

2015-2016 APSA
DEPARTMENTAL SURVEY
Doctoral Curriculum

July 7, 2017



Executive Summary

Department chairs at PhD-granting programs in political science and government were asked to describe the curriculum offerings and program requirements of their doctoral programs including: the courses offered by the program; the means by which the program evaluates the progress of individual students through the program; and the training required or offered to these students. The data reflect some general consistency among curriculum offerings and requirements for doctoral programs at both public and private institutions. National Research Council (NRC) rankings on reputation were added to the data, and our findings include analysis of the role of departmental rank in doctoral curriculum.

We find that doctoral curriculums tend to be roughly similar across programs, regardless of the institutional affiliations, but there is some variation in the shape of that curriculum based on the NRC reputational ranking of the program. However, variation by NRC quintile exists. Top ranked departments more frequently offered the greatest number of core courses and additional fields of interest, including Race, Ethnicity and Politics, Gender and/or Sexuality and Politics courses, and Regional Politics courses. Second, third and (to a lesser extent) fourth-quintile schools more frequently required and/or offered courses in public policy and public administration, training in research ethics, diversity of methods training, structured mentoring programs, and multiple evaluation methods for doctoral student progress. Thus, more formalized programs at the second and third quintile schools are evident in terms of set structures governing the types of training that doctoral students must complete.

The major exception to this overall difference between first quintile departments and second and third quintile schools is the requirement for pedagogical training as part of the graduate program. All reporting first quintile schools offered pedagogical training, and more than half of all first and second quintile schools required it. However, our survey did not identify the substantive content, nor capture the depth of, this pedagogical training. Further research on pedagogical training would be helpful in providing a more complete portrait.

We encourage you to read the report carefully, and we welcome your questions, suggestions, or ideas. Please contact us with any specific questions about the findings. We will aim to fold in some of the broader questions that members bring to our attention through subsequent reports and materials on the American Political Science Association website, www.apsanet.org. You can contact us at surveys@apsanet.org, or by calling the main APSA office at 202-483-2512.

Betsy Super, PhD
Amanda Meyers

Washington, DC

About the Data

The 2015-2016 APSA Departmental Survey was administered to 1,243 departments at 4-year colleges and universities offering degrees in courses in Political Science and Government in the United States. 349 departments responded to the survey for an overall response rate of 28.1%. Departments of social science had a response rate of 11% (n =23); BA departments combining political science with at least one other field had a response rate of 17.5% (n = 47); BA departments of political science or government had a response rate of 30.1% (n = 146); MA-granting departments had a response rate of 35.7% (n = 56); and PhD-granting departments had a response rate of 58% (n = 76).

National Research Council (NRC) departmental rankings were used to generate quintiles for departments responding to the survey based on an average of their reputational rank in 2010. More information about these rankings and how they were calculated by the NRC may be accessed [here](#).

Courses offered

- The top five courses offered to students in doctoral programs in political science and government were American Government (98.6% of programs), Comparative Government and Research Methods (both were offered by 97.1% of reporting programs), International Relations (94.3%), and Statistics (90%). The next most-commonly offered course, Political Theory, was offered by 81.4% of programs.
- Departments offering a course in methodology *always* offered Research Methods and at least one other course in methodology. 90% of all departments offered Statistics and 70% offered Qualitative Methods. 61.4% offered all three methods courses listed. Among departments offering *only* two courses in methods, 27.1% only offered Statistics in addition to Research Methods and 7.1% offered only Qualitative Methods in addition to Research Methods.
 - 2.9% of responding departments indicated that they did not offer any methodological training in their department's course offerings.
 - Mid-ranked departments were most likely to offer all three methods (81.8% of departments ranked in the third quintile), and were consequently more likely to offer both Statistics and Qualitative Methods in their departments. While top-ranked departments were about as likely to offer Statistics, they were somewhat less likely than average to offer all three (53.3% of departments ranked in the top quintile) and Qualitative Methods (66.7% of these departments).
- Additional courses in specific fields of study included Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics and Gender and/or Sexuality and Politics (both offered by 45.7% of programs), State and Local Government (40%), Constitutional Rights/Civil Rights and Liberties (34.3%), and Public Administration (28.6%).

Student Evaluation

- Comprehensive exams were the most commonly reported method of evaluating doctoral student progress through the program, with 90% of all reporting departments reporting this measure. The second-most common was the student's GPA (72.9%), a structured review (68.6%), and oral examinations (67.1%). Programs ranked in the top quintile were most likely to report that they evaluated their students through comprehensive exams (93.3%) and structured review (80%), and were least likely of all departments to evaluate student progress using GPA (46.7%).
 - Mid-ranked departments, those ranked in the second and third quintiles, reported the largest number of means to evaluate student progress. 63.6% of those ranked in the third quintile and 53.8% of those in the second quintile reported that they had four means of student evaluation.
- 25.7% of all doctoral programs reported that they used an unlisted method of evaluating student progress, usually an annual review or a qualifying research paper. Only one of 76 departments reported that they did not use any means of evaluating student progress through the program.
- 30.4% of responding programs indicated that they offered a structured mentoring program for doctoral students other than academic advisors. Doctoral programs at private institutions were only slightly more likely to offer this (30% of private institutions), although mid-top programs were most likely of all to offer structured mentoring – 41.7% of programs in the second quintile and 54.5% of programs in the third quintile responded that they offered structured mentoring, compared to 26.7% of top-ranked programs and 22.2% of programs in both the fourth and fifth quintiles. Only 15.4% of unranked programs offered structured mentoring for their students.

Training requirements

- 69.6% of departments offered training in research and/or professional ethics to their students. Although more programs at public institutions offered this training (71.7% of public institutions to 55% of those at private institutions), programs at both institution types were roughly equally likely to require this training for their doctoral students – 37.7% of programs required ethics training. Only 18.9% of programs at public institutions did not offer ethics training to their doctoral students at all, though 40% of programs at private institutions reported the same.
- Ethics training was offered and required more frequently by programs ranked in the third, fourth, and fifth quintiles. 63.6% of programs ranked in the third quintile required ethics training for their students, and an additional 9.1% offered ethics training but did not require it. Just 46.7% of top-ranked departments required ethics training, with an additional 13.3% offering but not requiring it. 33.3% of programs ranked in the top quintile and 30.8% of unranked programs indicated that they did not offer research or professional ethics training at all.
- 84.3% of all departments indicated that they offered pedagogical training of some sort for their doctoral students. 100% of programs ranked in the first and fifth quintiles offered pedagogical training. Whether pedagogical training was required or optional for students, however, varied much more by program rank. While 41.4% of all programs required pedagogical training for doctoral students, top-ranked programs were much more likely than average to do so – 53.3% of programs in the top quintile and 58.3% of those in the second quintile required pedagogical training, compared to 18.2% in the third quintile and 30.8% of unranked programs.
- 15.7% of all programs had a foreign language requirement of some kind for their doctoral students, with no measurable difference between programs at public and private institutions, although programs ranked in both the top and bottom quintiles were somewhat more likely than average (20% each) to require a foreign language for their students .

Core doctoral courses offered by NRC Reputational Rank Quintile

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 70	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 10	n = 13
American Government	98.6%	93.3%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
International Relations	94.3%	100%	91.7%	100%	88.9%	90%	92.3%
Comparative Government	97.1%	100%	91.7%	100%	100%	100%	92.3%
Political Theory	81.4%	100%	66.7%	81.8%	88.9%	90%	61.5%
Research Methods	97.1%	100%	91.7%	100%	100%	100%	92.3%
Offered one core course	1.4%	0%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Offered two core courses	1.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7.7%
Offered three core courses	2.9%	0%	0%	0%	11.1%	0%	7.7%
Offered four core courses	15.7%	6.7%	25%	18.2%	0%	20%	23.1%
Offered five core courses	78.6%	93.3%	66.7%	81.8%	88.9%	80%	61.5%

Additional doctoral courses offered by NRC Reputational Rank Quintile

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 70	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 10	n = 13
Constitutional Law/Judicial Politics	45.7%	53.3%	50%	63.6%	33.3%	50.0%	23.1%
Statistics	90%	93.3%	91.7%	100%	88.9%	90%	76.9%
Qualitative Methods	70%	66.7%	66.7%	81.8%	66.7%	70%	69.2%
State and Local Government	40%	53.3%	41.7%	54.5%	33.3%	20%	30.8%
Constitutional Rights/Civil Rights and Liberties	34.3%	33.3%	33.3%	54.5%	33.3%	40%	15.4%
Gender and/or Sexuality and Politics	45.7%	60%	41.7%	54.5%	33.3%	40%	38.5%
Race/Ethnicity Group-Specific Politics	48.6%	73.3%	41.7%	54.5%	55.6%	40%	23.1%
Regional Politics	52.9%	80%	41.7%	63.6%	33.3%	30%	53.8%
Public Policy	51.4%	33.3%	25%	81.8%	55.6%	50%	69.2%
Public Administration	28.6%	13.3%	8.3%	54.5%	11.1%	50%	38.5%
Other	8.6%	20%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	7.7%

Frequency of methods courses offered by NRC ranking

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 70	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 10	n = 13
Offered no methodology courses	2.9%	0%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	7.7%
Offered one methodology course	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Offered two methodology courses	34.3%	40%	25%	18.2%	44.4%	40%	38.5%
Offered Research Methods + Statistics	27.1%	33.3%	25%	18.2%	33.3%	30%	23.1%
Offered Research Methods + Qualitative Methods	7.1%	6.7%	0%	0%	11.1%	10%	15.4%
Offered three methodology courses	61.4%	53.3%	66.7%	81.8%	55.6%	60%	53.8%

How does your department evaluate the progress of doctoral students in your department?

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 70	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 10	n = 13
Minimum grade point average	72.9%	46.7%	91.7%	90.9%	55.6%	80%	76.9%
Structured review meetings	68.6%	80%	83.3%	81.8%	66.7%	70%	30.8%
Comprehensive Exams	90%	93.3%	83.3%	100%	88.9%	100%	76.9%
Oral Exams	67.1%	73.3%	83.3%	81.8%	66.7%	50%	46.2%
Other method of evaluation	25.7%	26.7%	16.7%	18.2%	22.2%	40%	30.8%
No method of evaluation	1.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7.7%

Number of methods used to evaluate student progress by NRC reputational rank

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 70	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 10	n = 13
No method of evaluation	1.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7.7%
One method of evaluation	5.7%	6.7%	0%	0%	11.1%	0%	15.4%
Two methods of evaluation	14.3%	13.3%	16.7%	9.1%	11.1%	20%	15.4%
Three methods of evaluation	30%	40%	16.7%	18.2%	44.4%	30%	30.8%
Four methods of evaluation	42.9%	33.3%	58.3%	63.6%	33.3%	40%	30.8%
Five or more methods of evaluation	5.7%	6.7%	8.3%	9.1%	0%	10%	0%

Does your department offer a structured mentoring program for doctoral students, other than their academic advisor?

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 69	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 9	n = 13
Yes	30.4%	26.7%	41.7%	54.5%	22.2%	22.2%	15.4%
No	68.1%	73.3%	50%	45.5%	77.8%	77.8%	84.6%
Don't Know	1.4%	0%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Does your program have a foreign language requirement for doctoral students?

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 70	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 10	n = 13
Yes	15.7%	20%	16.7%	9.1%	11.1%	20%	15.4%
No	82.9%	80%	75%	90.9%	88.9%	80%	84.6%
Don't Know	1.4%	0%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Does your department offer research/professional ethics training for doctoral students?

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 69	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 9	n = 13
Yes	69.6%	60%	66.7%	72.7%	77.8%	88.9%	61.5%
Yes, and is required for doctoral students	37.7%	46.7%	33.3%	63.6%	33.3%	44.4%	7.7%
Yes, but is not required	31.9%	13.3%	33.3%	9.1%	44.4%	44.4%	53.8%
No, do not offer	26.1%	33.3%	25%	27.3%	22.2%	11.1%	30.8%
Don't Know	4.3%	6.7%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	7.7%

Does your department offer pedagogical training for doctoral students?

	All	1 st Quintile	2 nd Quintile	3 rd Quintile	4 th Quintile	5 th Quintile	Unranked
	n = 70	n = 15	n = 12	n = 11	n = 9	n = 10	n = 13
Yes	84.3%	100%	66.7%	81.8%	88.9%	100%	69.2%
Yes, and is required for doctoral students	41.4%	53.3%	58.3%	18.2%	44.4%	40%	30.8%
Yes, but is not required	42.9%	46.7%	8.3%	63.6%	44.4%	60%	38.5%
No, do not offer	14.3%	0%	25%	18.2%	11.1%	0%	30.8%
Don't Know	1.4%	0%	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%