
- Immigration documents, including a current copy of your valid passport. For additional information, visit the [Immigration Documents](#) section of our website.

³ Volunteer work and/or work experience are not a requirement for admission to the M.A. in Political Science, but they will be taken into consideration in the admissions process.

Leveling Courses

Students who do not have an undergraduate degree in political science, or an undergraduate minor in political science, or who do not have a minimum of 12 credit hours in political science, may be required to take leveling courses prior to enrolling in graduate political science courses.

Once a student has been accepted, the Graduate Coordinator reviews the student's transcripts and determines how many leveling courses are needed. Students who are lacking in advanced political science undergraduate or post graduate hours may be required to complete up to 12 credit hours of undergraduate course work before registering for graduate political science courses.

The requirements will be listed on the student's degree outline, which is processed and distributed by the Graduate College after the Graduate Coordinator approves the requirements for the major. Political science leveling courses must be chosen in consultation with the Graduate Coordinator. A grade of "B" or better must be earned on all leveling courses.

Leveling work is not computed for the graduation GPA requirement.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The information below is from the Office of the Dean of Students website, Student Rights and Responsibility. For more information please refer to

<https://www.utrgv.edu/srr/students/academic-dishonesty/avoiding-academic-dishonesty/index.htm>.

A central principle for any educational institution, academic integrity is highly valued and seriously regarded at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and the Department of Political Science. Students are expected to maintain absolute integrity and a high standard of individual honor in scholastic work undertaken at UTRGV. The Vaquero Honor Code incorporates three central tenets as a way to reinforce academic integrity: honesty, integrity, and respectfulness. Students should complete their scholastic work with paramount honesty.

For the official policies on academic integrity and scholastic dishonesty, refer to:

Academic integrity: <https://www.utrgv.edu/srr/students/academic-integrity/index.htm>

Academic dishonesty: <https://www.utrgv.edu/srr/students/academic-dishonesty/avoiding-academic-dishonesty/index.htm>.

GRADING POLICIES

The information below is from the Graduate College Catalog.

Grading System

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley uses a 4.0 system. The following grades are used to designate achievement in coursework. Their corresponding grade values and points for students in graduate programs are indicated below.

A	Excellent	(4 grade points per hour)
B	Good	(3 grade points per hour)
C	Satisfactory	(2 grade points per hour)
F	Failure	(0 grade points per hour)
P	Passing	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)
NP	No Pass	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)
S	Satisfactory	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)
U	Unsatisfactory	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)
IP	In Progress	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)
I	Incomplete	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)
CR	Credit	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours) (however, hours are counted in total earned hours)
NC	No Credit	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours) (however, hours are counted in total earned hours)
DR	Course Dropped	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)
W	Withdrawal	(not considered in calculating grade points or attempted hours)

Incomplete Grades

An incomplete (I) grade is a temporary grade given only during the last one-fourth of a term/semester and only if:

- 1) The student is passing the course to date;
- 2) The student will not have completed the required coursework within the allotted time of a regular semester or summer session; and
- 3) The instructor determines that the reason for the work being incomplete is valid and that the grade of "I" is justified.

A written agreement between the student and the instructor specifying the work to be made up and the deadline for its accomplishment must be filed in the office of the Department Chair at the time that the "I" is submitted. The work agreed upon must be satisfactorily completed and the "I" changed no later than the end of the next regular (Fall or Spring) semester from the date the "I" was received (unless an extension is requested by the instructor) or the grade will automatically be recorded as the grade alternatively assigned by the faculty at the time of submitting the written agreement.

The Office of the Registrar must receive the complete Request for Grade of Incomplete Form with all required signatures by the published deadline for faculty to enter grades, or an NR grade will be entered.

GRIEVANCES

The information below is from the Office of the Dean of Students website, Student Rights and Responsibility website, Filing a Grievance. For more information, please refer to <https://www.utrgv.edu/srr/students/filing-a-grievance/index.htm>

The purpose of the grievance policy is to provide students with procedures for resolving complaints against The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) faculty and staff related to matters other than discrimination and grade appeals.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

The University Libraries serve as the chief information center for students during their time at the university. Librarians provide both one-on-one and group instruction helping students navigate resources for their academic research and assignments.

The library provides physical and electronic access to books, articles, and course reserve materials. In addition, laptops, tablets, calculators, phone chargers and other media equipment are available for check out. The libraries have over 300 computers for student use, provide assistance to UTRGV students with multimedia production and offer poster printing for class related projects and presentations. The library has individual and group study spaces that can be reserved online through its website.

Political Science has a library Research Guide Directory and an assigned bibliographer who can assist students with book request and (or) other publications:

For additional information on the Research Guide Directory, please refer to:
<https://utrgv.libguides.com/c.php?g=856460&p=6134754>

Political Science Bibliographer:
Carl Nelson
956-665-2753
carlton.nelson@utrgv.edu

REQUIREMENTS FOR A MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

The primary objective of the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Political Science at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) is to provide graduates with training and expertise in selective subfields of Political Science that are uniquely relevant to the Rio Grande Valley, such as World and Borderland Politics and Transnational Governance and Policy Process. Education in these substantive subfields will be supplemented with methodological training in statistical and qualitative research methods.

Students are required to designate a subfield concentration in either World and Borderland Politics or Governance and Policy Process by the end of the first semester. Students must take and pass all Required Courses before enrolling in the capstone courses.

Below are the requirements to earn a Master of Arts in Political Science:

1) Complete 12 Courses (36 credit hours): Three required courses (9 hours), three prescribed elective courses (9 hours), four courses in the subfield concentration (12 hours),⁴ and two capstone courses (6 hours). The details are below:

- **Three Required Courses:** All M.A. students must take the following Required courses:
 - 1) POLS 6330 Public Institutions & the Policy Process
 - 2) POLS 6340 Political Theory
 - 3) POLS 6370 Research Methods & Applied Statistics

- **Three Prescribed Elective Courses:** Students must take one course in each of the Prescribed Elective Clusters.
 - 1) World & Borderland Politics—select one course: POLS 6320 Theories & Concepts of World Politics; POLS 6321 Global Political Economy; POLS 6322 Nationalism & Borderland Politics.

 - 2) Governance & Policy Process—select one course: POLS 6331 Agenda & Information Control; POLS 6332 Theories of Policy Formation; POLS 6322 Policy Analysis.

 - 3) Politics of Race, Gender, & Class—select one course: POLS 6310 U.S. Race & Ethnic Politics; POLS 6323 Gender Theory in World Politics; POLS 6336 Inequality & the Welfare State.

- **Four Subfield Concentration Courses:** Students should work closely with their faculty advisor to choose courses for their subfield concentration.⁵

- **Two Capstone Courses:** Students that select the thesis option must register for both POLS 7300 and POLS 7301 Thesis courses, each of which are 3-hour courses. The POLS 7300 course must precede the POLS 7301 thesis course. The two courses cannot be taken during the same semester. The student must register for POLS 7301 during the semester in which the Master's Degree is earned.

Students that petition the Graduate Coordinator and pursue the non-thesis option must enroll in two courses from the subfield outside their concentration. These courses will be in lieu of the two Capstone courses of POLS 7300 and POLS 7301. In addition, students pursuing the non-thesis option must also take a comprehensive exam in their final semester.

⁴ Students may request to take one graduate course outside of political science to fulfill a subfield concentration course requirement. Permission of the Political Science Graduate Program Coordinator is required to take a course outside the Department of Political Science.

⁵ Students may request to take one graduate course outside of political science to fulfill the concentration area requirement with prior permission from the Political Science Graduate Program Coordinator.

More Information Regarding Master's Degree

- The minimum satisfactory GPA to successfully complete the Master of Arts in Political Science is 3.0.
- All students must be registered during the semester they plan to graduate.
- Full-time students can complete the requirements for either the thesis or non-thesis option in approximately four semesters. Careful planning of the program of study and regular consultations with the thesis advisor and Graduate Program Coordinator are critical to fulfilling the degree requirements.
- The Graduate Program Coordinator will keep track of each student's progress in the program. The student can consult the Graduate Program Coordinator at any time about his/her progress in the program to see how the course the student has taken meet the degree requirements.

2) Thesis and Non-Thesis Option

Students have the option of completing the M.A. in Political Science degree on a thesis or non-thesis (i.e., comprehensive examination) track, which must be declared by the time a student completes 18 credit hours toward the degree.

For students on the thesis option, a thesis committee will be formed by the end of the student's first year to guide the student through the thesis-writing process. Full-time students will complete their theses during their second year in the program, while part-time students taking two courses per semester will complete their theses during their sixth semester (third year), after completing 30 hours of course work.

Students choosing the non-thesis option must petition the Political Science Graduate Program Coordinator by the start of the student's second year in the program. Students granted the non-thesis option must complete 36 credit hours of course work and a comprehensive examination. Students on the non-thesis option must schedule and pass a comprehensive examination during their final semester in the program.

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS AND NON-THESIS PROCESS

Selecting an appropriate political science thesis topic and thesis committee are two of the most critical facets of your graduate work. The topic should be a collaborative process among the student, the M.A. Thesis Committee Chair, and the remaining thesis committee members.

As outlined in the Graduate College Thesis Manual Instructions, the finished thesis must reflect a comprehensive understanding of the pertinent literature (which must be properly cited) and express in clear readable language the significance of the student's research. The thesis should be presented as a single unit of scholarly and well-integrated narrative, properly supported, and documented, reporting the original work done by the student under the supervision of the committee. No thesis should be a series of separate but related journal-type articles: continuity

from chapter to chapter is important. A thesis corresponds in format to a book with a continuous narrative, not to an anthology.⁶

THESIS TRACK REQUIREMENTS

Selection of Thesis Committee

All Master's students in the political science program are responsible for setting up a thesis committee. The thesis committee will consist of the Committee Chair, and at least two additional full-time, tenure-track faculty members from within the Political Science Department. With the approval of the Graduate Program Coordinator, additional faculty (from UTRGV or other institutions) may also serve on the committee, but the committee must include at least three faculty members from the UTRGV Political Science Department. It is required that the thesis committee meet with the student at least once per semester, but it is the student's responsibility to initiate these meetings and to seek feedback from the committee, and especially the Committee Chair, regularly. Faculty members have the option to decline to serve on a Thesis Committee.

Once a committee is formed, it is the student's responsibility to complete a UTRGV Graduate College "Application for Thesis Committee" form. The form must be signed by the Committee Chair and submitted to the Political Science Graduate Program Coordinator who will sign and route the form to the Graduate College office.⁷

Upon approval of the thesis proposal by the thesis committee chair, the student will transition to the formal writing phase of the thesis. A Master's thesis is a piece of original scholarship and represents a major research effort written under the direction of the Thesis Committee Chair. A good Master's thesis will respond to a debate in the political science literature and will bring new evidence or arguments to bear upon the topic.

Proposal

Students need to prepare a written proposal and assemble a thesis committee. For full time students, the thesis proposal should be prepared before the end of the second semester of the first year unless permission has been granted by the Political Science Graduate Program Coordinator for a delay.⁸ It is the student's responsibility to ensure that each member of the committee has a copy of the thesis proposal before the end of the second semester of their first year in the program. It is important that all the members of the thesis committee be a part of the proposal process to ensure that all committee members accept the research plan described in the proposal.

⁶ The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Graduate College, Thesis Manual Instructions Concerning the Preparation of Theses, p. 4.

⁷ Graduation, Thesis, and other forms can be found on UTRGV's Graduate College website.

⁸ Part-time students will need to individually meet with the Graduate Program Coordinator to discuss their individual situation. In general, part-time students taking two courses per semester will complete their theses during their sixth semester (third year), after completing 30 hours of course work.

The proposal is a description of the research the student intends to conduct in preparing the final thesis. Three questions need to be addressed in the proposal: (1) is the proposed research project feasible? (2) if the research project is completed will it constitute an acceptable thesis? and, (3) is the student capable of carrying out the work proposed? Thus, the proposal and the student's competence to carry out the research are open to examination. A student should not proceed with a thesis proposal until the entire committee is confident that the answers to all questions are positive.

The thesis proposal is the point at which the committee certifies that the student is prepared to proceed with writing a thesis. Typically, the student makes a short formal presentation (8-10 minutes) to their thesis committee, which is followed by questions and discussion.

Members of the committee then select one of four options: (1) approval of the proposal; (2) approval contingent on specified changes to be approved by the committee chair and (or) members; (3) rejection of the proposal, requiring a substantially new draft and another presentation; (4) failure.

All committee members need to sign the "Report of Proposal Results" form at the conclusion of the proposal presentation.

The form must also be signed by the Political Science Graduate Program Coordinator to certify the proposal results and to ensure, if applicable, that the student has received any required ethical training and approval on research with human subjects from the UTRGV Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research Office. Students are encouraged to meet with their Committee Chair prior to finalizing their committee to review the student's status and committee composition.

- **Research With Human Subjects:** All research projects with human subjects conducted by faculty, staff, and students associated with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley must receive ethical approval prior to beginning the research. Research with human subjects (or participants) involves studies in which there is direct intervention or interaction with humans. It also includes observational studies in which there is systematic observation of humans even when that observation is the observation of public behavior. Any systematic investigation of people's non-public data, records, or specimens is considered a research study with human subjects. However, the systematic investigation of publicly available records is not considered human subjects research. A thesis project with human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the Political Science Graduate Program Coordinator and the UTRGV Institutional Review Board. For the policies, procedures, application materials, and forms for the review of a project involving human subjects, visit the Office of Research, Innovation, and Technology, Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research website at <https://www.utrgv.edu/irb/>.

Selection of a Style Manual

Students and their Thesis Committee Chair must decide on the style and format of the proposal and thesis. The student may be guided in the writing and documentation practices of the respective discipline by following a model or pattern for style and format a recent issue of one of the more respected scholarly journals in the field of political science.⁹

The completed thesis must conform as closely as possible to the general format and organization of a published article in a political science journal with the exception of specific variations indicated in the Graduate College Thesis Manual Instructions. If a journal employs a wide variety of styles, then one article from that journal should be selected and its style consistently followed throughout the thesis.

Copyright

The information below is from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Graduate College Thesis Manual Instructions Concerning the Preparation of Theses.

Since a thesis is legally classified as a publication, care must be taken not to violate U.S. copyright laws. Authors are discouraged from including copyrighted material (printed tests and measuring instruments, etc.) in the appendix to the thesis, since such published materials are usually easily available to the reader. Moreover, use of copyrighted materials without permission of the copyright holder constitutes plagiarism; therefore, such materials will not be reproduced in the microfilmed thesis. Inclusion of illustrative graphs, tables, charts, etc. from copyrighted sources is permitted only if a letter of release from the copyright holder is included in a separate appendix of the thesis. If there is a genuine need to include copyrighted material, the copyright holder's permission must be secured and the author must add the proper copyright notice (e.g., "Copyright 19—by John Doe. Used by permission.") at the bottom of the first page of all copyrighted materials.

Oral Defense (Final Examination)

It is important to note, the Committee Chair will determine when the thesis can be defended, not the Graduate College. However, it is the student's responsibility to meet the formal requirements for graduation and to be aware of deadlines outlined by the Graduate College. Students are also required to file for graduation by submitting a Graduation Application to the Graduate College office or via email by the deadline applicable to the graduation term.¹⁰ Once the Thesis Committee Chair determines that a student is close to successful completion of the thesis, the student must produce a full draft and pass an oral defense of their thesis. A master's thesis defense committee must include the Thesis Committee Chair and members of the thesis committee from within the UTRGV Political Science Department.

⁹ The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Graduate College, Thesis Manual Instructions Concerning the Preparation of Theses, p. 5.

¹⁰ Refer to the Graduate College website under the Current Students tab Graduation Information <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/for-new-and-current-students/graduation-information/index.htm>

The student must provide a full draft of the thesis to the graduate college eight weeks prior to their anticipated graduation date. On the same day that the student provides the graduate college with a draft, it is the student's responsibility to see that each member of the committee has the exact same copy of the draft.¹¹ Thesis drafts must be submitted to the graduate college and committee prior to the scheduled defense date. This allows committee members ample time to read the thesis and recommend revisions in preparation for the defense. A draft that is submitted for review should be complete except for minor formatting improvements and changes that will be made based on the committee's recommendations.¹²

The Thesis Committee Chair will act as the moderator at the oral defense. His or her duties are to preside and see to it that all participants act in a professional, collegial, and proper manner. The Thesis Committee Chair has the authority to suspend proceedings should a situation arise that would not be conducive to a fair examination.

The oral defense is a public presentation of a student's work and it is open to the university community. The public presentation will be advertised to your program and beyond. As part of the oral defense, master's thesis students will undergo a question and answer session led by the Thesis Committee; this will be followed by questions from other faculty, students, and audience members. The process is comprised of the following steps:

- 1) A brief presentation (PowerPoint) of the thesis' main findings (no more than 20 minutes).
- 2) A round of questions from the Thesis Committee (35 minutes).
- 3) Any questions from the university community outside of your committee (10 minutes).
- 4) It is strongly encouraged that student's practice their presentation prior to the defense. Students should practice in a setting similar to the actual presentation (for example, a live setting with an audience, via an online modality, etc.) so that they are comfortable with the setting and aware of their time constraints.

Closed Examination

Immediately following the public presentation, a closed examination of the defense will take place. The student will be asked to leave the room while the Committee reviews and discusses the research and decides whether the thesis is acceptable/not acceptable. The Committee can also decide if follow-up questions are warranted. If clarification is needed, the student will be called back into the examining room and questioning will begin in that order.

¹¹ Refer to the Graduate College website under the Current Students tab Thesis & Dissertation section for deadlines regarding online submission of drafts <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/for-new-and-current-students/thesis-and-dissertation/index.htm> and Milestones for Graduate Studies at <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/for-new-and-current-students/milestones-for-graduate-students/index.htm>

¹² The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Graduate College, Thesis Manual Instructions Concerning the Preparation of Theses, p. 6.

After all questions have been addressed, the student will be asked to leave the room while the Committee decides the outcome of the oral defense.

The student will be evaluated upon both:

- a) the overall quality and significance of the thesis, and
- b) the oral defense of the student’s findings.

A student passes the oral defense and becomes a “candidate” for the degree if he or she passes with no more than one dissenting vote. The student will be asked to return to the room to be informed of the outcome.

The Committee Chair must complete the “Oral Defense” form. Members of the committee then select one of three options: (1) pass; (2) pass contingent on specified changes to be checked by the committee chair and (or) members; (3) failure, requiring a substantially new draft and another defense. All committee members need to sign the “Oral Defense” form at the time of the defense. The form must also be signed by the Graduate Program Coordinator to certify the defense results.

Semester 1	Must meet with the Graduate Program Coordinator to discuss thesis ideas, coursework, and identify faculty members with an expertise in the students interest.
Semester 2	Prepare a thesis proposal, select a thesis committee, submit proposal, and revise proposal for approval by committee.
Semester 3	Enroll in Thesis I (POLS 7300), begin researching and writing, submit thesis draft.
Semester 4	Enroll in Thesis II (POLS 7301), revise and edit thesis draft, submit completed thesis to committee chair, defend thesis, send thesis for approval by the Graduate College, have thesis bound by library.

Know the Process

What happens at a thesis defense? The best way to know what happens and the best way for *you* to prepare for your defense is to regularly attend the defenses of your colleagues, both internal and external to your field of expertise. You should also speak to your Committee Chair to get a sense of his/her specific expectations of a defense.

Thesis Writing and Guidelines

The content of the thesis will vary with the type of research the student plans to conduct. However, every thesis should include the following:

- A. Minimum of 50-100 pages, including an abstract, tables, graphs, or appendix. The minimum page requirement does not include the bibliography. Students who write a master's thesis generally do so during their second year.
- i. As outlined in the UTRGV Graduate College Thesis Manual, all rules of style and format apply to the completed thesis.
- B. *Abstract.* The abstract provides the research question, theory, data, methods, findings, and conclusions in one summary. This is where you convince readers, and your committee, to read the thesis.
- C. *Introduction.* Clear and succinct statement of the thesis objectives, including the research question.
- i. Provide the puzzle or question that motivates this research. Why is it important to do this study? What is the purpose of the study?
 - ii. Provide a clear research question or purpose of the study
 - iii. Why is this particular research question important?
 - iv. What is the theory that provides an answer to your question? At this point, this is not an exhaustive articulation of your theory, this should be a brief explanation on the theoretical argument that guides research.
 - v. How is this research different from existing research?
 - vi. What is the context of this study? What approach will you be taking?
Quantitatively: What is your data and time-period? Qualitatively: comparative historical approach, analytical, other? Approach for political theory? This should be a brief explanation.
 - vii. What does the project contribute to the field of political science?
- D. *Literature Review.* This is not a review of all the literature related to the topic. You are interested in what others have written about his question and where the question fits in the overall literature. You should deal only with the literature that applies to your hypotheses or competing explanations. Use this section to:
- i. Develop the theoretical arguments for the thesis.
 - ii. Discuss relevant findings and debates within the literature.
 - iii. Link the literature to what you are asking. This is not just a list of all the literature. Instead, tell the committee, the literature says this and, therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect this. Or the literature says this, but so far, the question of this remains unanswered.
 - iv. What are the theoretical and/or methodological limitations to the existing literature?
 - v. How does your research contribute to this literature?
- E. *Theoretical Argument.*
- i. What are your concepts?
 - ii. Logically discuss how your theoretical argument is tied to the literature.
 - iii. If applicable, what is the causal mechanism linking the independent variables to the dependent variable If applicable, what discourses or genealogies are you drawing on to explain the conditions of the phenomena you are attempting to

understand If applicable, what observation or experiment are you drawing on for your conclusion?¹³

- iv. If applicable, produce hypothesis(es). Remember a hypothesis tells us expectations of the relationship between one independent variable and one dependent variable. These must come from your theory. Discuss possible alternative explanations.

What limitations are there in our model?

F. *Methods.* This is where you get into the finite details of your research design, or ‘road map’ for your project. More generalized question than your specific question(s). The following can be organized based on your thesis’s organization.

- i. What is your basic design and approach? For example, discursive analysis, genealogical, case studies, process tracing, cohort, observational, cross-sectional, laboratory, experimental, quasi-experimental, analytical, ideology critique, comparative historical, other.
- ii. How will you operationalize your research?¹⁴
- iii. What data are you using?
- iv. How were your data collected?
- v. What is your spatial-temporal domain? Why?

G. *Conclusion.* Return to your research question and explain how your research will contribute to political science. Answer the “who cares” questions by explaining *why* we should care. Discuss the limits of your study and how future research might address these limits.

NON-THESIS REQUIREMENTS

The Comprehensive Examination is a take-home essay exam taken in the student’s final semester. Electing the Comprehensive Examination option requires prior approval by the Graduate Program Coordinator by the start of the student’s second year.

Because the M.A. in Political Science is a research-based program, the thesis option is always the default option. The Comprehensive Examination (i.e. non-thesis option) is not an automatic selection for students. On a case-by-case basis, the Graduate Program Coordinator may approve the non-thesis option based on extraordinary circumstances specific to a student. The Political Science Department advises students to select the thesis option as part of their future career development and (or) for those students interested in doctoral programs.

¹³ Refer to Appendix A for the Burrell and Morgan (1979) journal article on subjective and objectivist approaches to research.

¹⁴ Refer to the article by Robert W. Cox to better understand the difference between problem solving theory and critical theory. Cox, Robert W. 1981. “Social Forces, State and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory.” *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 10 (2): 126-155.

Content and Administration of Examination

The Comprehensive Examination is a take-home essay exam. Students select three essay questions from a set of at least six questions and write essays that draw upon the political science literature and research used in their courses. Students write up to 9,000 words in total, thus each essay is about 3,000 words long. Students receive the exam on a Friday at noon and it is due the following Monday at noon. Students will have three days to complete comprehensive exams.

Question format: one question from the required courses list and two questions from the subfield concentration.

Selecting Courses

When selecting courses, students should keep in mind that the examination questions come directly from political science courses and related reading lists. Courses taught in other departments will not be covered on the exam, so students must make sure to have a strong foundation in course work in Political Science.

Committee Selection

Students are responsible for selecting an exam committee, which consists of three faculty members from the Political Science Department with approval from the Graduate Program Coordinator. Each committee member will be responsible for composing one to two exam questions but will evaluate all essays.

Students should generally expect to meet with their committee members individually at least two times throughout the semester to discuss expectations for the exams and review assigned materials.

The Semester of the Examination

During the semester a student will be taking the examination, the student should:

- Schedule a meeting with the Graduate Program Coordinator to discuss the exam.
- Sign up to take the examination with the Graduate Program Coordinator. Each semester, the Graduate Program Coordinator will send an email message with the deadline for signing up, and with the dates of the exam for that semester.
- Students should study for the examination by intensively reviewing and re-reading course materials.

Evaluation

A committee of three or four readers from the Political Science faculty evaluates each examination. Examinations are graded on a pass, marginal pass, marginal fail, and fail basis. Readers look for exams that demonstrate knowledge of the relevant political science literature, especially the material covered in coursework, and that shows an ability to integrate and apply that knowledge to the specific issues that each question raises.

Students are typically informed of the results within two weeks of taking the exam. If a student fails the exam, he or she may retake the exam the following semester.

Final Semester

Early February or September	Meet with Graduate Program Coordinator to discuss committee formation.
8 Weeks Before Exam	Ask faculty to be on committee and meet to discuss potential topics. Complete Comprehensive Examination Statement of No Appeal and the Non-Thesis Comprehensive Examination Committee Forms.
3 Weeks Before Exam	If applicable, review topic questions that may appear on the examination.
Frist Friday of April or November*	Examination

*Exact calendar dates will be communicated to students.

Non-thesis students must also complete and sign the Comprehensive Examination Statement of No Appeal and the Non-Thesis Comprehensive Exam Committee Form eight weeks before the comprehensive exam.

APPLICATION FOR GRADUATION

A student must apply for graduation by the published deadline date posted on the University Academic Calendar. The date, as well as other dates, and instructions outlining how to apply for graduation are posted on the Graduate College web site each semester. For further information regarding the graduation application deadline, contact the Graduate College at 956-665-3661 or 956-882-6552; or email at gradsuccess@utrgv.edu.

If applying for graduation, following the steps below. Comprehensive instructions can be found on the Graduate College web site: <https://www.utrgv.edu/graduate/for-new-and-current-students/graduation-information/index.htm>

- 1) Submit a graduation application.
- 2) Make a payment.
- 3) Meet all requirements for the degree you are seeking.
- 4) Enjoy your graduation!

HANDBOOK SIGNATURE PAGE

Your signature below indicates that you have read, understand, and agree to all the policies in the Master's Handbook.

This page must be returned to the Graduate Program Coordinator by 5:00 p.m. by the 12th day of classes

Student Signature

Date

Student Printed Name

FORMS

Degree Plan for Master of Arts in Political Science

(To open the PDF, right click on the PDF icon and select Acrobat Document Object then select open)



POLS MA Degree
Plan blank.pdf

REPORT OF PROPOSAL RESULTS FORM

Thesis Proposal:

- Approval of the proposal.**
- Approval contingent on specified changes to be checked by the committee chair and (or) members.**
- Rejection of the proposal requires a substantially new draft and another presentation.**
- Failure.**

Last Name: _____ **First Name:** _____ **ID:** _____

Committee Chair: the professor **MUST** agree to serve as your chair. It is then, your responsibility to work with your committee chair closely as you prepare your thesis proposal. Your committee chair **MUST** be a tenure-track Political Science Ph.D. professor who is a member of the UTRGV faculty.

Chairs Name (printed): _____

Chairs Signature: _____

Second & Third Committee Members: the professor **MUST** agree to be on your committee and be a Political Science Ph.D. professor who is a member of the UTRGV faculty. It is your responsibility to work with these professors for a successful thesis proposal.

Second Members Name (printed): _____

Second Members Signature: _____

Third Members Name (printed): _____

Third Members Signature: _____

Graduate Program Coordinator Approval: _____ **Date:** _____

****This form is not complete until the GPC signs****

ORAL DEFENSE FORM

Oral Defense:

___ **Pass.**

___ **Pass contingent on specified changes to be checked by the committee chair and (or) members.**

___ **Failure requires a substantially new draft and another defense.**

Last Name: _____ **First Name:** _____ **ID:** _____

Committee Chair: the professor **MUST** agree to serve as your chair. It is then, your responsibility to work with your committee chair closely as you prepare for your defense. Your committee chair **MUST** be a tenure-track Political Science Ph.D. professor who is a member of the UTRGV faculty.

Chairs Name (printed): _____

Chairs Signature: _____

Second & Third Committee Members: the professor **MUST** agree to be on your committee and be a Political Science Ph.D. professor who is a member of the UTRGV faculty. It is your responsibility to work with these professors for a successful thesis defense.

Second Members Name (printed): _____

Second Members Signature: _____

Third Members Name (printed): _____

Third Members Signature: _____

Graduate Program Coordinator Approval: _____ **Date:** _____

This form is not complete until the GPC signs

Comprehensive Exam Statement of No Appeal

This form must be completed prior to the comprehensive exam.

Faculty members taking part in the exam committee will evaluate the comprehensive exam essays and determine if the student demonstrates knowledge at the level appropriate for a master's degree holder. Essays earn credit only if they clearly meet or exceed the department's standards as seen on the outcomes assessment found on page 26 of this handbook.

The evaluation of an essay is final and cannot be discussed or appealed.

I understand that the evaluation of my comprehensive exam for completing my Master of Arts in Political Science is final and that I have no option to appeal the evaluation or to discuss the results with any member of the Department of Political Science.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

**NON-THESIS COMPREHENSIVE EXAM
COMMITTEE FORM**

Exam Map:

Early February (Spring) or Early September (Fall): Meet with GPC to discuss committee formation

Eight Weeks Prior to Exam: Ask faculty to be on committee and meet to discuss potential topics. Complete No Appeal form and necessary Non-This Exam form.

Three Weeks Prior to Exam: If applicable, review topic questions that may appear on the exam.

First Friday of April (Spring) or November (Fall): Examination

Last Name: _____ **First Name:** _____ **ID:** _____

Committee Chair: the professor **MUST** agree to serve as your chair. It is then, your responsibility to work with your committee chair closely in the weeks prior to your exam to successfully complete the comprehensive exam. Your committee chair **MUST** be a tenure-track Political Science Ph.D. professor who is a member of the UTRGV faculty.

Chairs Name (printed): _____

Chairs Signature: _____

Second & Third Committee Members: the professor **MUST** agree to be on your committee and be a Political Science Ph.D. professor who is a member of the UTRGV faculty. It is your responsibility to work with this professor to successfully complete the comprehensive exam.

Second Members Name (printed): _____

Second Members Signature: _____

Third Members Name (printed): _____

Third Members Signature: _____

A comprehensive exam will be scheduled upon completion of this form. Once the date and time have been established a copy will be given to you. If you have question, **DO NOT** hesitate to contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for guidance. *You must allow enough time when scheduling your comprehensive exam to complete this form in its entirety and the MA Graduate Program Coordinator **MUST** have enough time to review your file.

Graduate Program Coordinator Approval: _____ **Date:** _____

****This form is not complete until the GPC signs****

APPENDIX A

(Double clicking on the page will launch a PDF copy of the article)

Based on Gibson Burrell & Gareth Morgan (1979, p. 22) *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis—A Distinction between Theoretical World Views (weltanschauungen)*
Based on the Philosophical Assumptions of Social Scientists:

The subjective – objective dimension

The subjectivist approach to
social science

The objectivist approach to
social science

Nominalism ←-----ontology-----→ Realism

Anti-positivism ←-----epistemology-----→ Positivism

Voluntarism ←-----human nature-----→ Determinism

Ideographic ←-----methodology-----→ Nomothetic

According to model above, selection of methodology by social scientists is influenced by a predisposition to different ontologies, epistemologies and models of human nature. Within the subjective-objective dimension, Burrell and Morgan (1979) established four paradigms in which the “sociology of regulation” is juxtaposed to the “sociology of radical change,” to create a useful typology for contrasting philosophical orientations of social scientists.

Definitions- (1) **Ontology** is basically a first, or primary, philosophy. According to Burrell and Morgan, a basic ontological question is whether the “reality” to be investigated is external to the individual—imposing itself on individual consciousness from without—or a product of an individual consciousness; whether “reality” is of an “objective” nature, or the product of individual cognition; and finally, whether “reality” is a given “out there” in the world, or the product of one’s mind. (2) **Epistemology** is associated with ontological issues and is a second set of assumptions of an epistemological nature. These are assumptions about the grounds of knowledge—about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings. These assumptions entail ideas, for example, about what forms of knowledge can be obtained, and how one can sort out what is to be regarded as “true” from what is to be regarded as “false.” Indeed, this dichotomy of “true/false” presupposes a certain epistemological stance. It is predicated upon a view of the nature of knowledge itself: whether, for example, it is possible to identify and communicate the nature of knowledge as being hard, real and capable of being transmitted in tangible form, or whether “knowledge” is of a softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental kind, based on experience and insight of a unique and essentially personal nature. (3) Assumptions of **human nature** are characterized as being mechanistic (determinism) or based on free will (voluntarism). With the concept of human nature, we can identify perspectives in social science which entail a view of human beings responding in a mechanistic or even deterministic fashion to the situations encountered in their external world. With determinism, humans and their experiences are regarded as product of the environment; one in which humans are conditioned by their external circumstances. With free will, man is regarded as the creator of his environment—the controller as opposed to the controlled. (4) **Methodology** is comprised of different ontologies, epistemologies and models of human nature. The social scientist is inclined to use different means (quantitative versus qualitative research, for example), or research instruments, to “prove” various theories or laws, accordingly (the above is based on Burrell & Morgan 1979, pp. 1-2).

The four paradigms for the analysis of social theory are reproduced here:

The Sociology of Radical Change			
Subjective	1. Radical Humanist	3. Radical Structuralist	Objective
Subjective	2. Interpretive	4. Functionalist	Objective

The Sociology of Regulation

(Please note: numerals 1, 2, 3, & 4 were added to aid in describing the paradigms)

- 1 and 2 are based on conceptions of "German Idealism" and are characterized as sharing a nominalist ontology, anti-positivist epistemology, voluntaristic assumptions of human nature, and have a tendency towards ideographic methodology. Radical humanism is distinguished by a propensity for radical change from a subjectivist standpoint. Branches of the radical humanism paradigm include French existentialism, anarchistic individualism, and critical theory. The interpretive paradigm attempts to explain society as to how it really is and to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience (individual consciousness.) The paradigm includes phenomenology, hermeneutics, and phenomenological sociology (See Burrell and Morgan 1979, pp. 7, 28-9, 32).
- 3 and 4 represent "sociological positivism" and share common philosophical underpinnings such as a realist ontology, positivist epistemology, deterministic assumptions of human nature, and nomothetic methodology. Radical structuralist theorists advocate a sociology of radical change from an objectivist standpoint; emphasizing structural conflict, modes of domination, contradiction and deprivation. Elements of radical structuralism include contemporary Mediterranean Marxism, conflict theory, and Russian social theory. Functionalism combines a sociology of regulation with an approach towards subject matter from an objectivist point of view. The functionalist paradigm encompasses much of social science. It includes interactionism and social action theory, integrative theory, social system theory and objectivism (Burrell and Morgan 1979, pp. 7, 25, 29, 33-4).

One other important note: "Before we progress to a review of the four paradigms, one point is worthy of further emphasis. This relates to the fact that the four paradigms are mutually exclusive. They offer alternative views of social reality, and to understand the nature of all four is to understand four different views of society. They offer different ways of seeing. A synthesis is not possible, since in their pure forms they are contradictory, being based on at least one set of opposing meta-theoretical assumptions. They are alternatives, in the sense that one can operate in different paradigms sequentially over time, but mutually exclusive, in the sense that one cannot operate in more than one paradigm at any given point in time, since in accepting the assumptions of one, we defy the assumptions of all others.... We offer the four paradigms for consideration in these terms, in the hope that knowledge of the competing points of view will at least make us aware of the boundaries within which we approach our subject" (Burrell & Morgan 1979, p. 25).