

Information for Prospective Graduate Students

In conformity with recent American Political Science Association guidelines, the University of Michigan Department of Political Science is making the following information available to all prospective graduate students.

Goals of the Department's Graduate Program

The University of Michigan graduate program prepares students primarily for careers in research universities and liberal arts colleges or closely allied professions. Recent Michigan Ph.D.s hold positions at Yale, Harvard, UCLA, Rice, Duke, and Princeton, as well as Dartmouth, Carleton, Union College, Emory, and other schools. Every year, a few of our graduates opt to take non-academic research positions. For example, Michigan graduates work at the Rand Corporation, Sports Illustrated (market research), the Hudson Institute, the Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, the United Nations, and the risk assessment/strategic planning departments of Wall Street firms such as Bear Sterns. The department has recently expanded advising about non-academic options, but its program will continue to focus on research skills useful mainly in academic settings.

The department does not offer a terminal master's degree, although students who wish to leave before completing the Ph.D. may obtain a master's degree in recognition of the work they have invested.

The department began a review of its graduate program in 2000-01. It will complete this review in April 2002. A number of changes have followed from this review, including a new financial aid policy. That said, there is substantial agreement among faculty members with respect to the general goals of the graduate program.

Graduate Admissions Criteria

Our admissions committee seeks to admit and enroll applicants who show high promise as scholars and teachers. The class is currently limited to 18-20 students. Most students have mathematical and analytic GRE scores in the high 600s or 700s, and verbal scores in the middle 600s and 700s. The department accepts people with lower scores if other parts of the academic record are especially strong and a student brings special talents, interests, or experiences to the program. The personal statement and a strong record of performance in undergraduate analytic courses weigh heavily in admissions decisions.

Under a new financial plan, all students currently receive the same financial aid package. Through an agreement with the Graduate School and the College, we provide a first-year fellowship; equivalent support in years two and three in exchange for service as a teaching assistant; a fourth-year research assistant position if a student does not win external support for dissertation-related data collection; and a fifth-year completion fellowship. In each year, the support covers tuition, a competitive stipend (currently \$13,000 annually), and health insurance. Students who win NSF, Javits, or other, similar fellowships are able to reduce their teaching commitments. Students who take more than five years to complete their degrees often are able to cover all or some of their costs through graderships.

Applications, Admissions, Attrition, and Placement

The department currently receives about 200 applications for a class of 18-20. We admit roughly 45-50 students and finally enroll about 18-20 of those.

Not everyone finishes the degree. In every class a few students decide that they can earn more in another profession or find their interests take them in other directions. With an improved financial package and a strengthened advising system, we cannot predict current attrition rates. We project that two to three students in each class will decide to pursue other options before reaching candidacy. We urge students who decide they are more interested in other careers to drop out earlier rather than later.

Of the students who place themselves on the academic job market, roughly 60 percent win some kind of position in their first year of job seeking. Success rates vary by subfield and by year. In American politics, roughly 80 percent are successful in the first year, currently. In some other subfields, the success rate in the first year on the market is closer to 45-50 percent. Most of those who do not win positions are able to work as visitors at other colleges and universities while they continue to compete. A few hold post-doctoral fellowships at other institutions.

The proportion of graduates who win tenure-track positions at peer institutions is lower than the overall proportion of people who win academic jobs. In recent years we have found that many graduates who take positions at small schools and wish to pursue careers in larger research settings are able to move to major research universities within two to three years, should they choose to do so.

Preparing Students for Careers

a. Training. University of Michigan students take three years of coursework. Typically they begin with field seminars that introduce the enterprise of theory-building and expose everyone to important work in the major subfields of political science. Students then take upper-level research seminars, along with courses in a cognate field such as economics, history, law, or sociology.

All of our current graduate students receive basic training in statistical methods. Most take at least one course on research design. A majority of students pursue some advanced training in statistics, game theory, computer simulation, and/or qualitative research techniques.

Before the end of the third year, all students must take and pass preliminary examinations (qualifying exams) in a major field and a minor field. They may meet the requirements for a second minor through coursework. Exam formats vary by subfield.

b. Advising. Mentoring of current students takes several forms. 1) Students are assigned an adviser when they arrive. They may change advisers later as needs alter. 2) At the end of the first and second (and often the third) years, each student meets with a group of 2-3 faculty members to discuss his or her developing interests, perceived strengths and weaknesses, course plan, and other subjects. These conversations last an hour. They are designed to provide helpful advice. 3) Twice a year students meet as a group with the faculty members in their subfields. The purpose of these meetings is to talk about trends, journals, hot dissertation topics, journals, etc. 4) Students may speak with faculty members during office hours and with the Director of Graduate Studies

when they wish. 5) The department organizes an orientation day, an occasional day-long professional development workshop, and periodic brownbags or small workshops on professional development issues. 6) The department has placed advising information on its website, including the results of a survey of past graduates.

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Associate Chair play an especially active role in organizing these activities under an agreement with the Graduate School and the College.

c. Preparation for teaching. Almost all of our current students lead discussion sections for two years during their graduate careers. Under an agreement between the graduate student union and the university, all students receive 14 hours of teaching instruction in a department-based course. Those who teach advanced writing receive additional formal preparation.

Graduate teaching assistants receive assistance from the university's Center for Research on Teaching and Learning. The university evaluates all instructors, including graduate teaching assistants, at the conclusion of each term. The evaluations take the form of student surveys that are centrally processed. Graduate students who receive very high evaluations for at least two terms are nominated for university teaching awards.

Students who have strong teaching evaluations and make good progress in the program may compete to teach a class of their own in the six-week spring and summer terms.

d. Preparation for publishing. The department operates a small program of summer research grants that are designed to foster collaborative research between faculty and graduate students, leading to co-authored articles. American students are eligible to compete for workstudy research assistant positions at the Institute for Social Research during the summer, too. We have also instituted occasional brownbags/workshops about the publication review process, publishing requirements in academic careers, etc.

The department provides limited financial assistance for graduate students to travel to professional meetings at which they present papers.

e. Professional ethics & responsibilities. The department's professional development workshops touch on the organization of the profession, research responsibility, and other topics. The Rackham Graduate School and the Office of the Vice President for Research offer frequent seminars open to all graduate students.

f. The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching sponsors a variety of programs designed to help graduate students and faculty members with teaching. It does not provide employment assistance.

Job Placement

The department has a Director of Placement (a faculty member) and a part-time placement service. The placement office provides several types of assistance, including

§ two workshops per year about going on the job market

- § assistance in preparing submissions for the new Hire a Michigan Ph.D. portion of the department website
- § staff support for preparation and printing of dossiers
- § provision of copies of the APSA personnel newsletter and the Chronicle for Higher Education
- § coordination of practice job talks and counseling based on practice talks

General information

The American Political Science Association has asked all departments to make current and prospective students aware of the following information.

- § There will always be more Ph.D.s produced than there are open faculty positions.
- § Some faculty positions will offer opportunities to teach at the undergraduate and graduate levels, but most will involve undergraduate teaching only.
- § Some positions will offer significant opportunities and support for professional development, but many others will offer minimal support.
- § The average sized department has roughly 6 faculty members. (1996)
- § The average sized department has roughly one secretarial staff member. (1996)
- § The average total departmental budget for travel is \$2,000 annually. (1996)
- § Increasing numbers of Ph.D.s in political science will find employment in non-faculty academic positions, in government, and the non-profit sector, and in private business.

Summary data on Ph.D. placement are available on the APSA website.