

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Department of Political Science

Political Science

Master of Arts

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1. Introduction

The Master's (MA) degree in Political Science has been in existence since 1962. In past years, the Department enjoyed the benefits of a faculty roughly twice the size of that which currently exists, and as such, the MA program enrolled many more students than it does now. At the last program review in 2012 it became clear that our graduate program enrollments (MA and PhD combined) were much higher than peer institutions, especially given the decreased size of the Department's faculty. The norm at peer institutions was about two graduate students enrolled for every one faculty member. The Department at NIU had a ratio of over five students to one faculty member. Given the recent freezes on faculty hiring, along with continual constraints, it was determined that enrollments should be reduced. It was further determined that the size of the program was preventing the level of faculty-student interaction necessary to provide students with adequate training in graduate studies. Demand for the MA program has remained high and in the past five years we have routinely turned away about 75 percent of students who wish to enroll in the MA program. In the past five years we have admitted an average of 4.75 students each fall and have stopped admitting students entirely in the spring semester. There are currently 13 students enrolled in our MA program. At the time of the last Program Review (2012) we established four primary purposes for the MA program in Political Science:

1. To help students develop capacities for critical and analytical thinking to allow them to contribute more competently in political processes and beyond.
2. To educate students about different political and institutional arrangements with the goal of training reform-minded citizens who can work to improve governing systems and affect public policy in either the public or private sector.
3. To help students develop methodological and theoretical skills, which can be used to address societal problems and academic questions.
4. To provide students with an educational foundation suitable for graduate study at the doctoral level.

2. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

The Masters in Arts degree in Political Science can be either a terminal degree or an interim step towards earning a Ph.D. in Political Science. For all M.A. students the coursework requirements are the same; students are not formally placed into one of these two tracks. To obtain their degree, M. A. students must successfully write and defend a Master's thesis. The different goals of the Master's program suggest a mix of learning outcomes.

Learning Outcomes:

Students in the M.A. program in Political Science will achieve the following primary learning outcomes.

1. Students will demonstrate advanced theoretical and empirical knowledge of political processes, institutions, and policymaking via both oral and written forms of communication.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to organize and conduct research in a manner consistent with professional norms.

3. Terminal Master's students will demonstrate competence in research – both orally and in written form – suitable for a variety of different professions e.g. teaching, business, government, and non-profit organisations.
4. Students for whom the Master's degree is an interim step towards the PhD will demonstrate theoretical and substantive knowledge in their primary subfield in Political Science (e.g. International Relations, American Government etc).
5. Students for whom the Master's degree is an interim step towards the PhD will demonstrate research competence. Such skills will include:
 - a. Research skills such as the ability to summarise literature and identify original research questions.
 - b. Proficiency in research methods and research design.
 - c. The ability to effectively communicate original research in both written and oral forms.
 - d. The ability to summarise, analyse, and critique information from differing perspectives.
 - e. The ability to work independently.

3. Curriculum Map

The third section is a curriculum map (and is also optional but **highly encouraged**). A curriculum map outlines the scope and sequence of courses students will take and aligns them with the degree program student learning outcomes. The curriculum map is an effective tool for not only sequencing the curriculum and instruction, but also for strategically identifying places for formative and summative assessments of student learning outcomes. Required core courses are listed along the vertical axis of the matrix in chronological order. Degree program student learning outcomes are listed on the horizontal axis. For each course determine: (1) which outcomes are the *primary* focus of the course, and (2) the degree to which the course supports the outcome (i.e., at a beginning (B), developing (D), or proficient (P) level). Place a B, D, or P in the corresponding cell. It would be *unusual* to find all courses supporting all student learning outcomes—instead, concentrate on the primary focus of each course. This will map out the degree to which core courses support the development of your program student learning outcomes. The Four-Year Degree Path provided by the Office of Student Academic Success may be helpful (www.niu.edu/osas/DegreePaths). Look for strengths and gaps in the curriculum. Ideally, all outcomes should be supported with coursework through the proficient level. Below is an example of a curriculum map you can modify or model. Note that each course should address at least one student learning outcome, but does NOT have to support all learning outcomes.

Course	MA Student Learning Outcomes 1-5				
	1. Advanced theoretical and empirical knowledge of political processes, institutions, and policymaking via both oral and written forms of communication.	2. Demonstrate the ability to organize and conduct research in a manner consistent with professional norms.	3. (Terminal MA) - Competence in research – both orally and in written form – suitable for a variety of different professions.	4. (MA as interim step towards PhD) - Demonstrate theoretical and substantive knowledge in their primary and secondary subfields in Political Science.	5. (MA as interim step towards PhD) - Demonstrate research competence – summarize lit, develop research questions, research methods and design, communicate effectively, summarize and critique info, work independently.
POLS 600	D	B	P	D	B
POLS 602	B	B	P	D	B
POLS 603	B	B	P	D	B
POLS 650	D	B	P	D	B
POLS 651	D	B	P	D	B
POLS 660	D	B	P	D	B
POLS 680	D	B	P	D	B
POLS 690	D	D	P	D	D
POLS 699	P	P	P	D	D

Note. Course supports the outcome at the B=beginning, D=developing, or P=proficient level.

4. Assessment Methods

EXPLANATION OF ASSESSMENT METHODS TABLE

Assessment Method	Explanation					
	Description	Student-Level Achievement ^a	Program-Level Target ^b	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible	SLOs
Master's Thesis Rubric (Appendix A). Reviews MA student's abilities in relation to the SLOs, including their ability to be successful in the PhD program given that readiness for PhD study is at the heart of the MA degree program.	Students must orally defend their Master's thesis before a 3-person faculty committee. In addition to the defense of the presented thesis research, students are evaluated on their potential for the Ph.D. program. A rubric is given to each member of the thesis committee, and assesses the student in the following areas: topic originality; literature review; research implementation; organization; writing quality; presentation/defense; prospective PhD. Rubric scores range from 0-4 with each number corresponding to a level of proficiency, 4 being the highest.	Students should aim to score a 3 or 4 (the two highest scores) in each of the seven categories of evaluation.	The Department's target is to have 75% of our graduating MA students receive the highest score of '4' in at least 3 of 6 categories related to their MA research. Additionally, the Department aims to have 75% of students score 4 on the question related to the prospects of being successful as a PhD student.	At time of Master's Thesis Defense	Master's Thesis Committee	1, 2, 3, 4, 5a-e

Assessment Method	Explanation					
	Description	Student-Level Achievement ^a	Program-Level Target ^b	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible	SLOs
Ongoing evaluation of MA student's performance in each graduate seminar (Appendix B)	Faculty rank and evaluate each student's performance (Ph.D. and MA) in every seminar with special attention to written and oral communication skills, substantive knowledge of the course topic, substantive knowledge of the subfield in general, and appropriate methodology for the course topic. Faculty also note the likelihood of success in PhD program since MA students may wish to continue on into the PhD program. A 5-point Likert scale is utilized for this measurement task, with "Agree" and "Strongly agree" being the positive response categories faculty can select.	The goal is for all students (100%) to achieve a positive evaluation, but especially those who wish to continue on to earn a PhD. A positive assessment indicates that a student has shown at least adequate written and oral communication skills, along with substantive knowledge of the course, the subfield in general, and appropriate methodology for the course material.	The Department's goal is for 50% of enrolled MA students to be assessed as likely to be able to complete the PhD.	Every semester at end of each course in which student is enrolled.	Graduate faculty in each seminar in which student is enrolled.	1, 2, 5a-e

Assessment Method	Explanation					
	Description	Student-Level Achievement ^a	Program-Level Target ^b	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible	SLOs
Student performance on a pre-MA and post-MA Research Design Survey (Appendix C).	At graduate orientation, each new MA student completes a survey designed to test their knowledge of research design in the social sciences. Questions are broad in scope and cover issues of research design and epistemology that are covered in two required courses specifically (POLS 602 and 603). After successful defense of their MA thesis, students complete the survey again with the expectation that knowledge will have increased due to student learning and engaging in original research.		Two targets have been set: Firstly, 50% of students will score 100% on the post-test. Secondly, the Department wants to see an average change or improvement of 50% from pre-test scores to post-test scores.	Pre-MA survey to be completed at graduate orientation; post-MA survey to be completed after successful thesis defense	Director of Graduate Studies (with assistance of the Graduate Committee and the graduate program assistant)	2, 3, 5a-e
<p><i>Note.</i> ^a Student-level target is the score or performance an individual student must demonstrate to say the student met the student learning outcome. ^b Program-level target is the percent of all students that must demonstrate they meet the student learning outcome.</p>						

ASSESSMENT METHODS-BY-OUTCOMES MATRIX

Assessment Method	1. Advanced theoretical and empirical knowledge of political processes, institutions, and policymaking via both oral and written forms of communication.	2. Demonstrate the ability to organize and conduct research in a manner consistent with professional norms.	3. (Terminal MA) - Competence in research – both orally and in written form – suitable for a variety of different professions.	4. (MA as interim step towards PhD) - Demonstrate theoretical and substantive knowledge in their primary subfield in Political Science.	5. (MA as interim step towards PhD) - Demonstrate research competence – summarize lit, develop research questions, research methods and design, communicate effectively, summarize and critique info, work independently.
Master’s Thesis Rubric	S, D	S, D	S, D	S, D	F, D
Ongoing evaluation of student’s performance in each graduate seminar	F, D		F, D	S, D	S, D
Pre-MA and Post-MA Research Design Survey			S, D		S, D

Note. F=formative assessment, S=summative assessment, D=direct assessment, and I=indirect assessment. See the paragraph above for an explanation of each type of assessment.