Advising and Mentorship in Political Science
2019-2020 Assessment Report

Executive Summary

• Current Structure
  o Our current system of formal advising for course selection is undertaken by
    the Program’s Executive Officer, Deputy Executive Officer, and MA Advisor, a
    relatively recent system aimed to streamline the advising process and ensure
    equity of access for all students. In addition, students are directed to meet
    with the subfield chairs, who hold regular office hours and open meetings for
    students and faculty within the subfield every semester.
  o EO and DEO hold a lunch in the middle of each semester with the new cohort
    during their first year in the Program.
  o Students are assigned peer mentors upon matriculation, to better aid in
    navigating department regulations and norms and life as a graduate student
    in NYC.

• Annual Assessment Process
  o Focus groups conducted this year indicate that most students are satisfied
    with early advising, but some expressed residual confusion.
  o Faculty focus groups expressed their own confusion about some course
    requirements, a problem that inhibits students’ ability to find program advice
    outside of the EO/DEO/MA Advisor/subfield chair structure.

• Closing the Loop
  o Handbook re-design on program requirements for both MA and PhD
    programs, indicating expected timing and sequence.
  o Concrete Checklist produced for each degree track.
  o Procedural shift to inform all faculty of advising procedures and course
    requirements.
  o We have designed a student-learning objective to help guide students in
    advising, as well as a mechanism for assessment.

Current Procedures of Advising and Mentorship in Political Science

Upon coming to the program, students receive course advising from the Executive
Officer, the Deputy Executive Officer, and MA Advisor during a day-long orientation and
then during individual meetings, semester luncheons, and frequent workshops. Students
are also directed to seek subfield chairs, who hold regular office hours and open student
meetings every semester. Since all of our incoming doctoral cohort are given some
support in the form of an RA-ships, they also typically receive advisement from those
faculty as well. As students find advisors for their dissertation or thesis projects, the task
of advising students transfers to those individuals. Students continue to seek, however,
to obtain advice from the department leadership. This multi-layered system of advising
reflects a shift from a previous process where students were required to consult with
individual advisors every semester to receive a pin number in order to register for
courses. We found that the lack of resources for consistent advising, especially for our
consortial faculty, created gaps in registration for students. Our revamped system creates
a concrete pathway for advising students in their early years in the program.
In their first year, students attend a day-long orientation with the EO, DEO and MA advisor and student leaders in the program. Following that, students avail themselves of office hours held weekly by the EO, DEO and MA Advisor in order to establish their course schedule. Students can also consult with other faculty for advising as they prefer, including professors who lead the subfields, who hold regular office hours and open meetings each semester.

In addition to the formal advising offered by the Executive, Deputy Executive Officer, and MA Advisor each incoming student is assigned a peer mentor to help guide them through the program, assigned according to common subfield interests.

Once students progress through coursework and first exams, and into their process of designing their dissertation research project, they then pivot to select a dissertation supervisor. That supervisor takes on the role as primary advisor, although student mentorship continues, as does mentorship from the EO, DEO, MA Advisor and subfield chairs.

While much of the nuts and bolts of these processes are covered in a welcome letter sent out in mid-June and again during the orientation period, admittedly students are inundated with a great deal of novel information in that short period, a circumstance that limits detailed retention. The Political Science Program Handbook, available on the program website and amply indicated through orientation and advising sessions, reiterates and details the academic requirements and regulations for the program. Thus, students have ample resources to help guide them through the program.

All new students are required to meet with the EO, DEO or MA Advisor during their first few months in the Program to discuss transfer credits and program requirements. During these meetings they are presented with a checklist (which is also in the orientation packet and on the webpage) to help them know what requirements will need to be covered as they select their courses.

Since initial advising is offered by the EO, DEO, and MA Advisor, we are certain that they have access to the current regulations and requirements, as well as what is expected of advisors, as well as the resources and support services are available to students. We also maintain a website that has support services and resources linked so that students can avail themselves of those materials as they need them. Our faculty members also have the handbook available to them.

Each semester the Registrar issues progress reports. Students who are stalled in progress towards their degree are identified and required to meet with the EO for advisement. Annually, the Program conducts its own assessment and the faculty holds a meeting to examine the progress of every student in the Program. A detailed spreadsheet is prepared by the APO and distributed to all in attendance. Led by the EO, faculty discuss student progress, in particular noting any students whose progress has been stifled officially, or those about whom faculty have concerns. Advisors at the meeting communicate the outcomes to the students as needed. The EO follows up with faculty who were unable to attend, and also with students as needed.
Internal Assessment, Findings, and Avenues for Reform
As part of a broader self-study project, we conducted focus groups with faculty and students, in order to elicit honest and contextualized commentary about the experiences in the program (faculty and student focus groups were held separately, with student focus groups conducted by students with assurances of confidentiality). We included a number of questions on advising and mentorship with this assessment task in mind. The focus groups provided significant insights for us to consider as we go forward.

Most students professed satisfaction with the content and quality of advising provided by the EO and DEO, but also voiced a desire to establish advising relationships with faculty members in their own fields. Furthermore, while most students indicated an understanding of the program requirements, a minority of student focus group members expressed confusion on course selection and how to organize the broader course of study of the PhD program, particularly in terms of timing first and second exams. Faculty members expressed confusion regarding the credit structure of the program and professed their difficulties providing quality advising about course progression in the program when asked by students. Current practice for new faculty includes an on-boarding process, led by the EO, that apprises them of the program requirements (and provides them a copy of a handbook). It could be that the faculty who have expressed their confusion began under different departmental leadership and therefore did not benefit from this instruction.

Because of the confidentiality measures incorporated in our focus group methodology, we are unsure whether those expressing confusion were from an older graduate cohort that did not benefit from the streamlined course advising system undertaken by the EO and the DEO, or if they had confusion despite the clarities offered in the new system. Likewise, with our faculty members’ expressed confusion, we do observe that those likely to express uncertainty hailed from our consortial faculty, whose advising connectivity with the department is often limited by their teaching availability, as well as advising demands on their home campuses. With practice comes familiarity, and it could be that our consortial faculty have not had the opportunity to refine and master departmental regulations.

Students also noted difficulty in toggling between short-term course requirements and longer-term program demands of moving through the first and second exams and developing a dissertation process. They also noted informal, non-programmatic demands of the academic job market – such as conference presentation and journal publications – that they must also find a place for in their program.
Closing the Loop: Formalizing Processes and Expanding Communication

The Program, responsive to the uncertainties and ambiguities highlighted in its fact-finding processes, has implemented two procedures to ameliorate these concerns.

1. We have developed a concrete set of guidelines for both students and faculty audiences that provides clarity on the requirements of each of our programs (MA and PhD). For PhD students, this document offers expectations of how students should time their sequence of taking their qualifying exams (the first exam), as well as a suggested framework for completing their dissertation proposal. For both programs, we have further developed a checklist that helps the students and their advisors to track their progress in the program. The guidelines are included in the Departmental Handbook; the Checklist is distributed as a stand-alone document to students at orientation. The checklists and new handbook language are located in the Appendix of this document.

2. To further facilitate students’ opportunities to seek program advice in addition to that offered by the EO and DEO, as a way also to foster stronger relationships with faculty members in their field, we are instituting a new practice of communication to faculty through subfield chairs. Each year in the fall, subfield chairs typically send a welcome message to their faculty, apprise them of key dates in the semester, and indicate any changes or concerns that might be brought to faculty attention. We will request that subfield chairs include a copy of the checklist in that annual communication, as well as a notice that all faculty can access the handbook on line to refresh their understanding of the program requirements should they so need.

3. We have developed a student learning objective to ensure students are pushed to seek advising:
   a. “Students will demonstrate that they have read the handbook and understand the course sequencing requirements of the program.”
   b. This student learning objective will be assessed by asking students to sign a their path to degree checklist by the end of their first year for the PhD students and the end of the first semester for the M.A. students. (PhD students are welcome to turn theirs in earlier should they choose.)
**Course of Study**

**Required Credits**
Students must complete a course of study consisting of 30 graduate credits, which includes 24 credits in political science and related disciplines, the 3-credit Core Seminar in Political Science, and a 3-credit thesis tutorial.

**Concentration**
Students must complete at least three courses in one of the five fields (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Theory, and Public Policy).

**Breadth of Study**
Students are required to complete a course in a second field.

**Course Level**
Students are required to complete at least two 800-level courses.

**Tools of Research**
Depending upon the research tools appropriate to their field, students must demonstrate proficiency in one research tool from the following list: (1) quantitative research methods; (2) qualitative research methods; (3) other methods of inquiry; (4) a foreign language. Proficiency in a research method (options 1 through 3) may be demonstrated by passing a graduate course on that method with a grade of B or higher. Foreign language proficiency may be demonstrated by achieving a B grade or better in an approved foreign language course or by passing the Program’s foreign language proficiency exam. Any advice about what courses count for each method can be obtained from the EO.

**Thesis**
Students are required to complete a master’s thesis under the supervision of a member of the doctoral faculty in political science. This may take the form of a substantial revision of a research paper that was submitted in a course during a prior semester, and ordinarily will be done under the supervision of the instructor in that course. Students may also choose to undertake a new research project for the thesis.

**Concentrations in American Politics or Public Policy (Optional)**
The Political Science Department also offers special concentrations in either American Politics or Public Policy as a separate component of the M.A. in Political Science. M.A. students who intend to pursue either concentration are required to complete at least three courses in the concentration, two of which must be at the 800-level. Students pursuing either of these concentrations must satisfy the tools of research requirement through either quantitative or qualitative methods (1 or 2 above).

Source: https://politicalscience.commons.gc.cuny.edu/program/degree-requirements/#1469357198348-fa374776-f205
Checklist for M.A. Program Requirements.

Worksheet is for illustrative purposes only. Please bring this to a program advisor every semester before registering for courses to ensure you are on track to graduate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course # &amp; Title</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th># Credits</th>
<th>Semester taken</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core seminar</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breadth of Study</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>800-level course 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>800-level course 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elective (if needed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools of Research</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis tutorial</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfer credits</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 max</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total credits</td>
<td></td>
<td>30 needed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thesis advisor:

Note: Courses can be used to satisfy more than one requirement, with the exception that cross-listed courses cannot be used to satisfy both a Concentration and Breadth of Study requirement. For example, a course taken to satisfy the 800-level course requirement can also satisfy the Tools of Research requirement. However, a cross-listed course in American Politics and International Relations can only count as either a Concentration or a Breadth of Study course, not both.

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Course of Study

Required Credits
Each student is required to complete 60 graduate credits, of which at least 20 credits (5 courses) should be earned through 800-level doctoral research courses. These courses may be in any area of political science and may include independent study, so long as the independent study includes a major research paper. Students are not allowed to take more classes after reaching 45 credits until they have completed at least one part of the first examination successfully.

Knowledge of Two Fields
For the Doctorate in Political Science, students are required to develop a major and minor area of concentration from among the five fields in the Program (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Theory, and Public Policy). Special competence in these two fields is the basis of the student’s doctoral specialization and is also the basis of the student’s First and Second Examinations. In each of the two chosen fields, students must take at least one course at the 700-level.

Exposure to Other Fields
Each student is required to complete a total of three courses in at least two fields OTHER THAN their major or minor with a grade of B or better. Courses which are cross-listed are counted only once in meeting any requirement.

Tools of Research
For students matriculating in the fall of 2019 and thereafter, it is required that before the completion of 45 credits every student must demonstrate proficiency in two research tools from the following list: (1) quantitative research methods; (2) qualitative research methods; (3) other methods of inquiry; (4) a foreign language. Proficiency in a research method (options 1 through 3) may be demonstrated by passing a graduate course on that method with a grade of B or higher. Any advice about what courses count for each method can be obtained from the EO.

Foreign language proficiency (option 4) may be demonstrated by achieving a B grade or better in one of the courses offered by the CUNY Graduate School Language Reading Program or by passing the Program’s foreign language proficiency exam. Students taking the exam are required to translate a page of typical text in social science into English. The use of a dictionary is permitted. Dates for the foreign language examinations are announced at the beginning of each academic year. Students who wish to be examined in a language not ordinarily given may make arrangements with the Executive Officer. Students who have received a B.A. from a foreign institution may use the language used in that institution as a medium of instruction to demonstrate proficiency.

Depending upon the research tools appropriate to their subfield, students may seek approval from the Executive Officer to fulfill their second research tool requirement within the same category used to fulfill their first research tool requirement. For example, a student majoring in Political Theory may be permitted to demonstrate proficiency in a second foreign language; a student majoring in American Politics may be permitted to demonstrate proficiency in a second course in quantitative methods. In practice, this principle may be applied to all subfields.

Students who matriculated before the fall of 2019 can choose to satisfy the above Tools of Research requirements, or all the following requirements: 1) proficiency in one research tool that is either quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods, or an other method of inquiry; 2) one course in Political Theory; and 3) proficiency in a foreign language.

First Examination
The First Examination must be taken after the completion of 27 credits and before the completion of 45 credits.

The First Examination examines students in two of the Program’s five fields. Students are examined in one major field and one minor field. The examination consists of a six-hour written examination in the major field and a four-hour written examination in the minor field. Students may take their major and minor examination in the same semester or in consecutive semesters. Students may request questions in sub-fields that they designate when they register for the examination. (Majors must answer questions in three sub-fields, minors in two sub-fields). Each major and minor field is subdivided into standard specialized concentrations or subfields. The First Examination Committee must receive these requests at least one semester prior to the examination.

Exam preparation materials can be found on Blackboard.
Second Examination

The Second Examination tests the doctoral candidate’s ability to explicate, examine and assess the major theories, applications, and controversies within their chosen areas, and place their ideas in the range of views in those areas, with a focus on their intended dissertation research.

Between the semester in which the student completes 60 credits and two semesters after the completion of 60 credits, the student completes a dissertation proposal under the supervision of a faculty adviser and faculty reader. The dissertation proposal is considered satisfactory for the purpose of registering for the Second Examination when the faculty sponsor and reader so indicate in a written communication to the Executive Officer.

The examining committee consists of either three or five faculty members, including the sponsor and the reader. At least one-third of the committee must be from fields other than the major of the candidate. GC rules require that all members of a 3 person committee be doctoral faculty at the GC. The composition of a Ph.D. doctoral committee in political science must include a majority of members of the doctoral faculty in political science. Thus, for example, a committee of 3 would need 2 from political science. A committee that includes faculty from outside the GC would need to grow to 5, with 3 doctoral faculty from political science. Upon completion of a satisfactory dissertation proposal, the student consults with his or her sponsor about the composition of the examining committee, which is then selected in consultation with the Executive Officer.

A faculty member from another Ph.D. Program may be invited to participate in the supervision of a political science dissertation as a reader, provided: (1) the Dissertation Committee is satisfied that the dissertation proposal fully meets applicable standards, and (2) a member of the Ph.D. Program in Political Science takes full responsibility as sponsor or co-sponsor of the dissertation.

The student circulates his or her dissertation proposal to the members of the examining committee, who should submit written comments to the faculty sponsor at least two weeks before the examination. The faculty sponsor then conveys the comments to the student.

The Second Examination itself is a two-hour oral examination in which students are expected to place their research project within broader areas of the discipline. A satisfactory written proposal is a prerequisite for the oral examination, not part of the examination itself. The student is encouraged to consult with the individual members of the examining committee prior to the examination to identify the issues that will be addressed during the exam. These issues should be primarily determined by the student’s research interests as expressed in the dissertation proposal.

Dissertation

Students have a maximum of eight years to complete all of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree.

Once the dissertation proposal has been approved, the student is expected to work closely with his or her sponsor and reader in researching, organizing and writing the dissertation. In addition, the student is encouraged to consult with other faculty members, as it may be desirable, in pursuing his or her research.

The Examination Committee for a Final Oral Examination represents the Ph.D. Program and the Graduate Council of the Graduate Center. It is therefore responsible for the standard of the Ph.D. Degree at the University. The committee must decide whether all academic requirements for the degree have been fulfilled. The Dissertation Defense Committee is composed of either three or five members, and follows the same guidelines for composing the second exam committee. The Dissertation Defense takes place no less than 30 days after the student has made complete copies of the dissertation available to all members of the Defense Committee.

The Dissertation Defense is a two-hour examination. Each examiner has approximately 20 minutes to examine the candidate. Possible grades are Pass, Pass with Minor Revisions, Pass with Major Revisions, or Fail as determined by a majority of the committee. In case of a Pass, the Dissertation is accepted, with the exception of typographical errors, which should be corrected without any faculty supervision. In the case of a Pass with Minor Revisions, the candidate has three months to make the appropriate corrections and present the dissertation to the committee chair (the Sponsor) for approval. In case of a Pass with Major Revisions, the candidate has twelve months to re-submit the dissertation to the Committee for its official approval. In case of Fail, the candidate is terminated from the Program. The grade of the examination is determined by vote of the committee and immediately reported to the candidate.

Source:
https://politicalscience.commons.gc.cuny.edu/program/degree-requirements/#1469355867682-e532411f-19e6
Checklist for PhD Program Requirements.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course # &amp; Title</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th># Credits</th>
<th>Semester passed</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Major Field 700-level</td>
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<td>Minor Field 700-level</td>
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<td>Breadth of Study 1</td>
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<td>Breadth of Study 2</td>
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<td>Breadth of Study 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>800-level course 1</td>
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<td>800-level course 2</td>
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<td>800-level course 3</td>
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<td>800-level course 4</td>
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<td>800-level course 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools of Research 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 or 4</td>
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<td>Tools of Research 2 (or Political Theory course if matriculated before Fall 2019)</td>
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<td>Foreign Language if matriculated before Fall 2019</td>
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<td>First Exam Minor Field</td>
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<td>Second Exam: Proposal</td>
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Note: Courses can be used to satisfy more than one requirement. For example, a course taken to satisfy the 800-level course requirement can also satisfy another degree requirement (e.g., Tools of Research).

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