



Guidelines for the Ph.D.  
Program in Public Policy  
2022-23

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## UNC-CH Ph.D. Program in Public Policy

### Graduate Faculty

The Graduate Faculty consists of those members of the UNC's General Faculty who are charged with conducting graduate student teaching, supervision, and advising. All tenured and tenure-track faculty at the ranks of assistant, associate and full professor are automatically designated Regular Graduate Faculty. Other qualified individuals may be appointed by the Dean of The Graduate School on the recommendation of the relevant academic program (see Special Appointed Regular Graduate Faculty at <http://gradschool.unc.edu/policies/faculty-staff/faculty/>).

### The Ph.D. Program in Public Policy

The Graduate School Handbook details all policies and procedures governing all University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill doctoral programs, including residency requirements, time limits to complete all degree requirements, requirements for declaring a minor, and other valuable information. While the policies and procedures of the Ph.D. Program in Public Policy are consistent with all Graduate School requirements, not all Graduate School requirements are detailed in our guidelines. Students should consult these documents when appropriate:

- [Graduate School Handbook](#)
- [Graduate Catalog](#)
- [Academic Integrity and Ethics](#)
- [Guide to Theses and Dissertations](#)

In any case where the Ph.D. in Public Policy guidelines appear to conflict with provisions contained in the Graduate School Handbook, the Graduate School Handbook shall govern.

### Leadership of the Ph.D. Program in Public Policy

Policies governing the Ph.D. in Public Policy are set by the UNC Public Policy faculty and implemented by the Chair. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) is appointed by the Chair, and is responsible for all aspects of graduate study including approval of each student's program and dissertation committees, appointment of the core examination committee, administration and grading of the core examinations, and approval of any exceptions to UNC

Public Policy's graduate requirements. The DGS is also responsible for final UNC Public Policy certification of each student's academic progress and examination results and for approval of proposed courses of study for all students from other academic units who seek the graduate minor or certificate in public policy. Finally, the DGS chairs the UNC Public Policy Graduate Studies Committee (GSC), which recommends to the Chair and the faculty proposed changes in graduate policies; and in cooperation with the Chair and with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), recommends graduate students for teaching opportunities in UNC Public Policy, and helps to identify other opportunities for research assistantships and financial support.

## Mission and Objectives of UNC Public Policy Ph.D. Program

UNC Public Policy offers the Ph.D. degree to students who aim to contribute new knowledge and/or to solve major domestic and global policy problems. Graduates of the program are prepared to serve in academic positions and/or conduct policy research that provides useful information to decision makers and to advance the bodies of knowledge about public policy making in general and about their specific substantive policy field. Doctoral graduates of UNC Public Policy's Ph.D. Program hold academic positions in major universities, research positions in policy research organizations, and senior policy staff positions in government agencies.

The Ph.D. in Public Policy consists of courses rooted in multiple academic disciplines, including policy analysis, economics, political science, philosophy/normative analysis, and research design/statistics and electives in substantive policy fields. Ph.D. dissertations aim to create new knowledge and/or social science theory and methods to address major domestic and global policy problems.

## Ph.D. Requirements

Students are admitted to the doctoral program in public policy from diverse backgrounds in terms of academic preparation and experience, and such diversity is strongly welcomed and encouraged. Once enrolled, each student is expected to complete a set of doctoral-level core courses in policy analysis, applications of economic and political theory to public policy issues, research design, ethics, research methods, and a policy field in a substantive area of public policy. In preparation for this course of study, applicants are expected to take a preparatory course in intermediate microeconomics and are encouraged to take courses in calculus, basic statistics, and quantitative analysis. All entering students also are required to take PLCY 700, a two-week short 'math camp' course in mathematical methods for economic analysis, in August before their first Fall semester.

## Core Courses

Ph.D. students are required to complete 44 hours of coursework, including 26 hours of "core" courses common to all students and 18 hours in a self-defined substantive policy field. Students normally spend approximately two years in full-time coursework, and longer if they enter the program without key prerequisite courses or a master's degree in a related field. Students who have successfully completed graduate courses elsewhere that duplicate our required courses may petition the DGS to have up to nine such hours counted toward their Ph.D. in public policy. Courses proposed for transfer must be approved by the DGS as elements of the student's program within UNC Public Policy, and material from those courses may be included in the comprehensive doctoral examinations. In most cases, students are advised to build upon prior coursework with higher-level or diverse types of material, without a reduction in total required hours. Core courses include 716 (Politics, Institutions and Public Policy I), 717 (Politics, Institutions and Public Policy II), 780 (Normative Dimension of Public Policy), 788 (Advanced Economic Analysis for Public Policy I), 789 (Advanced Economic Analysis for Public Policy II),

801 (Research Design), 810 (Professional Research Seminar – 1 credit per semester, taken twice), 881 (Linear Regression), and 882 (Panel Data).

## Policy Field

Each student designs an individual course of study for a policy (specialization) field. The 18-credit hour requirement gives students rigorous training in the theory, methods, and subject matter of policy analysis within a substantive policy field. The field area course of study must include no less than 9 credit hours of courses related to the theory and subject matter of their policy field, up to 6 credit hours of which may be taken as independent studies. Additionally, each student must take at least 3 credit hours of research methods that are appropriate for the field. The remaining 6 hours of required field credits are normally completed as PLCY 992 (Master's dissertation research) or 994 (Doctoral dissertation) credits. The student's field research methods course(s) should provide the student with the ability to design and conduct dissertation research, to continue making scholarly contributions in his or her chosen field, and to independently conduct policy research. To assist in designing an appropriate course of study, each student is required to prepare a program statement (see below), which is reviewed and discussed with an individualized program committee, who helps the student by identifying courses, independent readings, and other sources of information to acquire both the substantive knowledge and the quantitative and other analytical skills appropriate for the student's policy field specialization.

## Summary of Core Courses

### **PLCY 716 Politics and Public Policy Theory. 3 Credits.**

Students build a theoretical foundation about the politics of policymaking. We examine the governmental institutions and actors that make policy decisions, incentive structures, and influences that shape these decisions as well as the macroenvironment within which policy demands arise and policy decisions are made. The course focuses on domestic policymaking but incorporates theoretical and empirical contributions from around the world.

### **PLCY 717 Institutional Analysis for Public Policy. 3 Credits.**

This course examines the role of institutions in the analysis of public policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. We consider how institutions are used to address market failures, how formal and informal institutions form, persist and change, and theoretical and empirical approaches for studying the role of institutions as either mediating factors or determinants of public policy outcomes. The course draws on theoretical and empirical contributions from both domestic and international contexts.

### **PLCY 780 Normative Dimensions of Public Policy (3)**

Ethical considerations in policy choice are integrated with formal analytical approaches to decision making. Students examine the most prominent theoretical approaches to these questions including utilitarianism, contractualism, and rights-based views. Students also focus on the ethics

of social science research, examining the principles investigators must comply with when conducting research on human subjects.

### **PLCY 788 Advanced Economic Analysis for Public Policy I. (3)**

PLCY 788 provides a doctoral-level, calculus-intensive, introduction to economic theory applied to policy issues, including applications of the consumer theory of utility and demand, organization and operation of product and factor markets, production theory, perfect competition, market equilibrium, taxes, welfare economics, and monopoly. An intensive mathematics and statistics review course, PLCY 700, is required in preparation for PLCY 788 and 789. Students who already have advanced preparation in economics and wish to pursue an economics-oriented doctoral emphasis may, with the approval of their advisor and the DGS, take ECON 700 and ECON 710 instead of PLCY 700 and PLCY 788. Intermediate microeconomics and multivariable calculus are pre-requisites for PLCY 788.

### **PLCY 789 Advanced Economic Analysis for Public Policy II. (3)**

This course will teach you how to use advanced microeconomic theory to address practical problems in the policy world. In this course, we will use traditional economic tools to analyze problems in welfare and tax policy as well as inter-governmental transfers. We will review the main results in general equilibrium and welfare economics. We will also critically assess the market mechanism and identify the circumstances under which it leads to inefficient outcomes. We will explore more recent developments in microeconomic theory, including information economics, choice under uncertainty, game theory, and strategic behavior. These techniques and concepts will be applied to an array of economics problems including health insurance, investment in schooling, wage contracts, collective bargaining, and many others. Intermediate microeconomics and calculus are prerequisites for PLCY 789, as is PLCY 700.

### **PLCY 801 Design of Policy Research (3)**

PLCY 801 aims to prepare students to conduct independent policy research and develop sound critiques of the research literature in the field. The course covers the theory of the analysis of causation, threats to validity, sampling, measurement, and other sources of potential bias. The course discusses the major types of research designs, including observational studies, quasi-experiments, random assignment studies, and case studies.

### **PLCY 810 Public Policy Seminar (1)**

The Ph.D. program in Public Policy hosts a seminar series that invites faculty, applied policy scholars, senior government officials, practitioners, and public policy Ph.D. students to present their research and perspectives on public policy issues. The seminar also provides instruction on a variety of professional development topics. The seminars, required of all Ph.D. students in public policy, give students the opportunity to assess the relevance of their training to policy research applications. (One credit hour; required two semesters)

### **PLCY 881 (HPM 881) Linear Regression Models (3)**

This course is an introduction to linear regression models. Topics include least squares regression, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, autocorrelation, and hypothesis testing.

## **PLCY 882 (HPM 882) Advanced Panel Data Methodology for Public Policy (3)**

This course is designed to increase your ability to apply models and statistical techniques to problems in health, education, employment, poverty, and other areas of public policy. Students will learn major techniques used to estimate causal relationships in quasi experimental designs, with an emphasis on panel data; gain intuition and skills about the “art” of econometrics, including techniques for using complex survey data and dealing with missing data; and conduct original research applying the techniques covered in class (especially panel data techniques). The following methods are covered: Difference-in-Differences, Fixed Effects, Random Effects, Instrumental Variables, Regression Discontinuity, Propensity Score Matching, and Synthetic Control Method.

### **Summary of Core Requirements**

<b>Core course</b>	<b>Credit hours</b>
PLCY 716	3
PLCY 717	3
PLCY 780	3
PLCY 788	3
PLCY 789	3
PLCY 801	3
PLCY 810	2
PLCY 881	3
PLCY 882	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

### **The Public Policy Field**

Each student designs an individual course of study for a substantive policy field with the approval of an individualized program committee. The 18-credit hour requirement in a substantive public policy field gives students rigorous training in the theory, methods, and subject matter.

The field area course of study must include at least 3 hours of research methods in an area related to the student’s policy field. The combination of research methods courses should provide the student with the ability to design and conduct dissertation research, to continue making scholarly contributions in his or her chosen field, and to independently conduct policy research. In addition to the field-related research methods class, students normally enroll in no less than 9 credit hours of courses related to the theory and subject matter of their policy field. These courses may be selected from any appropriate graduate-level offerings at UNC or neighboring universities, including special Ph.D. seminars taught by Public Policy faculty or faculty from other departments, to provide the student with adequate foundations in their policy field area. Up to 6



hours of these credits may be taken as an independent study. The remaining 6 hours of the required policy field credits are normally completed as PLCY 994, following the completion of examinations (discussed below), during the period when the student is authoring the dissertation.

### Summary of Policy Field Requirements

Course	Credit hours
Research methods	3
Substantive Policy	9
PLCY 994	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

### Illustrative Sequencing of Classes

Table 1 (below) shows one example of the sequencing of core and policy field courses. Note that this is illustrative only. Students must take a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester to maintain full-time student status; most students also take at least 12 credit hours in one semester to complete all coursework, excluding PLCY 994 before their third year. Most Ph.D. students also hold teaching or research assistantship responsibilities of 20 hours per week, and full-time student status is required for such positions.

No foreign language is required for the degree. However, students whose program suggests the need for language competency should incorporate appropriate language instruction within their program. For information on Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships, see <http://www.unc.edu/areastudies/fundingopp/flas.html>.

**Table 1: Example of Core and Field Sequenced Courses**

	<b>YEAR 1</b>	<b>YEAR 2</b>	<b>YEAR 3</b>
<b>FALL</b>	<i>PLCY 700</i> <i>(August, required)</i> Policy field PLCY 788 (3) PLCY 716 (3)	PLCY/ (HPM 882 (3) Policy field (3) PLCY 801 (1)	Any policy field or research methods courses needed. PLCY 810 (1) PLCY 992 (MA) (3)
<b>SPRING</b>	PLCY 717 (3), PLCY 789 (3) PLCY (HPM) 881 (3)	Field research methods (3) PLCY 780 (3) Policy field (3) PLCY 810 (1)	Any policy field or research methods courses needed. PLCY 994 (dissertation) (3)

Students normally begin their dissertation in year 3 or year 4, depending on their prior preparation and the timing of their comprehensive and field examinations.

### MA in Public Policy (in lieu of Ph.D.)

The MA in Public Policy is available as an option for students who are opting to exit the Ph.D. program prior to completing all requirements for the PhD. In all cases, the student must meet UNC Public Policy and Graduate School degree requirements for a master’s degree, including 30 earned credit hours, two full semesters of residence credit, passing an exam requirement, and completing a thesis or (thesis substitute) project.

In Public Policy, the 30 credit hours will be earned through core and elective courses, completed in the student’s first two years in the program. Students nearing completion of their core courses and intending to exit the program without completing the Ph.D. may petition to the DGS to write an approved thesis substitute with an (oral) exam defense (Students planning to exit the program with an MA may satisfy the core examination requirement by earning a grade of Low Pass (L) or better on each of the four sections of the examination and therefore forego the oral defense requirement). The oral exam defense will occur before at least three (3) committee members and will cover appropriate core course material from the program in lieu of sitting for the written core exam. The thesis substitute format will be determined by agreement between the student and the faculty committee and may include a literature review or discussion/research paper. Students who decide to exit the program by completing these latter MA requirements may not later choose to continue for the PhD without taking and passing the core written exam.

The following core and elective courses are required for the MA (30 credit) degree:

**PLCY 716, Politics and Public Policy Theory (3)**

**PLCY 717, Institutional Analysis for Public Policy (3)**

**PLCY 780, Normative Dimensions of Public Policy (3)**

**PLCY 788/789, Advanced Economic Analysis for Public Policy I & II (6)**

**PLCY 801, Design of Policy Research (3)**

**PLCY 881 Linear Regression Models (3)**

**PLCY 882 Advanced Panel Data Methodology for Public Policy (3)**

**Ph.D. elective course (6)**

**PLCY 992 Master's (Non-thesis) (3)**

### Graduate Minor

With the approval of the major and minor programs, a student may also elect to declare a formal minor in any program that offers a graduate degree. If a student does elect a formal minor, it must comprise at least 15 credit hours in courses listed (or cross-listed) in one or at most two programs other than that of the major and cannot also be counted toward the major. The minor course of study must be approved in advance by the Director of Graduate Studies in both the major and the minor programs and sent to the Graduate School to become a permanent part of the student's record.

### Teaching Experience

An objective of the Public Policy Ph.D. Program is to prepare top quality and initiative-taking teachers of public policy. Teaching experience is therefore considered an important additional element of the student's doctoral program. The intent of this teaching requirement is for the student to obtain a meaningful experience of organizing and explaining the subject matter of public policy and having teaching experiences that extend beyond grading responsibilities. All graduate students who wish to obtain teaching experience are required to attend a training session for prospective teaching assistants through the UNC's Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE). CFE also offers useful short courses and coaching on many additional aspects of teaching at the university level. For information on CFE, see <http://cfe.unc.edu/>.

## The Ph.D. Program ‘Process’

### Formulating a program of study

Each admitted student is advised initially by the DGS or another designated faculty member. The purpose of this initial advice is to assist in the development of the student’s first semester of study, and to move the student as quickly as possible toward the identification of a faculty member who will be the student’s primary academic advisor.

### Selecting an academic advisor

The student may nominate (to the DGS) any member of the Public Policy core faculty to serve as his or her program advisor. Any regular member of the UNC Graduate Faculty may also serve in this role with the approval of the DGS; any who are not regular members of the Graduate Faculty must be approved for this role both by the DGS and by the Administrative Board of the Graduate School. It is expected that the advisor teaches or does research in a policy area closely related to the student’s prospective area of specialization. The faculty member accepting the role of advisor accepts responsibility to see the student through his or her program of course work and through completion of the Ph.D. written and oral exams, and through the dissertation. The student may request a change of advisor by mutual agreement with the new advisor for reasons communicated to the DGS. Any change in advisor must be approved by the DGS and noted in the student’s file.

### Preparing a formal “Statement of a Proposed Program of Study”

With the help of their advisor, the student should then define a policy field area, identify appropriate courses in subject matter and research methodology for that area, and work out their program in detail. Students are encouraged to consult both with the advisor and with other relevant faculty members within and outside UNC Public Policy on the selection of appropriate courses. The result of this process is the student’s preparation of a formal “Statement of Proposed Program of Study” for approval by their program committee (see below), normally by the end of the second semester.

The student’s Program Statement should set out the student’s academic and research interests and career goals, and the subject area and methods in which the student proposes to develop dissertation research. It should show what courses satisfy the core, policy field, and any other requirements (such as a minor, if elected), and in what semesters these courses will be (likely) taken, and any other information relevant to a decision as to whether the program of study will provide an adequate foundation for the student’s dissertation research and career aspirations. It is also appropriate and helpful to include in the program statement a summary of any prior academic preparation and professional experience that contribute to the student’s readiness to complete a doctorate in the subject area proposed. The program statement should also discuss the

student's tentative research interests and plans to obtain research experience, as well as teaching experience if the student aspires to an academic career.

### Selecting a program committee

In addition to the primary academic advisor, each student is guided by a Ph.D. program committee, including the advisor and at least one other member of the graduate faculty. The Director of Graduate Studies may serve on the program committee on an interim basis until a full dissertation committee is identified. The student nominates program committee members, normally no later than the end of the student's second semester and approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. The student's advisor serves as chair of the program committee. In cases where a student plans to take a formal minor, the minor department may elect to participate in the program conference through a representative who will advise on the minor area program.

### The program conference

The last step in the program approval process is the program conference, which should be scheduled no later than the end of the student's second semester in residence. This conference is not an examination. It is a discussion of the adequacy and suitability of the student's program to satisfy the student's interests and meet the requirements of the Ph.D. program. The program committee judges the proposed program on three grounds: (1) if the proposed program is implemented, would the student have mastered his or her chosen policy field area and the appropriate research methodology? (2) Is the student qualified to complete the proposed program at a doctoral level of performance? (3) Does UNC Public Policy and the university at large have the resources (faculty, courses, other necessary expertise, and facilities) required for the successful completion of the proposed program? The committee may either approve the proposed program as presented or approve it with additions or changes as agreed to during the conference or inform the student that the proposed program statement is not yet approved and how it must be revised for it to be reconsidered.

The committee may identify key concepts and bodies of literature which it regards as essential elements of the student's policy field and for which the student would be held responsible at the time of exams, whether these are part of the student's formal course work. That list of concepts and literature may be refined and extended as the student proceeds through his or her program and approaches exams.

Upon approval of the student's program, a copy of the approved program signed by the program committee must be filed with the UNC Public Policy student services manager. The student must have a program formally approved before registering for their third semester of residency. Any delay in program approvals always results in a delay in completion of course work and in the scheduling of exams.

## Progress reviews

The advisor of each student should meet with the student regularly and no less than once each semester to discuss the student's academic progress, needs for research and teaching opportunities, and any changes in intellectual directions, courses, or other preparation that the student is experiencing or needs. The DGS/GSC will conduct annual reviews of each student's progress, including a review of teaching assistant performance.

## Program changes

Minor changes in the student's proposed course work (in the advisor's judgment), which do not significantly affect the definition of the student's policy field or the competence he or she can be expected to develop, may be made on the recommendation of the advisor alone.

Changes that the student proposes in his/her program which the advisor judges to be major (which would affect the content of his or her program as originally defined in the program conference) should be discussed and approved by the program committee.

In the event of a request for a major program change, the faculty advisor is expected to reconvene the program conference for a program review. The membership of the committee may be changed to better accommodate the student's new interests, after advising the Director of Graduate Studies.

Any approved program changes (major or minor) should be reported by the committee chair to the DGS in the form of a signed amendment to the original program and entered in the student's file.

## Doctoral Examinations

### Overview

The Graduate School requires that each UNC Ph.D. student pass a doctoral written examination and a doctoral oral examination, which together constitute a comprehensive examination of the student's command of his or her field, as well as a final oral examination (defense of dissertation proposal). If the student declares a minor, at least one of the two doctoral examinations must include examination of the minor area as well. The doctoral written examination and the doctoral oral examination together are intended to assess the extent and currency of the candidate's knowledge in as comprehensive and searching an examination as the best practice of that field requires, test the candidate's knowledge of all transferred courses, discover any weaknesses in the candidate's knowledge that need to be remedied by additional course work or other instruction, and determine the candidate's fitness to continue work toward the doctorate. The

student must also have an approved dissertation prospectus prior to advancing to candidacy and authoring a dissertation. UNC Public Policy's comprehensive exams consist of a CORE exam and a FIELD exam.

### Core examination

The core exam covers material contained in UNC Public Policy's core courses: economics, public policy, politics and institutions, and normative dimensions of policy. The exam is designed not merely to assess proficiency in these subjects individually, but in the spirit of public policy to synthesize material from these courses. The core examinations are administered by a faculty examining committee appointed by the Director of Graduate Studies, consisting of at least three members of the UNC Public Policy graduate faculty.

All public policy Ph.D. students eligible to take the core exam each year take the same core exam at the same time. The Director of Graduate Studies must approve any exceptions. The core exams are taken after the first year of full-time course work, and administered in the first week of June, immediately after the spring semester of the student's first year. Students intending to sit for the exam in a given academic year must notify the Director of Graduate Studies by March 15 of that year. A majority of the core exam committee must be regular members of the UNC Public Policy's faculty and the UNC-Chapel Hill Graduate Faculty.

The core exam is administered in a central location. It is a closed-book, open note, three-day essay exam. The specifics of the open note policy for the exam will be described by the examining committee prior to student preparation for the core examination. The first day is scheduled as a reading day to review case materials on which the essays will be based. The second and third days are divided into three three-hour writing periods (two exams on each of the two days). The examining committee grades the exams.

For graduate students who need any testing modifications, the Office of Accessibility Resources & Service provides services and reasonable accommodations to currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate/professional students with disabilities. They can be reached at [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu).

### Grading for core exams

Examination committees are expected to grade exams in a timely manner, with final grades assigned no more than two weeks after the exam is taken. Two committee members will grade each section of the student's exam. Exams are graded on a High Pass (H), Pass (P), Low Pass (L), or Fail (F) scale. The student will be deemed to have passed the exam by receiving a grade of H or P on each part of the exam. If a student earns a grade of L or F on any section of the exam, the student fails the core examination. The student will be required to retake the core examination on only those sections that received a failing grade. Retakes of the core examination will typically consist of a new exam for the student, provided at a time convenient for both the faculty and the student, and may not take place until at least three months have elapsed. In some cases, a student may be asked to rewrite a specific part of a question rather than

receiving a new case. A student who fails a portion of the examination for the second time becomes ineligible for further graduate work. Upon request from the Director of Graduate Studies, the Graduate School may grant a student a third and final opportunity to take the examination. No student may continue in a program or take an examination a third time without approval by the Administrative Board of the Graduate School. Each student must pass the core exam before sitting for the field exam.

### Policy field and assessment

UNC Public Policy defines a field as a recognized substantive area of public policy research with a coherent body of scholarly literature. A student who identifies and declares such a field would be prepared to be hired to teach both an undergraduate introductory survey course and an advanced graduate seminar in the subject area, as well as be prepared to design a publishable quality research study in the area. During their coursework, students are required to take at least three substantive area courses and a field-related research methods course that together will form the basis for their chosen policy field. Students must receive approval of these course choices during their program conference with their program committee members to ensure appropriate fit with their field.

Students are discouraged from narrowly defining a field with respect to a particular topic. While students may focus their dissertation research on one policy topic, the policy field must reflect a broader knowledge base. And while it is unreasonable to expect a student to have comprehensive knowledge of the entire potential breadth of a field, the student should have the ability to characterize the field as a whole and to recognize and articulate the links among major subfields. A field must be broad enough to represent a basis for a career of teaching and research and not simply a single dissertation project.

### Objective of the field assessment process

The field assessment in public policy is intended to ensure that students have in-depth knowledge of theory, research methods, and current policy topics in their stated field area (see above).

**Theory:** The student's field should include at least one primary theoretical lens, such as political and institutional or economic theory or others, or a combination or comparison of them.

**Research Design and Methods:** The student's research design and methods should demonstrate proficiency in an appropriate set of research methods for identifying and examining researchable questions, and for reading the literature in the broader field (not just the dissertation topic area).

**Policy:** The student's policy focus should convey fluency in the main policy issues and debates in the field, demonstrated ability to critique or critically assess alternative policy options and proposals, including an ability to present normative, ethical, political, and economic arguments for relevant policy options.

Students may be assessed on their field through either a limited duration multi-day field exam or a field paper. Students should declare their preferred instrument after discussion with their advisor, field examination committee members, and the DGS. Either assessment will be based on a listing of literature identified by the student and approved by the field examination committee



members in advance. This literature will draw from the methodological and substantive field coursework but may exclude course materials not relevant to the policy field and may include supplemental literature key to the field.

### Format for the field exam

The format of the field exam is like that of the core exam. Each of three questions (covering theory, design and methods, and policy) will be written during a 3-hour period on consecutive days. Notes (either course notes or notes on readings) and the approved field reading list (only the list, not the readings themselves) may be brought to the written exam at the discretion of the field examining committee. The field exam will typically be taken in the fall of the third year and should be completed no later than the end of the spring semester of the third year.

### Format for the field paper

The format of the field paper is a critical literature review of a maximum of 40 pages (double-spaced) in length. Typically, the field exam paper will cover: (1) background including historical perspective, social significance, and development of research in the field; (2) relevant theoretical perspectives that are commonly brought to bear in the field; (3) main questions in the research literature in the field; (4) findings, methods, and conclusions of the key papers that address the main research questions in the field; (5) gaps in the current knowledge pertaining to the questions; (6) substantive and methodological issues confronting future research; (7) new and/or innovative questions that should be addressed in future research. It is reasonable to expect that the critical literature review may focus on a subset of the field in sections 3-7. An outline of the paper that the student submits to every member of the committee for review and approval is required as noted below.

### Grading for the field assessment

Examination committees are expected to grade field assessments in a timely manner, with final grades assigned no more than two weeks after the exam is taken or the paper is submitted. At least three faculty members will grade each student's assessment. Assessments are graded on a High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, or Fail scale. The student will be deemed to have passed the field assessment by receiving a high pass or pass on each part of the assessment. To pass the field assessment requires the agreement of a majority of the members of the examining committee, including a majority of those who are regular members of the Public Policy faculty and of the UNC-Chapel Hill Graduate Faculty. At the discretion of the relevant exam committee, a student may be passed on some questions/parts and failed on others, and thus might be responsible for making up or rewriting part of an exam/paper. Make-up assessments will be provided and/or coordinated at a time convenient for both the faculty and the student.

A doctoral student who fails the field assessment may not take the assessment a second time until at least three months have elapsed. A student who fails an assessment for the second time

becomes ineligible for further graduate work. Upon request from the Director of Graduate Studies, the Graduate School may grant a student a third and final opportunity to take the assessment. No student may continue in a program or take an assessment a third time without approval by the Administrative Board of the Graduate School.

### Combining dissertation proposal conference with oral field exams

If the field examination committee unanimously agrees that the student performed well on the written portion of the field assessment, the committee may then agree to have the dissertation proposal defense serve as the oral component of the field examination.

### Timing of exams

The core exam is taken in the first week of June immediately after the spring semester of the first year. The field assessment is typically taken after the student's fourth semester, but no later than the end of the student's eighth semester. Exceptions due to health or other events can only be made upon petition to the Director of Graduate Studies.

### Student responsibilities

The student must nominate a field assessment committee chair to the DGS and then, together with the committee chair, select an appropriate committee. Ideally the student's program committee would also serve as their field assessment committee. The field assessment committee will consist of at least three members, the majority of whom must be core faculty members in UNC Public Policy. The nominees for chair and proposed committee membership must be forwarded to the DGS at least one month prior to the intended field assessment date. The program advisor is normally, but not always, the chair of the field assessment committee. The student must provide copies of his or her answers to each committee member.

### Faculty responsibilities

The core examination committee, in consultation with the DGS, is responsible for the preparation of the core exam. The chair of each field examination committee for students opting for the exam assumes the responsibility for the initial distribution of question-writing responsibilities among committee members, coordinates questions, defines the purpose of each question (in conjunction with committee members), and assures that all topics required by this document are covered in the exam. Each chair should make clear to the student at an early stage the expectations of the examination committee. The chair of each field examination committee for students opting for the critical literature review field paper assumes the responsibility for reviewing the outline for the paper prepared by the student and providing guidance about the

content of the paper. The student may also discuss and clarify the scope and content of the exam with individual committee members.

The faculty is expected to grade exams in a timely fashion, with grading of written exams to be completed no more than two weeks following the exam date. The chair of the student's field examination committee must inform the DGS when the student has passed his or her written field exam and at the right time set a time for the oral exam, which will also serve as a dissertation proposal defense (dissertation conference) if the committee approves it. After final committee action on the written examination, the chair of the examining committee has the responsibility of preparing the appropriate forms and submitting them to the Director of Graduate Studies for certification of the results, placement in the student's file, and forwarding to the Graduate School.

The chair of each examination committee may provide the student with a summary of the committee's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the written exam along with the grades for each section of the exam. Within a few days of the exam, the chair of the committee has a follow-up evaluation discussion with the student and answers questions the student may have about his or her performance.

### Dissertation stage

The student initiates dissertation research by developing a preliminary proposal defining the problem to be studied and the research methods to be applied. The dissertation should be a scholarly contribution to the public policy literature. That is, it must represent an original piece of work, accomplished, and reported in a theoretically and methodologically convincing manner. The links to a theory base and to policy formulation, implementation, or evaluation should be clear, strong, and meaningful. The dissertation usually includes an application of rigorous scientific methods, including formal research design techniques, to empirical data to inform the public policy process. A comparative case study based on rigorous case-study methodology that meets the generalizability criterion is also acceptable. The student should discuss the preliminary proposal with his/her advisor and faculty members who have an interest in the subject or who may otherwise be able to advise the student on the merit and feasibility of the project.

### Selecting a dissertation advisor

The student nominates a dissertation advisor, usually their field exam committee chair, to the DGS. If approved, whether the individual nominated serves is determined by mutual agreement between the student and the faculty member. The dissertation advisor must be a member of the Public Policy core or adjunct faculty and must also be a member of the university's graduate faculty; any exceptions must be approved in writing in advance by the DGS and the Graduate School. The chair of the student's field examination committee is a logical choice for dissertation advisor, but there is no requirement that he or she be so selected. The faculty member electing to serve commits himself or herself to do everything reasonable to see the student through the dissertation project.

## Formal dissertation proposal

The student, in consultation with the advisor and other faculty as needed, prepares a formal proposal for the dissertation project. The exact format and content will be determined in considerable measure by the advice of the advisor, but should include as a minimum the significance of the research and motivation for the study; a description of the research problem; summary of existing literature on the problem; exposition of the relevant theoretical base for the researching; preliminary statement of hypotheses to be tested and or research questions; data sources; analytical methods; and expected or preliminary results. The dissertation proposal should indicate whether the student's dissertation will follow the traditional monograph format or the three-essay format with an appropriate introduction.

## Selection of dissertation committee

By Graduate School rules, the doctoral dissertation committee must consist of at least five people, at least one of whom shall be named the dissertation chair and appointed by the DGS after consultation with the candidate at the time a dissertation proposal is initiated. A majority of the members of a doctoral committee (and a majority of the members approving a doctoral dissertation) must be regular members of the UNC-Chapel Hill Graduate Faculty from UNC Public Policy. Other members may include special term appointees to the Graduate

Faculty. The chair of the doctoral committee must be a regular member of the Graduate Faculty in Public Policy; however, at the request of the program and approval of the Graduate School, the dissertation chair may be a fixed-term faculty member or from another UNC-Chapel Hill program. Similarly, the student may petition the Graduate School through the DGS to waive the requirement that a majority of the doctoral committee consist of regular Graduate Faculty from UNC Public Policy. The rationale for such a petition (for example) could be the lack of expertise in the student's subject area within the faculty.

If the dissertation involves a formal minor field, one of the committee members must come from the minor field. The student and dissertation advisor propose the committee and obtain agreements from members to serve, but the Dean of the Graduate School must approve the dissertation committee. It is up to the student to prepare and his or her advisor to approve the necessary form requesting the Dean's approval and submit it to the Director of Graduate Studies for forwarding to the Graduate School.

The dissertation committee's responsibilities include reviewing and giving formal approval to the dissertation proposal, consulting with the student in the research and writing, providing timely feedback on chapter drafts, evaluating the results, approving the dissertation for presentation, and participating in the final oral examination.

## Preliminary committee review, dissertation conference, and public presentation of the dissertation proposal

At the request of the dissertation advisor, members of the dissertation committee give the proposal a preliminary review, advising the student on appropriate changes and modifications. When the committee is satisfied that the proposed project has merit and is feasible, it approves the scheduling of a dissertation conference. A dissertation conference consists of a formal presentation of the dissertation proposal by the student to the dissertation committee for its discussion and approval. The dissertation advisor convenes and chairs the conference. The purpose of the dissertation conference is to permit the student to discuss the research proposal thoroughly with the dissertation committee, and to receive their feedback. The dissertation conference will serve as the oral portion of the student's field examination.

If the dissertation committee and the field exam committee have different members, the committee for the dissertation conference would either be the union of the examination and dissertation committees for discussion, or the session may be held in two parts with the committee changing with the change of topic from written exam follow-up to dissertation conference.

## Approval of dissertation proposal

Following a successful dissertation conference and satisfactory revisions to the proposal, the dissertation committee grants formal approval of the dissertation project. At this point, a "Report of the Approved Dissertation Project" and an attached copy of the final proposal are filed by the dissertation committee chair with the DGS for placement in the student file and forwarding of the form to the Graduate School

## Dissertation

Standard Graduate School rules on format must be followed. Each doctoral student is expected to consult with members of the dissertation committee at frequent intervals throughout the progress of his or her research and is required to submit a progress report to each member of the committee at least once a year.

## Final oral examination

The final oral examination shall be held only after all members of the committee have had adequate opportunity to review a draft of the doctoral dissertation that the candidate has prepared to submit for final production. The dissertation advisor is responsible to members of the

committee for determining that the draft is in an appropriate form for their evaluation. The final oral examination is primarily a defense of the research and writing in the candidate's dissertation, but it may also include questions that relate the dissertation to the broader field of public policy. The defense is conducted by the dissertation committee but must be officially announced and is open to outside observers. All committee members are expected to be present at the defense.

Students must be registered in the Graduate School in the semester in which they defend and submit their dissertation. Notice of the final oral examination including the student's name, dissertation title, date, time, and location should be distributed by UNC Public Policy's student services officer by email to core faculty and graduate students at least two weeks before the exam is held. The oral presentation of the dissertation is a public event.

After presentation of the dissertation by the candidate and questions from the committee, the chair of the committee can ask for all those in attendance other than core faculty to leave the room to allow the committee to discuss their evaluation with or without the candidate. After the completion of the examination, the committee evaluates the student's overall performance, informs the student of their judgment, signs the dissertation if it is acceptable, and completes the form, "Report of the Final Oral Examination." The chair of the dissertation committee shall provide the report to the DGS for UNC Public Policy approval and copies should go to the Graduate School and be placed in the student's file in UNC Public Policy. At least a two-thirds assenting vote of the committee is required for passing.

### Application for degree

Before the application deadline for the next commencement (<http://gradschool.unc.edu/student/graddeadlines.html>), the student files the appropriate application for degree, pays final fees, deposits the dissertation in the Graduate School, and has met all the formal requirements for conferring the doctoral degree.

### Degree time limits, residency requirements, changes in requirements

Under university regulations, a Ph.D. student has a maximum of eight calendar years from the date of first registration in the Graduate School to complete the doctoral degree. Extensions can be recommended to the Graduate School for valid reasons, the first extension by the student's committee and beyond that, by the full UNC Public Policy faculty. Extensions are not a matter of right. A minimum of four semesters of residency is required, at least two of which must be earned in continuous registration on the UNC campus; see the Graduate School Handbook for further details. If doctoral requirements are changed during the period of the student's studies, the student normally has the option either of completing the degree under the requirements that were in force at the time of his or her matriculation, or under the new requirements, but not a hybrid of the two. Students are not guaranteed funding beyond their fifth year.

## Ethics and Honor Code

The Policies and Procedures chapter of the Graduate School Handbook contains detailed information about amorous relationships, illegal drugs, ethics, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the Honor Code, non-discrimination, racial and sexual harassment, the alcohol policy, and other important rules and policies. Each student is responsible for learning and adhering to these University expectations.

## Additional Resources

### The Graduate School

The Graduate School makes available information about internal and external funding sources on [its website](#). The Graduate School also provides resources and opportunities for professional development, diversity, and student success.

### FERPA training

Any Teaching Assistants with access to student information are required to complete FERPA training prior to the start of the semester. This training will take less than an hour and can be found online at: <http://registrar.unc.edu/training/ferpa/>.

### Obtaining Residency in North Carolina

UNC Public Policy expects every graduate student who is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident to make a good faith effort to obtain residency in North Carolina at or before the beginning of their first academic term and to apply 365 days after establishing residency. The Graduate School provides information on establishing and applying for residency on their website: <http://gradschool.unc.edu/studentlife/resources/residency/> The residency application process can be completed online through the [Residency Determination Service \(RDS\) website](#). U.S. citizens and permanent residents who do not make a good faith effort to obtain residency in a timely fashion are not guaranteed out-of-state tuition remission. The Graduate School will host information sessions regarding the residency process. The department Student Services Manager also serves as a resource on the residency process.

### Office of Sponsored Research

The Office of Sponsored Research makes available information about external sources for research funding on [its website](#).

## Institutional Review Board on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB)

Public policy research, like many other kinds of social science research, frequently involves the collection of information about identifiable individuals. Such research is considered research on human subjects. Every student who conducts or participates in research on human subjects is required to pass a brief training course on research ethics, and to follow all applicable rules concerning advance review of proposed projects, proper treatment of human subjects and of information about them throughout the course of their research, and final reporting.

Early in the first semester of residency, each student should obtain required training in research ethics and human subject's research. The [UNC Office of Human Research Ethics \(OHRE\) website](#) provides instructions about how to obtain research ethics training and certification. Please see <https://research.unc.edu/human-research-ethics/getting-started/training/>.

The Office of Human Research Ethics must review all research involving human subjects (including dissertations and class research projects). Students must submit any proposed study involving human subjects to the OHRE's Behavioral Institutional Review Board for review, even if they believe that their research may be exempt as defined for certain human subjects research by the Code of Federal Regulations. It is essential to receive IRB approval prior to beginning research: approval will not be given retroactively.