

University of Chicago
Department of Political Science
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An Overview of the Methods Field Exam

Students in the Political Science Department may be permitted to take a field exam in research methods. However, the Department requires that students wishing to take the exam petition the methods faculty for permission.

Permission will be granted to students *pro forma* if they have satisfied the following conditions.

First, a student taking the methods exam must have done significant coursework in quantitative research methods. Successful completion of a minimum of five courses in quantitative methods including Data Analysis, Causal Inference (or other Intermediate Research Methods course agreed upon by the statistics faculty, such as STAT 220 when the department does not offer Causal Inference), Linear Models, and Maximum Likelihood, with a fifth course to be drawn from the department's advanced offerings (Bayesian Inference, Multi-level Modeling, Panel Analysis), or a course of an equivalent level offered by another department would satisfy this requirement.

Second, a student taking the exam must also have done significant coursework in one additional area of political science research methods such as formal theory, case study, or interpretive methods. By significant coursework, it is meant that students should have taken at least two graduate-level courses in that area of research methods. Students are also required to have taken one additional course that applies these methods at an advanced level. (Summer courses, such as those taught at ICPSR, will not count towards a *pro forma* approval of a student petition).

To give an example of significant coursework in a second field, it would satisfy the coursework requirement in formal theory if a student successfully completed the two course formal modeling sequence in the Harris School (currently, this is the Introduction to Game Theory taught by Ethan Bueno de Mesquita and the advanced course game theory course co-taught by BDM and Roger Myerson) and Jeff Grynaviski's course on the New Institutionalism.

Third, because there are a limited number of faculty with the ability to administer a methods exam in each field, students must have the commitment from a faculty member in Political Science to administer the exam in the student's second field. This commitment should not entail an evaluation of the student's ability to successfully pass the exam. Rather, it is simply a commitment to work with the student to prepare for the exam, to craft (with the assistance of other faculty) the exam for the student, to evaluate the exam, and to clearly communicate to the student when they will be on leave, etc., so that the student has clear expectations about when they might take the exam. Students are

strongly encouraged to secure such a commitment before wedding themselves to the idea of taking the methods exam.

Fourth, a student must write one paper applying quantitative research methods and one paper applying the research methods employed in their second field. (These need not be different papers). Ordinarily, these would be papers prepared in a student's routine coursework.

A student may petition the methods faculty to take the methods exam if they have not satisfied these requirements, but they are very strongly encouraged to consult with the faculty before pursuing such an alternative.

Exam Details

The methods exam will take place over two days. The first day students will be tested in quantitative research methods. The second day students will be tested in their second field.

There will be two parts to the statistics component of the methods exam, one to test familiarity with the core ideas in statistics, the other part to provide the student with data which will be graded on the basis of that student's grasp of the use of statistical methods to explore a substantive problem in political science. The first part will be a closed book exam, the second part will not, and will involve the analysis of data that we have provided to the student. The statistics component of the exam will run from 9am – 5pm, and students may allocate their time as he or she sees fit, subject to the constraint that they cannot return to the closed book part of the exam once they have begun the open book component.

Exams in the students' second field of research methods will be designed by the faculty member who committed to the administration of the exam. Generally speaking, the exam will be administered over a period of four hours.