

MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL
SCIENCE

Student Information
& Program Guide

2026-27

New Mexico State University
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Program Overview

The Master of Arts (MA) in Political Science is one of two graduate degree programs offered by the Department of Political Science, Public Law and Administration at New Mexico State University.

For information on the MA in Political Science see: <https://deptofgov.nmsu.edu/academic-programs/ma.html>

For information on the Masters in Public Administration Program (MPA), see: <https://deptofgov.nmsu.edu/academic-programs/mpa.html>

The MA in Political Science provides course work in each of the major fields of political science and prepares students for a variety of careers in teaching, public service, and the private sector, as well as for further graduate study.

Pursuing versatility and policy relevance, the MA degree program offers course work and supervised student research in the fields of American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law, public administration and public policy. Specialized fields are periodically redefined in light of current developments and faculty/students' interests. In developing their programs of study, some MA students take advantage of NMSU's location on the US-Mexico border and the active involvement of the university in many international programs. In addition, the MA program offers a graduate minor in Security Studies.

The graduate program encourages a supportive environment for individual growth through seminars and close faculty supervision. The presence of students from throughout the country, nearby military bases and abroad provides ample opportunities for cross-cultural contact in a stimulating learning environment.

We welcome your interest in the Department of Political Science, Public Law and Administration at NMSU. For additional information concerning our graduate programs, please contact:

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575-646-4935

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Staff and Faculty Profiles

For information about staff and faculty, including current research interests, see: <https://deptofgov.nmsu.edu/facultydirectory/faculty-profiles.html>

Admission to the Program

The department seeks applicants whose interests and experience demonstrate abilities appropriate for advanced work in political science. When making admissions decisions, the MA Program Committee considers each applicant individually.

Prospective graduate students are expected to have at least a 3.0 undergraduate grade point average (GPA), as determined by the NMSU Graduate School. Applicants who graduated with a GPA of 3.0 or less are required to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) if they received their undergraduate degree within the five years prior to submitting this application.

Applicants who graduated more than five years before this application are not required to take the GRE. In addition, a writing sample and three letters of recommendation from persons familiar with the applicant's academic work must be submitted via the online application system described on the next page.

Applicants must also include a personal statement describing any relevant academic training and work experience, as well as their interest in pursuing the MA in Political Science at NMSU. While there are no formal application deadlines, complete applications are required for admission. As a condition of admission, candidates with inadequate preparation may be required to take appropriate undergraduate course work.

Application Process

For information about the application process and how to submit your application, see: <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/future-students/admission.html>

Follow these steps:

1. Complete the Application for Admission.
2. Upload the supporting documents required by the academic program you are applying for (see below for the documents required for the MA in Political Science). You can review the departmental application requirements on the department website or the Graduate Programs page.
3. Submit the application fee. You can make payment within the online application system using a credit card. However, if you select to pay by check and then change your mind and want to pay by credit card use this link. Pay by credit Card.
4. Review your application and the supporting documents before you submit your application. You are unable to make changes to your application after it has been submitted.
5. Submit the application. Upon submission, the academic department will have full access to all of the documents you have submitted. The MA faculty will review your application. Once the department has made a decision, you will receive an email notification indicating a tentative admission. The Graduate School is the official admitting authority and any tentative admission decision cannot be construed as a formal official admission offer. If you are admitted to the program, the Graduate School will officially contact you about the next steps in the process, including the submission of official transcripts and other required documents.

Applicants to the MA in Political Science need to submit the following documents in the online system:

- Personal Statement
- Writing Sample
- Current Resume
- Three (3) Letters of Recommendation (preferably at least two from former or current professors)
- Unofficial Transcripts from all institutions attended
- GRE Scores (if Applicable)

Financial Assistance

Financial support may be available for students admitted to the MA program in the form of assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, and loans. However, admission to the program does not equate to any offer or guarantee of financial assistance. Departmental assistantships and university fellowships are limited and are awarded on a competitive basis.

The department offers graduate assistantships to support qualified full-time students (minimum of 9 graduate-level credits per semester). You can indicate your interest in being considered for an assistantship when you complete the application form online and in your letter of interest. There is no separate application form to request a graduate assistantship. Students must first be admitted to the MA program to be eligible for a graduate assistantship. Out-of-state students who receive a graduate assistantship qualify for in-state tuition rates. Graduate Assistants work under the direction of the department faculty.

The granting of a graduate assistantship is based on the applicant's qualifications and available funding. The program does not provide summer funding unless there are additional available resources from departmental funds and/or external grants that allow for the hiring of graduate assistants.

Assistantships are conditional offers contingent upon other factors such as, but not limited to, funding, enrollment levels, and academic standing.

Students admitted to the MA Political Science program are eligible for Graduate Assistantship support and tuition remission in line with the Scholarship Award provisions described in Article 8 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. See: <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/ga-and-union/grad-assistant-forms/NMSU-collective-bargaining-agreement.pdf>

All new Teaching Assistants (TA) must attend the New Graduate Student Orientation presented by the Graduate School at the beginning of the fall semester. New international students must pass the NMSU International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Screening administered by the Department of English. If they do not pass the ITA Screening, a student must attend courses offered through the Department of English to ensure that they have command of English and will be able to teach.

Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

For details on how graduate assistantships are funded, tuition remission, and all aspects of employment as a graduate assistant, please see the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) at <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/ga-and-union/collective-bargaining-agreement.html>

Graduate School – Graduate Assistant Handbook

For further details about employment as a Graduate Assistant at New Mexico State University, see the Graduate School's Graduate Assistant Handbook at:

<https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/current-students/current-student-forms/graduate-assistant-handbook.pdf>

Graduate students are encouraged to apply for scholarship awards and research/conference travel funds that are offered on a competitive basis by the Department of Political Science, Public Law and Administration, the College of Arts & Sciences, the Graduate School, other NMSU units, and external organizations.

The financial aid office, <http://fa.nmsu.edu>, helps new graduate students apply for many types of financial support. Perkins Loans (national direct student loans), Federal Direct Loans and college work-study are all available to domestic graduate students. The amount of aid awarded will be based on the financial need of the student.

Degree Audit

Students in the MA Political Science Program should meet with their adviser and/or MA program coordinator at least once a semester to monitor their progress towards degree completion, focusing on the requirements for taking a research methods seminar (POLS 502 and/or 503), three core seminars (from POLS 530, 550, 560, 570, and 580), electives, prospectus defense of thesis or non-thesis option, and completion of thesis or non-thesis option. Similar monitoring of progress to complete any graduate minors or dual majors should be conducted each semester. In order to monitor progress, use the degree audit at: <https://records.nmsu.edu/students/star-degree-audit.html>

MA Degree Requirements

All candidates must complete 36 credit hours of work, including one of the following courses in research methodology (3 credit hours):

POLS 502 Research Methods in Political Science

POLS 503 Qualitative Research Methods

Those who consider pursuing doctoral work after their MA are encouraged to take both methods courses. MA students must complete either POLS 502 or POLS 503 with a B- or better.

In addition, all candidates must take three of the following five government core courses (9 credits). MA students must complete their three core classes with a B- or better.

POLS 530 Seminar in Public Policy

POLS 550 Seminar in American Politics

POLS 560 Seminar in International Relations Theory

POLS 570 Seminar in Comparative Politics

POLS 580 Seminar in Political Theory

Students complete their academic program with 18 additional credit hours of elective courses, plus 6 hours of thesis or special research (non-thesis) credit. All courses are to be selected with the approval of the student's graduate advisor. Advisors are assigned during the admissions process; applicants are informed of the advisor assignment in the letter of acceptance. Students are also permitted to select their own advisors. It is the student's responsibility to remain in contact with his or her advisor.

During the semesters when students are completing their first 18 credits, each MA student must complete the following steps:

1. Select a faculty member in the Department of Political Science, Public Law and Administration who agrees to serve as chair of his/her graduate committee. Normally the chair will be the graduate faculty member most professionally qualified to supervise the work.
2. In consultation with his/her chair, develop a degree completion plan that indicates any minors being pursued (for example, the graduate minor in Security Studies).
3. Meet with his/her chair to choose between the thesis and non-thesis options. These options are provided to facilitate individualized programs of study.

Thesis Option

The thesis option is strongly suggested for students who have career objectives that can be enhanced by the deep and careful analysis of a thesis topic. For the student interested in pursuing a doctoral degree, the thesis provides an excellent opportunity for exploring themes and ideas that might serve as the foundation for a dissertation proposal. Under the thesis option students complete 30 credits of course work plus 6 hours of master's thesis credit (POLS 599).

Thesis Committee: In consultation with the student's thesis committee chair (see above), the candidate will select **one** other department member to serve on the committee and oversee the research. An additional committee member from a discipline outside the department must be included as the third committee member, to serve as the Dean's Representative. The committee chair will advise the student on how to choose an outside member who can offer relevant insight and support. The student and the committee chair will also discuss the most appropriate time for inclusion of the outside member, which may not occur until the scheduling of the final oral examination. Changes in the composition of the committee must be approved by the student's committee chair.

Thesis Prospectus: Working with his/her thesis chair, the candidate is responsible for completing a prospectus of the proposed thesis and submitting it to his/her thesis committee prior to registration for thesis hours (POLS 599). The thesis committee will then meet with the candidate to discuss the proposal, make recommendations and – if acceptable to all committee members – approve the prospectus. Registration for thesis hours is not permitted until the prospectus is approved. A prospectus is ordinarily 10 to 12 pages in length. It should explain the rationale and research question(s) guiding the proposed thesis, specify major theoretical orientations, summarize relevant literature, outline tentative methodologies, and provide a preliminary bibliography. In addition, a brief biography of the student's background (for example, relevant courses taken, papers written, etc.) should be included. Once the committee has approved the prospectus, the student will work with his/her thesis chair until completion of a rough draft of the thesis. In some cases, the draft will be circulated to the entire committee who will make suggestions for changes. Once the thesis chair notifies the student that there is a defensible draft, the student will schedule a thesis defense with all of his/her committee members.

Thesis Committee Review: Committee members will receive copies of the draft at least 10 working days prior to a scheduled thesis defense. The defense will constitute a major part of the student's final oral examination (discussed below). Following a successful defense, the student will submit an electronic copy of their thesis that meet Graduate School deadlines and style requirements.

Non-thesis Option

Designed for flexibility, the non-thesis option provides an opportunity for the qualified student to develop – with the approval of his/her committee – a unique academic and/or internship project tailored to meet specific academic and/or career goals. Students pursuing this option complete 30 credits of course work plus 6 hours of special research credit (POLS 598) or 6 hours of approved internship credit (POLS 510).

Project Committee: In consultation with his/her committee chair (see above), the candidate will select two other department members to serve on the committee and oversee the project. An additional committee member from a discipline outside the department must be included as the third committee member, to serve as the Dean's Representative. The committee chair will advise the student on how to choose an outside member who can offer relevant insight and support. The student and the committee chair will also discuss the most appropriate time for inclusion of the outside member, which may not occur until the scheduling of the final oral examination. Changes in the composition of the committee must be approved by the student's committee chair.

Project Proposal: Working with the committee chair, the student is responsible for developing a proposal that describes the specialized academic and/or internship project, and submitting the proposal to his/her committee for review. A proposal is ordinarily 10 to 12 pages in length. In addition to information that may be requested by the chair, the proposal should explain the rationale and significance of the project, and outline steps for completion. In addition, a brief biography of the student's background (for example, relevant courses taken, papers written, etc.) should be included. A proposal for a research project (as opposed to an internship) should also indicate the likely venue(s) for public presentation of the research findings, such as a professional conference or symposium organized by the Graduate School at NMSU; the student and his/her committee will decide on the most appropriate venue for this presentation, which may include publication in a professional journal. Committee members may require revisions to the non-thesis proposal prior to approval. The proposal must be approved by the student's committee prior to registration in either POLS 598 or POLS 510.

Project Committee Review: It is the responsibility of the candidate to meet periodically with his/her chair for the purpose of reviewing the progress of the work and receiving suggestions for improvement. The review stage will continue until the chair believes the student has produced a defensible project (e.g., a report, conference paper, manual, etc.). Committee members must receive a draft of the project at least 10 working days prior to the final oral examination.

Written Examination: All non-thesis candidates must pass a written departmental examination during their final semester to demonstrate mastery of the discipline. Students must remove all incompletes before taking the exam and must pass the exam in order to take the final oral examination. At the beginning of the final semester, the student will meet with his/her chair to set a date for the written exam. The written exam must be scheduled at least 10 working days prior to the final oral examination. The student's committee chair is responsible for soliciting questions from committee members for the final written exam, scheduling the exam time and room, and distributing the exam answers to the corresponding committee members for grading. Each departmental member of the non-thesis committee will submit a question, for a total of three. The candidate is expected to communicate with each committee member from the Department regarding the main topic areas to be covered in the written exam.

Candidates will be given three hours to complete the exam. Copies of the completed exam will be distributed to the committee members from the Department. Each member will grade and comment on the answers to his/her question. The committee chair will collect the members' evaluations and notify the student and the MA Program Coordinator of the results. The student needs to pass at least two questions to proceed to the oral examination. Students who fail two or more questions will be allowed to retake the examination one time in a different format. A second failure will result in removal of the student from the program.

Final Oral Examination

All students, regardless of option, are required by the Graduate School to take an oral examination during the final semester in residence. Students must remove all incompletes prior to taking the oral exam. The final draft of the thesis or specialized academic project must be formally submitted to the committee at least 10 working days prior to the oral exam date. As required by the Graduate School, a faculty member from another department will serve as a representative of the Dean of the Graduate School and must participate in the oral exam and receive copies of the thesis or academic project. Candidates are encouraged to meet with his/her committee members prior to the oral examination to discuss their comments on the thesis, academic project and/or written examination.

The oral exam provides a second opportunity for the student to demonstrate his/her mastery of the subject. Typically, the examination will involve a discussion of the student's major research findings or major components of the specialized academic project and will include a question and answer period focusing on the thesis or project/written examination, and overall mastery of the discipline. A student who fails the oral examination will be permitted to retake the examination once. A second failure will result in the removal of the student from the program.

GRADUATE MINORS

Graduate Minor in Public Administration

This minor addresses some of the specific needs of those pursuing a career in governmental or non-profit administration. Most courses are offered in the evenings, and the program is designed both for individuals who recently completed undergraduate degrees as well as returning students. It is intended to foster public service leadership by teaching students how to confront theory with practice and practice with theory.

Twelve (12) semester credits of graduate courses from the following:

Required (3 Credits):

POLS 540: Seminar in Public Administration

At least one of the following MPA core courses (3 Credits):

POLS 541: Public Budgeting

POLS 542: Public Sector Human Resource Management

POLS 547: Government Organizations

POLS 549: Ethics in Government

Additional credit hours from core above (recommended) or from list below (6 Credits):

POLS 524 Introduction into the Non-Profit Sector

POLS 530: Seminar in Public Policy

POLS 531: Public Program Evaluation

POLS 537: Issues in Public Policy (subtitled course)

POLS 543: Skills Workshop* (subtitled course)

POLS 544: Public Policy Analysis

POLS 548: Public Sector Leadership

POLS 591: Law for Administrators

* No more than three credit hours of POLS 543 may count toward a minor.

Students may double-count MPA minor course credits e.g. POLS 524 Introduction into the Non-Profit Sector and POLS 530 Seminar in Public Policy for the MA.

Graduate Minor in Security Studies

Nine (9) semester credits of graduate courses from the following:

POLS 468 Rebels, Guerrillas and Terrorists in Modern Latin America

POLS 549 Ethics in Government

POLS 560 Seminar in International Relations Theory

POLS 563 Issues in International Relations

POLS 564 Advanced National Security Policy

POLS 565 Advanced Issues Security Studies

POLS 566 Advanced Issues in American Foreign Policy

POLS 567 Advanced Issues in Terrorism

POLS 568 Advanced Issues in Human Security

POLS 569 Advanced Issues in Globalization

POLS 574 Contemporary Comparative Studies
POLS 596 International Law

Students may double-count MA course credits for the security studies minor.

Additional classes for the Graduate Minor in Security Studies: Other graduate courses may become available during the year which may be substituted for the above-listed courses for this minor. Consideration may be made on a case-by-case basis.

Make sure you know the steps needed to file for graduation and the deadlines provided each semester by the Graduate School. See: <http://gradschool.nmsu.edu/>

Equal Opportunity Statement

New Mexico State University, in compliance with applicable laws and in furtherance of its commitment to fostering an environment that welcomes and embraces diversity, does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, retaliation, serious medical condition, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation spousal affiliation, or protected veteran status in its programs and activities, including employment, admissions, and educational programs and activities. You may submit a report online at <https://equity.nmsu.edu>. If you have an urgent concern, please contact the office of Institutional Equity at 575-646-3635.

Title IX prohibits sex harassment, sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, stalking and retaliation. For more information on discrimination or Title IX, or to file a complaint, contact:

Office of Institutional Equity (OIE)
O'Loughlin House, 1130 University Avenue
Phone: (575) 646-3635 E-mail: equity@nmsu.edu
Website: <http://equity.nmsu.edu/>

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADA) covers issues relating to disability and accommodations. If a student has questions or needs an accommodation in the classroom (all medical information is treated confidentially), contact:

Disability Access Services
Corbett Center Student Union Room 204
Aaron Salas, Director
575-646-6840
das@nmsu.edu
<https://sas.nmsu.edu/>