Office of the Provost

Substantive Academic Change to an Existing Degree Program Form

| Proposed Substantive Change to an Existing Degree: Academic Components |

1. Please describe and provide a rationale for the proposed change to the existing degree:

We propose three changes to the requirements of the MA component of the BA/MA program in political science:

- Replace the comprehensive exam requirement with a required master’s thesis
- Add a requirement for two graduate level research methods courses chosen from a list of four courses.
- Reduce the total credit requirement for the dual BA/MA degree from 160 credits (40 4-credit courses) to 144 (36 4-credit courses) to bring the Political Science BA/MA program in line with the credit requirements of the majority of Art and Sciences BA/MA programs, or to whatever higher total credit count may be set University-wide for BA/MA programs in the future.

Rationale:

*Replacing the Comprehensive Exam with a Thesis Requirement:* Comprehensive examinations are traditionally an integral part of doctoral programs in political science. However they are not commonly found in top masters programs. Instead the predominant approach is to require master’s candidates to engage in independent original research through a master’s thesis. In reviewing our program, the department determined that comprehensive exams are of little benefit to students on the job market or applying to graduate school. By contrast, the lack of a capstone research experience is an important weakness in the current program. We propose replacing the existing comprehensive exam requirement with the requirement to complete a master’s thesis.

The thesis, expected to be at the level of an article-length extended and refined graduate student seminar paper, encourages substantive interaction with a faculty member and provides the student a means of highlighting their research and analytical skills on the job market or in an application to graduate school. The thesis will be reviewed for merit by a faculty committee consisting of the thesis topic advisor and the Director of Advanced Programs. The faculty committee will decide on the basis of the thesis whether or not the student merits the award of
the Master's degree. Students will follow a standard schedule of draft submission and revision so that their progress toward the degree award is assured.

It should be noted here that students admitted to the BA/MA program will not be allowed to complete the Political Science Honors in the Major program, which also involves writing a thesis. Students will be able to either complete the honors program by submitting an undergraduate honors thesis or complete the BA/MA program by submitting an MA thesis.

Coursework: The requirement of two graduate level research methodology courses provides students with the tools to complete their thesis project and ensures greater interaction with student in the political science graduate program.

Total credit requirement: Reducing the total credit requirement to 144 allows well prepared students to complete the BA/MA in four years while completing all the requirements of the major in political science and the MA in political science without any course overlap. This brings the BA/MA in political science into line with most BA/MA programs in Arts and Sciences. Should the University set a higher minimum total credits for a BA/MA in the future, then this requirement would be raised to the new minimum total credits required for a BA/MA.

2. Please describe how the proposed change(s) advances the Strategic Plan of the school/college and of the University plan:

These proposed changes increase the rigor of the MA portion of the BA/MA in Political Science consistent with goal 4 of the CAS/GRS Strategic Plan:

4. We will offer leading doctoral, postdoctoral, and masters programs within and across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

3. Please list the program requirements for the current and revised programs: (expand the table as needed and denote new courses in bold print)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current program</th>
<th>Revised program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least two of GRS PO 711, 741, 751, 771, 791.</td>
<td>At least two of GRS PO 711, 741, 751, 771, 791.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 additional PO courses numbered above 500</td>
<td>At least two of PO 502, 840, 841, 843.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive exam in three fields</td>
<td>4 additional PO courses numbered above 500</td>
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<td>160 total credits</td>
<td>144 total credits</td>
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4. Please list learning outcomes for the revised program:

Learning Objectives

Students graduating with an MA in Political Science are expected to:

1. Demonstrate an advanced knowledge in three of the five sub-fields of Political Science: American Politics, Public Policy, Comparative Politics, International Relations and Political Theory.

2. Demonstrate written and oral communication skills.

5. How does the change place your program in the context of programs at peer institutions?

This change does little to move our relative placement among peer institutions. Indeed, there is a great deal of variance in the requirements for BA/MAs. We compared our program to similar programs at University of Chicago, Vanderbilt, Emory, UNH, ASU, Loyola and NYU. Common among program requirements at these institutions are both theses and comprehensive exams. In all, the thesis appears to be a more prevalent requirement than comprehensive exams, but some require one without the other, some both, and some allow students to choose between them. Our motivation to require a thesis instead of comprehensive exams stems from conversations with several faculty advisors and students. In brief, comprehensive exams are of little benefit to the students on the job market or in applying to graduate school. Moreover the predominant approach is to require a thesis.

6. How does the change affect other academic units?

Not Applicable

7. How will you notify current students of the proposed changes and implement the requirements?

Current students will not be affected by the new requirements as this is only a year-long program. Going forward, applicants will be notified through the usual advising process. Numbers of students are small, in the 6-15 range per year, allowing for close communication and follow up.

8. Please document any implications that the change has on professional accreditation or licensure at the program or school/college level:

Not Applicable

9. Please list the resources needed including IT, new faculty, new staff, reassignment of faculty from existing courses to new ones (especially if the existing course(s) is not being removed from the bulletin), technology enhanced classrooms, office space, and other facilities:

None
## Degree Advice Requirements

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<th>Catalog Year or Academic Semester</th>
<th>GRS has not implemented degree advice</th>
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<td>How many credits is the degree</td>
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<th>Block Name</th>
<th>Requirement Name and the number of courses needed to complete the requirement</th>
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Subject: comments on BA/MA proposal
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2014 7:09:09 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: Susan Jackson
To: Christenson, Dino P.
CC: Wilson, Graham K, Kriner, Douglas Lee

Dear Dino (in case you’re in reach of email, and Graham, Doug, in case not),

I’ve just received a compilation of (five) comments on the proposal from Deans Council and Faculty Members, to whom all curricular proposals are sent for optional comment by the Provost’s Office.

All five are convinced that the case is made for replacing the comprehensive exam with a thesis. Four have nothing else to say. Here, in full, is the fifth comment, also generally approving:

"The proposed changes are sound and relevant. What is not addressed clearly are: 1. The resources (time and staff) needed to supervise the theses; and 2. The ideal or proposed schedule of courses students would need to follow to ensure they can prepare for and execute the thesis. How is thesis prep built into the course program for the student?"

I can confidently answer #2 in terms of students’ BA preparation including seminars with substantial papers, central role of advisor/mentor, and contributions of methods courses and general/topical graduate coursework in chosen subfield. Here’s a question: How clear an idea do you expect students will have of eventual thesis topics at the time they apply for the MA?

#1 is a question not infrequently asked by commenters from schools and colleges where thesis supervision at all levels is less integral to faculty profiles than in CAS/GRS. One way of assuring outsiders that thought has been given to demand on faculty time is quantitative: How many students do you expect to enroll for the BA/MA (in some future cases choosing BA/MA over undergraduate Honors)? And how many different faculty might be involved in supervising MA theses in a given year? I can also say of course that PO has made a priority of providing beneficial challenges and opportunities for top undergraduate students. It also seems—but correct me—that, in the comprehensive exam era, faculty put considerable effort into the less worthwhile and rewarding tasks of preparing reading lists, prepping students, and grading exams.

All advice welcome. I’m not worried, just wanting to do right by your proposal.

Thanks,

Susan
Comments

BA/MA in Political Science—Substantive Change (GRS7976645)
Compiled by Kelly Connors

“The proposed changes are sound and relevant. What is not addressed clearly are: 1. the resources (time and staff) needed to supervise the theses; and 2. the ideal or proposed schedule of courses students would need to follow to ensure they can prepare for and execute the thesis. How is thesis prep built into the course program for the student?”

“These changes make sense to me.”

“The rationale for replacing the comprehensive exam with a master’s thesis seems solid. I agree that the capstone project would improve the real as well as paper qualifications for graduates of the program. I approve the proposal.”

“I approve.”

“This makes a lot of sense--a thesis will be much more helpful to students than a comprehensive exam.”