

**M.A. Program in Public Policy with a concentration in**

**Philosophy and Social Policy**

**A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS**

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THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY

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WASHINGTON DC

Welcome to the M.A. Program in Public Policy with a Concentration in Philosophy and Social Policy, often known as the “Philosophy & Social Policy” or “PSP” Program. This unique program provides the opportunity to study social policy from a range of disciplinary perspectives, and to receive individual attention from faculty.

This guide has two parts. **New students should review Part I immediately**, as it describes some of what to expect in your first months of graduate school. Part II describes the later stages of the degree program. Familiarize yourself with Part II, at your leisure, over the next year.

## PART I – BASIC INFORMATION

### A. Academic Advising and Support

The Program is affiliated with the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration (TSPPPA), but administered by the Department of Philosophy in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences (CCAS). You have two academic advisors, both of whom are based in the Department and also hold appointments in TSPPPA:

- Dr. William Griffith, Director  
[wbg@gwu.edu](mailto:wbg@gwu.edu), 202-994-8684, Phillips Hall 5\*\*
- Dr. Jeffrey Brand-Ballard, Associate Director  
[jbb@gwu.edu](mailto:jbb@gwu.edu), 202-994-6911, Phillips Hall 523

Rather than assigning a single advisor to each student, the Directors share advising responsibilities for all the students in the PSP Program. The Program Director has final authority regarding Program policies. However, when you need guidance you should first seek out the Associate Director, consulting the Director only if the Associate is unavailable.

The Department also employs an Executive Aide and several Student Assistants who are available to help you. They can answer many basic questions (e.g., “Where do I buy my books?”), or refer you to someone with answers.

- Ms. Julia Louie, Executive Aide  
[philosop@gwu.edu](mailto:philosop@gwu.edu), 202-994-6265, Phillips Hall 525

### B. Initial Advising Conference

During your first semester in the Program, you should schedule an initial advising conference with one of the two Directors. You may contact either Director individually to schedule this conference, or visit his weekly office hours. These hours are established in the first weeks of the semester and are available from the Student Assistants. **As a graduate student, it is your responsibility to contact a Director for this initial advising conference.** Thereafter, you are expected to discuss your progress with a Director each semester before registering for classes, and more frequently, if needed.

### C. Program of Studies

The PSP Program affords considerable flexibility to tailor your program to your individual interests and goals. At the initial advising conference, you will discuss a provisional Program of Studies for completing your degree efficiently, consistent with your other responsibilities and objectives. Before your conference, familiarize yourself with all Program Requirements in the University Bulletin for Graduate Programs. These include:

1) general requirements for a Master's Degree in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~bulletin/grad/csas.html> (under "Requirements for the Degrees - The Master's Programs"); and

2) specific requirements for the PSP Program, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~bulletin/grad/phil.html>.

Bound copies of the University Bulletin for Graduate Programs are also available at the Office of Student Services, Academic Center Room T-107, 801 22nd Street, NW.

After reviewing all Program Requirements, but before your initial advising conference, sketch your provisional Program of Studies. Think about which courses you plan to take, and when you plan to take them, in order to satisfy your requirements in both the philosophy and the policy cores. You should also begin to think about what electives you would like to include. These should reflect your interests, whatever they may be (health policy, welfare policy, environmental policy, education policy, etc.).

Bring two copies of your Program to the conference. The Director with whom you meet will review it with you, make suggestions, and answer any questions you may have. He will also help you to begin thinking about which electives are most relevant to your interests. The University offers many courses that are ideal for PSP students, but they are scattered across the many units of this large institution, including SPPPA, CCAS, School of Media and Public Affairs (SMPA), Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM), Elliott School of International Affairs (ESIA), Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD), School of Business (GWSB), School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS), School of Public Health and Health Services (SPHHS), and the Law School. You need to know where to look for the courses that interest you.

Keep in mind that your Program is bound to change over time, as it is impossible to predict exactly which courses will be offered more than a year in advance.

### D. Course Selection

Many PSP students take nine credit hours (typically three courses) in each Fall and Spring semester. This is a full-time program for a graduate student at the University. Some students take fewer credits or more. Some add one or two courses in the Summer semester. Much depends on your individual funding package and any outside responsibilities you may have. Keep in mind that not all courses are offered every semester, and that summer course selection is limited. The Philosophy Department offers most of its courses annually, but does not offer graduate courses in the Summer semester. Also note that the courses in the policy core are offered by other departments, such as Economics, History, and Political Science. The Program does not control which courses these departments offer in a given semester. Most of the courses in the required groups are offered at least annually, but there are no guarantees.

It is recommended, other things being equal, that you register for a mix of courses in each semester, some from the philosophy core, others from the policy core (see PSP program requirements, above). It is wise to concentrate on your required coursework in your first two semesters, taking, at most, one elective in each.

#### E. Outside Employment

Many PSP students hold part-time or full-time employment or internships while pursuing their degrees. The Department offers graduate courses in the late afternoon and evening to facilitate this. Most other departments do so, as well. Students are encouraged to seek positions in which they can develop skills and acquire experience relevant to their ultimate career goals. It is also important to plan one's coursework with one's other responsibilities in mind.

Students often learn about exciting employment and internship opportunities from their fellow graduate students, or by visiting the GW Career Center, 1922 F Street NW, 202-994-6495, <http://gwired.gwu.edu/career/?url=career>. You may also wish to contact the SPPPA Career Development Program, 805 21st St., NW, Room 601Q, (202) 994-8475.

#### F. Questions and Difficulties

Many students find graduate work more challenging than they had expected. If you ever encounter difficulties with your coursework, especially during the first two months of classes, you should contact a Director immediately to discuss your options. A course dropped during the first four weeks of classes does not appear on your transcript. A course dropped after the fourth week, but before the end of the eighth week, is assigned a grade of WW. Courses may not be dropped after the eighth week. In some cases, engaging a tutor may prove very helpful.

In the future, you will probably find yourself with many additional questions for the Directors (e.g., "How much economics should I take if I want a career in health policy?"). You should always feel free to visit a Director's office hours, or schedule a conference.

## PART II - THE STANDARD OPTION AND THE THESIS OPTION

There are two ways to complete the PSP Program:

- a) complete thirty-six credit hours, including twelve in the philosophy core, twelve in the policy core, and twelve credit hours of approved electives; submit an acceptable Program Description; and pass a Comprehensive Examination; or
- b) complete twenty-four credit hours, including twelve in the philosophy core and twelve in the policy core; apply and receive approval for the Thesis Option; register for six credit hours of thesis research; and complete a thesis that earns Departmental approval.

These options are described in more detail below.

### A. The Standard Option (thirty-six credit hours, no thesis)

The Standard Option is the default for PSP graduate students. No special permission is required, and most students prefer it. If you choose the Standard Option, then you should meet with the Program Director as you approach your last semester of coursework. He will set deadlines for the submission of your Program Description and Comprehensive Examination (described below).

#### 1. Program Description

The first component of the Standard Option is a description of your Program of Studies. This is a narrative description of your coursework, explaining the coherence of your program as a whole. It explains why you chose particular core courses and electives to constitute your individual program. What policy problems did you address in your coursework? Which problems did you study extensively enough that you consider yourself to have some in-depth knowledge of them? Are there problems you studied in more than one course, or on which you wrote several papers in different courses? Have you acquired the expertise implied by a master's degree? The Program Description should include an appendix listing every course you completed in the Program and the name of each instructor. Your Program Description should run approximately three pages, excluding the appendix.

There are two main purposes of the Program Description. The first is to have you look back over your experience as a graduate student and pull together what you studied into a coherent account. This will help you to appreciate more fully the range and significance of the knowledge and skills you have acquired. Also, most people you will encounter in your career will not be familiar with your unique degree. You should be able to explain it to them, so they can see how it holds together and appreciate what you have accomplished.

The second purpose of the Program Description is to allow the Directors to shape your Comprehensive Examination questions appropriately.

#### 2. Examination Questions

After you submit your Program Description to the Directors, they will draft examination questions for you, based in part on your individual program. They will want to see whether you can manage an assemblage of concepts and methods from different disciplines to shape a cogent interdisciplinary attack on a policy problem. The questions will ask you to evaluate policy issues

of your own choosing from various normative, empirical, and analytical perspectives that you have studied. The questions may also ask you to explain which concepts and theories appear, in fact, to have influenced policymaking in certain areas. They may also require you to put yourself in the position of an advisor to a policymaker and to grapple with the ethical dilemmas that arise for someone playing an advisory role.

### 3. Preparation

The Comprehensive Examination is “open-book,” and you will have two weeks to complete it, so there is no need to spend time memorizing anything. However, the Directors suggest preparing by spending some hours reviewing syllabi and materials from your courses. You will also want to gather these materials and organize them so that you can locate specific sources efficiently as you complete your exam.

### 4. Evaluation

A Reading Committee from the Program will evaluate your examination essays as passing overall, passing in part and failing in part, or failing overall. In the event of either of the latter two judgments, you will be given one opportunity to retake part or all of the examination.

### 5. Scheduling

Most students choose to take the Comprehensive Examination after the conclusion of their last semester of coursework. If that is the Spring semester, then the exam may be taken early in the summer months. In this case, the degree is conferred in August. This schedule allows you to focus on completing your coursework without the extra burden of the Comprehensive Exam. Most employers do not care whether your degree is “in hand” in May, provided that your coursework is completed. The Directors are pleased to write letters to prospective employers explaining that you have completed your coursework and are on schedule to graduate.

August graduates are not charged summer tuition and they are still permitted to march in the May graduation ceremony, although they must still submit the Application for Graduation before the deadline for May graduation. The registrar charges a \$35 fee for “continuous enrollment” for students who choose the August option.

If it is important to you to receive your degree at the end of the Fall or Spring semesters, then you can take your Comprehensive Examination during those semesters. Consult the schedule below.

<b>To receive your degree in</b>	<b>Submit your Program Description to the Directors no later than</b>
August	June 15
December	October 15
May	March 15

You will receive your exam questions within roughly two weeks of submitting your Program Description. You will have two weeks from receipt to complete and submit your responses.

## B. The Thesis Option (twenty-four credit hours of coursework, plus six-credit thesis)

The Thesis Option is available only to students who show exceptional promise, as determined by the Graduate Studies Committee.

### 1. Applying

If you decide to apply for the Thesis Option, you must do so after you have completed at least twelve, but no more than twenty-four, of your required credit hours. Application is typically made in the third semester of study. To apply for the Thesis Option, submit a letter to the Program Director. Explain your reasons for desiring to complete your program by writing a thesis; indicate the general topical area you wish to explore, and the background you expect to have in this field when you begin your thesis research; finally, indicate the time period over which you plan to complete and submit the thesis. If you would like to have a particular faculty member assigned as your Thesis Advisor, please indicate this. There is no guarantee that any particular faculty member will be available to serve as a Thesis Advisor.

### 2. Prospectus

The Graduate Studies Committee will evaluate your application to determine whether your academic achievements suggest a strong potential for successfully completing a thesis. If you are approved for the Thesis Option, then a Thesis Advisor will be assigned to you, taking into account any preference you have indicated. Your next steps are to register for six credits of thesis research (PHIL 299-300) and to begin working with your Thesis Advisor to prepare a Prospectus. The Prospectus should run no fewer than ten, but no more than twenty, double-spaced pages, excluding bibliography.

If and when your Prospectus is approved by your Thesis Advisor, the Graduate Studies Committee will examine you, orally, on your thesis proposal, and on your knowledge of those related topics and literatures that you would need as background to write the thesis. Successful completion of this oral examination results in approval of a (possibly modified) thesis topic, although it does not guarantee acceptance of your completed thesis.

### 3. Thesis Committee

Upon notification by your Thesis Advisor that your thesis is ready to be evaluated, the Program Director will appoint two other faculty members to constitute, with the Advisor, a Thesis Committee. The Committee will decide by majority vote whether to accept the thesis as it stands; accept it conditionally, contingent upon specific improvements being made; or agree only to re-evaluate the thesis if it were to be substantially rewritten.

### 4. Deadlines and Requirements

It is your responsibility to become fully informed about and take timely steps to meet all deadlines and requirements, stylistic and otherwise, imposed by the CCAS and the University regarding theses submitted in partial completion of degree requirements.

## C. Applying for Graduation

It is your responsibility to file with the Office of the Registrar an Application for Graduation (available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb/web-content/index.html>) at the beginning of your final semester of study.