Introduction

Welcome to the University of Southern Mississippi Department of Political Science, International Development and International Affairs. You have selected a program that will prepare you for a wide array of careers in government, education, business, the military, or law. This document summarizes some of the important procedures and regulations governing the master’s program.

It is important not to rely solely on this handbook. The handbook is not intended to substitute for or otherwise modify the regulations that are contained in the current USM Graduate Bulletin or in other official university documents. Instead, this document supplements and explains general university- and departmental-level requirements as they might apply specifically to the department’s master’s program. You should also consult other sources of university policy, much of which can be found on university websites.

All students will be provided a copy of this policy and procedure manual on entry to the program. The most recent copy of the document can be downloaded from the various department and program websites.

Admissions

The graduate admissions committee makes recommendations on all admissions. Admissions decisions to all graduate programs are competitive, and are made based upon the totality of the student’s admissions packet. The department prefers a 3.0 overall undergraduate degree GPA (with at least a 3.0 in Political Science courses) for regular admission to the master’s program. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is required for all graduate admissions. A test score taken within five years of the application is expected. Each complete application is reviewed for admission independently, based upon the materials provided. Students conditionally admitted are considered probationary until they have met the requirements of their conditional admission.

Getting Started

Orientation:

A departmental orientation is held each fall for incoming graduate students within the first two weeks of the semester. Attendance at the meeting is required of all students on assistantship or fellowship; all graduate students are encouraged to attend. All new students should check with the director of the program to learn when and where it will be held.

Student Responsibilities:

You should familiarize yourself with all university calendars for advising and registration, bill payment, dropping classes, and other procedures of the university. While we will attempt to make timely announcements to remind you of deadlines, much of this information can be found in the USM Graduate Bulletin and on various university websites.
All new graduate students should obtain an ID card to access resources within the university. Information about having photos made can be found in the front section of the USM Graduate Bulletin.

Please contact the iTech help desk to obtain your USM email address, account name, and password.

**Advising and Expectations**

**Advising:**

The director of the master’s program will advise master's students initially. Master’s students may request that any member of the faculty serve as their advisor. Students can be advised at any time by seeking out the director.

**Registration:**

The university uses the Student Online Advising Registration (SOAR) system that is accessed via your student identification number and password. The system requires the department to certify whether you are eligible to enroll, based upon your status.

Students should be aware of certain issues that could affect the ability to register:

1. Those admitted conditionally will generally not be able to register themselves through SOAR, and will need to request that the department secretary or graduate director register them for their courses.

2. Certain courses, especially “special projects” such as 692 and thesis or dissertation hours, require departmental permission. This involves a department representative entering a permission code for a specific student and course into the registration system. If you are attempting to register for one of these courses and receive an error message, call the department or email the master’s program director.

3. Students on assistantship are required to enroll for 12 hours for each semester they receive funding, and to perform no more than 20 hours of employment per week, on average.

**Course Scheduling:**

Please remember that not all graduate courses are offered every semester. Furthermore, personnel changes and other scheduling considerations sometimes require modifications to the timetable of classes (USM Class Schedule Guide). It is important to consult with a faculty advisor in order to plan a schedule that will satisfy the selected program-of-study.
Transfer of Graduate Credit from Other Institutions:

Students who believe that a required core course taken at another accredited institution is equivalent to the one required for the master’s degree program may request that it be considered for transfer by providing the department with a copy of the transcript on which that course grade appears, a copy of the course syllabus, and any other available materials which will be helpful in determining whether the course in question is equivalent to the one required at USM. The material will be furnished to the USM instructor who normally teaches the course. That person, in turn, will make a recommendation to the director of the program and the department regarding course equivalence.

Up to six (6) semester hours of graduate credit from other regionally accredited institutions may be transferred to your program at USM, if such course work is within the time limitations that the University allows for the degree, earned at least a 3.0 on a scale of 4.0, and are approved by the director of the program and USM faculty of record for the equivalent courses.

Incompletes:

The decision to grant an Incomplete (“I”) for any course rests solely with the instructor of record for that course. A student who receives an Incomplete will have only one semester in which to complete the work, and generally must work according to guidelines pre-established with the instructor.

Continuous Enrollment and Leave of Absence Policy:

Students must normally enroll for a minimum of 1 credit hour (or 3 hours during the term they plan to graduate). Failure to enroll for the appropriate hours will result in the student’s being discontinued from Southern Miss and will require that the student reapply for admission to the program (see the USM Graduate Bulletin). Under special circumstances such as illness, family hardship, or military service, a student may request a leave of absence. Leaves of absence will be granted for one semester or longer as circumstances warrant. Requests for a leave of absence should be submitted in writing to the department chair or director. The chair will then forward his or her recommendation to the Graduate Studies Office. The university director of Graduate Studies will notify the student and chair or director of the decision. Normally, requests should be submitted at least one semester before the leave of absence.

Academic Progress:

When a student experiences difficulties in the program, several steps may be taken. These include, but are not limited to, (a) reducing the student's course load, (b) approving a request for a semester leave-of-absence, (c) referring a student to remediation courses, (d) requiring repeating courses.
Academic Honesty:

It is important to be familiar with the information found in the USM Student Handbook and the USM Graduate Bulletin. The following is from the USM Graduate Bulletin:

When cheating is discovered, the faculty member may give the student an F on the work involved or in the course. If further disciplinary action is deemed appropriate, the student should be reported to the dean of students. In addition to being a violation of academic honesty, cheating violates the Code of Student Conduct and may be grounds for probation, suspension, and/or expulsion. Students on disciplinary suspension may not enroll in any courses offered by the University of Southern Mississippi.

Plagiarism:

The Department adheres to the policies on plagiarism and other forms of academic cheating outlined in the Student Handbook. That document defines plagiarism as, “scholarly theft, and … the unacknowledged use of secondary sources. More specifically, any written or oral presentation in which the writer or speaker does not distinguish clearly between the original and borrowed material constitutes plagiarism.” The policy further specifies that “an act of plagiarism may lead to a failing grade on the work involved and in the course, as well as sanctions that may be imposed by the student judicial system.” (Student Handbook, p. 37.)

Termination:

Failure to meet program requirements, Graduate Studies guidelines, or comply with university regulations of conduct is grounds for termination. Students who have been terminated are no longer eligible to continue or complete their program of study. Students may appeal termination decisions, consult the Student Handbook for appropriate procedures.

Graduate Assistantships and Graduate Work-Study Positions

Graduate assistants and those with work study assignments receive a stipend through the school. If you accept one of these appointments, you will commit to work 20 hours per week, on average, on campus. Students must be granted regular admission to the program to be eligible, and must be registered for 12 hours in both fall and spring semesters. Only those able to meet both the work and registration requirements will be considered for graduate assistantships. Please read the following information carefully:

A. Students must have an average 3.0 GPA, or better, each semester, and must perform work assignments in a satisfactory manner, in order to maintain a graduate assistantship or graduate work-study appointment.

B. General tuition and the non-resident fee are waived for those holding a graduate assistantship or graduate work-study appointment. To qualify for this waiver, students must be registered for graduate courses totaling twelve (12) hours each semester. Courses taken as Audit do not count toward these hours, nor do any courses taken as “out of career.” The tuition waiver may also cover tuition for courses during intersessions.
C. The Perkins Loan Program (formerly NDSL) and the Federal Work-Study Program are available to graduate students who meet certain criteria. All students in the graduate program are expected to make application for the Federal Work-Study program if they wish to be considered for any form of departmentally administered financial assistance. The Federal Work-Study match significantly augments the overall resources remaining for all of our graduate students. An advantage for students who do qualify for work-study is that they are normally funded during the summer. Summer funding is not always available to those who are on a graduate assistantship. Students should note, however, that a summer tuition waiver is provided to all students who received funding in fall and spring.

D. Applicants for Perkins Loans and Federal Work-Study Program should apply by March 16 (priority date) for loans and work to begin the fall term. Applications for the Perkins Loan Program and the Federal Work-Study Program may be obtained from the USM Office of Financial Aid.

E. All Graduate Assistants in the master’s program are expected to maintain a narrative summary of their activities during the semester. These summaries should be submitted to the director of the master’s program by the end of classes in each semester the student holds an assistantship.

F. Graduate assistants have assigned carrels in the department office suite. Students should use their carrels to hold office hours, read, and write. When occupying their carrels, students should remember that the group office is a decidedly public space: clutter and noise should be kept to a minimum. Personal items should be secured when unattended by the responsible student. Carrels will be accessible to graduate assistants at all times. Keys that open the front door and the group office will be issued to students when carrel assignments are made.

G. Teaching Assistants are representatives of the University and Department. As such, performance evaluations will be assessed at the end of each semester of employment. Assessments will be made by the Graduate Director with advisement from faculty familiar with TA activities. Duties to be assessed include professionalism, timeliness and quality of work, and collegiality.

Completing the Program

Comprehensive Examinations:

Each student in the master’s program must sit a comprehensive examination in their major and minor areas of Political Science (i.e. in three subfields of Political Science). The content of the examination will be determined by the student's graduate committee. The examination has a written and oral component. The written component is administered in the late fall and late spring on a single week to be designated by the Graduate Director for all students taking them. Summer examinations can be arranged, but a full committee must be formed and a date agreed to by that committee and the student, by April 30th of the preceding term. The written component is graded ‘high pass,’ ‘pass,’ or ‘fail.’ It is a closed book and in-person exam (no take homes and
An oral follow-up will be held within two weeks of the written component, and is conducted by the examination committee. However, students who fail the written component in all three subfields must make a second attempt at the written component prior to taking orals. A second failure in all three subfields automatically generates the hearing process described below. The oral may be waived, at the discretion of the committee, based on performance on the written component. The oral is graded on a pass/fail basis. Students must pass the oral, if not waived, to pass a comprehensive examination. Students failing the comprehensive exam must pass on their second attempt. Normally, this will be scheduled for the next regular exam date (in the following semester). During the interim period, students should meet with committee members and the director of the master’s program to prepare. A second failure will result in a hearing with the department chair and the director and a possible recommendation of termination of the student’s participation in the program.

The examination will cover the student’s chosen major and minor subfield areas. Consequently, students should take content courses with their committee members. Students should seek directions from committee members on preparations for comprehensive examinations. For these reasons the Department of Political Science urges graduate students to decide on their fields and to consult with advisors and the director to form a coherent plan of study as soon as possible in their graduate career. Students in the M.A. program may, at the discretion of their committee, be examined orally in conjunction with the thesis defense.

Master’s Thesis (M.A. Only):

Your master’s thesis will be conducted under the guidance and direction of a faculty committee chosen in a consultative process involving the student, faculty members, and the director of the relevant program. Committees must be named and approved on the appropriate Graduate School forms, and must be filed according to regular published Graduate School deadlines. These forms and deadlines for their submission may be found at the Graduate Studies website.

Thesis Committees: Thesis committees normally consist of three faculty, at least two of whom must be members of the department. All members must have at least Graduate Faculty Status Level II, and non-department committee members must be approved in advance by the director, the department chair, and the dean of the college.

Substantial Research Project (M.S. only):

Students completing the M.S. track must register for 3 hours of PS 691 in their final semester in the program, and complete a substantial research project with the supervision of a professor in their major field of study. Students need not form a committee, and submission to the Graduate School is not required. There is no oral defense of the research project. Students may develop a separate research project, or may elect, in consultation with their PS 691 advisor, to revise a paper from a previous course up to the required level. The final product is expected to be of the quality, but not scope, of a master’s thesis. As a rough indication, the final paper should be around the length of a journal article manuscript (35-40 pages). The paper should ordinarily pertain to the student’s primary field of study. The paper should be submitted to the major
professor for distribution to the comps committee the first Monday in November for the Fall, first Monday in April for the Spring, or first Monday in July for the Summer.

Pre-Graduation Procedures:

Please carefully read the version of the USM Graduate Bulletin that governs your academic career (usually the Bulletin for the year that you entered the program) for relevant regulations, guidelines, and deadlines at least one year before your anticipated graduation. Application for graduation must be made with the Graduate Studies office in the semester prior to that in which you plan to graduate. Be sure that you will be able to complete all outstanding work by the required deadlines. Once the application has been made, deferment of graduation to a subsequent semester carries a fee.

As you plan for graduation you should consult with the USM Graduate Bulletin, the Graduate Studies office website, the director of your program, and the chair of your committee. These sources should be able to provide you with the most up to date deadlines and regulations.

Other Resources

University Policies:

Instructions regarding formal university policies and procedures are available to students at the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs or the Dean’s Office in the College of Arts and Letters, and are also published in the University Student Handbook. The relevant sections and pages of the Student Handbook are indicated below:

University Grievance Policy: “Student Rights and Responsibilities,” p. 24
USM Sexual Harassment Policy: The University of Southern Mississippi, in its efforts to foster an environment of respect for the dignity and worth of all members of the university community, is committed to maintaining a work-learning environment free of sexual harassment. It is the policy of the university that no member of its community shall sexually harass another. Any employee or student who violates this policy is subject to disciplinary action including termination. Sexual harassment is illegal under both state and federal law. “Student Rights and Responsibilities,” p. 22.
Grade Appeal Process: “Statement of Academic Standards,” p.32

Support Services:

The most up to date information on student support services can be found on the website for the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. Some important services are listed below:

Office for Disability Accommodations:

Telephone Numbers: 601-266-5024 or 228-214-3232

Individuals with Hearing Impairments: ODA’s TTY Number is 601-266-6937 or use the Mississippi Relay Service at 1-800-582-2233 to contact any campus office.
Fax Number: 601-266-6035

Location: Bond Hall, on the west end of the first floor, next to the University Police Department. Access ramps to enter the building are available on the North and South sides of the building.

University Counseling Center:

Telephone: (601) 266-4829

Fax: (601) 266-5146

Email: counseling@usm.edu

EMERGENCY: 911. Ask for University Police. Counselors are also available after-hours in emergency situations call: 601.818.6352.

Location: Kennard-Washington Hall Room 200

Center for Child Development:

Telephone: (601) 266-5294