Program: Ph.D. in Political Science

1. Learning Outcomes

The Ph.D. program in Political Science has three primary learning objectives.

1. Provide substantive knowledge in political science that allows a high degree of specialization appropriate to students’ future careers;
2. Prepare students to teach in colleges and universities; and
3. Train students to conduct original research that meets the high standards expected of professionals in the private and public sector.

2. Explanation of Methods

A. Evaluation of comprehensive written exams
After course requirements are met, doctoral students take written comprehensive exams in at least two fields of study. These exams are each eight hours long and consist of four to six essay questions. In their answers, students must demonstrate a command of the relevant scholarly literature, a capacity to deal analytically with complex issues, and substantive knowledge of the subject. Faculty members in each field read the written exams, decide whether the exam warrants a pass, and submit written evaluations that are summarized for the student and placed in his or her file. A summary of outcomes in the year’s written exams is presented at the graduate committee’s annual assessment meeting.

B. Evaluation of oral doctoral candidacy exams
Upon satisfactory completion of the written exams, students take an oral comprehensive exam attended by members of the student’s advisory committee and other interested faculty. In this exam, students must substantiate their assertions, show an ability to think extemporaneously, and deal in an articulate way with the substance of each of their fields. Members of the committee then fill out an evaluation form. A summary of outcomes in the year’s oral exams is presented at the graduate committee’s annual assessment meeting.

C. Exit survey
After commencement in May, August, and December, each graduate of the program receives a congratulatory letter from the Department. A one-page assessment survey is attached to the letter asking graduates to indicate their level of satisfaction with questions and response categories that reflect the Department’s expected outcomes:

• Substantive knowledge in different fields of political science
• Training appropriate to intended careers, including teaching
• Skills in conducting original research
We also ask respondents to comment on strengths and weaknesses of the political science graduate program. The aggregate responses from the three proceeding exit surveys are presented to the graduate committee in its annual assessment meeting.

D. University alumni survey
The University surveys Ph.D. graduates of selected years each spring. From the surveys, the Department gathers information about occupation and perceived satisfaction with graduate training at NIU. Among other things, respondents are asked whether course work prepared them for their current position. The results of each year’s survey are reviewed by the chair and director of graduate studies and summarized for the graduate committee in its annual assessment meeting.

E. Ongoing evaluation of student performance
In addition to assigning a course grade, faculty members rank and evaluate each Ph.D. student’s performance in every seminar with special attention to written and oral communication skills. Their content is summarized in the aggregate for the graduate committee’s yearly assessment meeting. The committee checks for any trends over time. If trends are ascertained, the committee discusses their implication for admissions standards and program changes.

F. Evaluation of graduate student classroom instruction by faculty members
Doctoral students are required to demonstrate teaching competence. Depending on the students’ prior experience and skills and the Department’s needs, this professional training and development can take the form of (1) participating in several class meetings of an undergraduate course under the supervision of the course professor, (2) teaching discussion sections of a professor’s introductory course, or (3) teaching a section independently. In each of these options, students work closely with faculty members in an apprentice-mentor relationship. At least once a semester, the faculty mentor will visit the doctoral student’s class (or observe a guest lecture), provide the student with constructive criticism and feedback on his or her performance as an instructor, and complete an evaluation form to be placed in the student’s file. The faculty member rates the student on 10 dimensions related to teaching effectiveness. A summary report is presented to the graduate committee at its annual assessment meeting.

G. Evaluation of graduate student instructors
Graduate students who serve as discussion section leaders for POLS 100 and independent course instructors are evaluated by their students at the close of each semester. These evaluations encompass both a closed-ended questionnaire and an open-ended response form. The Department summarizes responses for its graduate students and also notifies those who teach independent sections of the mean grades they assigned as compared with the mean grades assigned by all faculty and staff at that course level. Summary responses are shared with the graduate committee as part of its annual assessment meeting, which helps the Department assess the performance of student instruction.

H. Language/research tool options
All doctoral students must demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language(s) or research tool(s). In an aggregate, the Department tallies by number the options selected by students each year, records the grades earned by students, and examines a question on student evaluations (for POLS
classes) pertaining to the degree to which students believe they have gained knowledge from the courses.

**Outcomes-by-Methods.** The table demonstrates which outcomes are addressed by each method of assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Substantive knowledge</th>
<th>Teaching Abilities</th>
<th>Capability for Original Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written Comprehensives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral Doctoral Candidacy Exams</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Exit Survey</td>
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<td>University Alumni Survey</td>
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