

Applying to a graduate degree in Political Science FAQs

How do I apply to the University of Alberta graduate programs in Political Science?

All applications are received entirely on-line through a central admissions system. Go to the website of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at <https://uofa.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies> and click on “Apply Now” to start an on-line application.

What materials do I need?

All materials you need to submit are itemized within the ApplyGrad system. In brief, you will need to complete a standard application form that identifies three referees, and also provide as separate documents: a *curriculum vitae* (resumé); your transcripts from all previous post-secondary education; a statement of research interests; a sample of your academic writing; and evidence of ESL competence (if applicable). If you are applying to the PhD program you will also need to specify two proposed areas of specialization, selected from: Canadian Politics, Comparative Politics, Gender and Politics, International Relations, and Political Theory.

What is the deadline?

The deadline for applications is normally January 15 for admission starting September 1 of the same calendar year. Although starting in September is strongly recommended, candidates admitted in any annual cycle may opt to start in the following January with the agreement of the Associate Chair Graduate Studies (ACGS). Applications not received or incomplete by the ApplyGrad deadline will be cut off by the system; due to the large volume of applications we receive, it is not normally possible to follow up on incomplete applications, and applicants are advised to make every effort to ensure their applications are complete by the deadline.

How is my application evaluated?

Your application is forwarded to the Department of Political Science where it will be read and discussed by the Graduate Studies Committee, which is a committee of five permanent faculty from across the different fields of Political Science, chaired by the ACGS. All applications are then ranked (MA and PhD applicants are ranked separately), and the committee decides based on academic track record, and potential, and fit with supervisory capacity and availability, which students to recommend. Those students receive an unofficial offer of admission and possibly funding from the department. Admission is competitive and only a small proportion of applicants receive such an offer. Official admission to the university is offered by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in a formal letter that follows the department process.

What is the admissions committee looking for?

In general, we are looking for evidence that you have adequate educational background in Political Science to succeed at the graduate level, as well as demonstrated aptitude in the field as shown by your transcripts (courses taken and GPA), writing sample, and letters of recommendation. We are also interested (especially for doctoral applicants) in whether you would be a good fit for our department in terms of your research interests, and in whether you have the potential to undertake and complete a self-directed research project.

What are you looking for in a writing sample?

Your writing sample should be a piece of academic writing that demonstrates your ability to identify and pose a scholarly question and then marshal a literature in the service of providing your own answer. It should be solely authored by you in English, no longer than 6000 words, and use an appropriate citation system. A successful term paper written for a course is often acceptable. It should not consist only of literature review or description of a case study, but should also include some evidence that you are capable of developing your own ideas.

What are you looking for in a statement of interest?

We hope to see that you have selected the University of Alberta Political Science department for reasons specific to our program and faculty research interests; you should normally specify a prospective supervisor. We are also looking for a description of a research project you might undertake during your graduate degree that would become either an MA project, thesis or a doctoral dissertation. While of course thesis topics can change and you are not bound to this proposal, this description signals to us that you are capable of pursuing your own identifying an intellectual agenda and succinctly identifying a research question that can be supervised by faculty members in our department.

Who should I ask to be my referees?

Your best bet are university teachers who know your abilities well. Typically stronger letters come from professors who have taught a student several times, taught them in a seminar, or supervised a thesis or other research project. Non-academic referees, such as an employer, are not usually suitable unless they can speak to abilities you have shown in the workplace that are relevant to your graduate application (e.g. research skills, data analysis). Give your referees lots of lead time to write your letter, and provide them with your application materials.

How can I pay for my degree?

The Department of Political Science funds some admitted students by offering academic employment as a Teaching or Research Assistant. Other students have or get scholarships to support their graduate work, while a few are self-funded.

I have my own way of paying for my degree. Can I be automatically admitted?

No. All students are admitted solely on the basis of academic merit.

When will I hear about my application?

The admissions committee meets in early February to evaluate applications. Shortlisted doctoral applicants will normally be asked to do a short phone interview around this time. Initial unofficial offers are usually made by the end of February.

The department will continue to make offers of admission through the spring and into the summer depending on our funding situation and on whether our offers are accepted. If your application is

highly ranked but we cannot initially offer you a place, we will typically send you a notice that you are on a waitlist. We appreciate all students admitted or on the waitlist keeping us advised of offers from other universities they are considering.

I wasn't admitted. Can I get feedback on how to improve my application?

Due to the large number of such requests we receive, we are unfortunately not able to provide individualized feedback on unsuccessful applications.

Can I contact individual professors about my application?

We recommend that you contact professor(s) in your areas of research interest in advance of submitting your application. It is helpful to share your statement of interest and ask whether the professor is likely to be available for supervision. This correspondence doesn't commit either party. Once your application is submitted, the person to contact to check on its progress is the Graduate Advisor at psgrad@ualberta.ca, but please note that our office receives a lot of inquiries, and allow adequate time for the application to progress through the system.

Who should do a graduate degree in Political Science?

In general, successful graduate students are highly self-motivated and intellectually curious. They enjoy independent learning and are willing to defer moving ahead with other career options for the sake of advanced education. In Political Science, they are deeply interested in the study of power, organizations, and systems of governance across a range of contexts.

The MA is an excellent degree for students interested in a career in public administration, law, journalism, NGOs, working for a political party, or related professional path where a post-BA credential and graduate-level training is an asset. The MA is also a path to a PhD.

The PhD is a challenging degree and should only be undertaken by students who are very sure that they want to devote a number of years to advanced study, much of which time will be spent doing self-directed research on a very specific topic. Applicants to the PhD should do careful research on the limited career opportunities available in contemporary academia and consider whether a doctorate is necessary for their non-academic career ambitions. The department is committed to supporting doctoral students in pursuing research and teaching positions within and outside academia, non-professorial careers within higher education, and extra-academic careers.