

Hillsdale College Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship

Degree Requirements – M.A.

The aim of the M.A. program is for students to develop a firm knowledge of the first principles of American constitutionalism and to understand the fate of those principles in American political development and contemporary American politics. Since the first principles of American constitutionalism and subsequent developments in the American political tradition have been informed by the great works of Western political thought, students ought also to understand the critical elements of Western political thought, both classical and Modern.

Degree Requirements

- Minimum of 9 hours in each of the two tracks
- 36 credit hours
- Maximum of 9 hours in advanced undergraduate courses cross-listed for graduate credit (only courses designated at the 500 level). This maximum may be raised in individual cases of compelling need at the discretion of the Graduate Dean, and the Dean will determine on a case-by-case basis which track (political philosophy or American politics), if any, will be credited for each 500-level course.
- Completion and oral defense of an M.A. thesis, which counts as 6 credit hours toward the 36-hour requirement.
- For students in the doctoral program having passed the Doctoral Qualifying Examination, the M.A. degree may be earned without the M.A. thesis, completing 6 hours of coursework in its place, for a total of 36 hours.

Regulations

Choice of Courses

There are no required courses for the M.A. program. However, students will be held to account in their thesis defense examination for how well they have mastered the concepts described in the aims of the M.A. program (above). Students should choose their coursework with this in mind. Accordingly, it is expected that students will take coursework in both early and contemporary American political thought and politics, as well as classical and Modern political philosophy.

Independent Study

One independent study (up to three credit hours) may be counted toward the required credit hours for the M.A. Independent studies must be on topics that are not covered by the regular course offerings of the graduate program. All independent studies require the approval of the Graduate Dean, application for which must be submitted to the Graduate Dean's office at least one week prior to the beginning of the semester in which the independent study is to be taken. Upon approval, the Graduate Dean will assign an appropriate course number in consultation with the Registrar, and will determine whether the course will apply to the political philosophy track or the American politics track.

M.A. Thesis

The thesis is to be a minimum of 50 typewritten, double-spaced pages, and is often an expansion of a paper completed for coursework in the M.A. program, although this need not be the case. As they take their courses, students should be consulting with faculty and formulating a plan for their theses. In the final semester of their M.A. coursework, students should approach a member of the Graduate Faculty about serving as a thesis reader, and should also secure the consent of a second reader from the Graduate Faculty. Prior to the end of the semester, the student should submit a thesis proposal to the Graduate Dean. The proposal should state the argument of the thesis, outline how the argument will be developed, and indicate the key areas of research. It should include a complete bibliography of primary source material and a substantial selection of relevant secondary literature. The length of the proposal's narrative should be no shorter than three (double-spaced, typed) pages and, if the thesis is to be an expansion of a previously written

paper, the original paper should be included with the proposal. All proposals must be approved by the Graduate Dean; a student whose proposal is denied may appeal to the Graduate Committee.

Thesis Defense and Examination

Once the thesis has been written and approved by both readers, it is to be submitted to the Graduate Dean who will schedule an oral defense and examination in consultation with the student and the readers. The Graduate Dean will serve as the third member of the examining panel (if the Dean is already one of the two readers, he will appoint another member of the Graduate Faculty to serve on the panel, bringing the total number to three). The oral defense will last from 60 to 90 minutes, and will examine the student in two areas:

- 1) The argument of thesis itself and the student's knowledge of the topic of the thesis and the literature (primary and secondary) relevant to it.
- 2) The student's knowledge of the concepts that are central to the aims of the M.A. program (stated above). In particular, the student will be expected to demonstrate that he or she understands the principles of the constitutional order created by the American founders, and the fate of those principles in American political development and contemporary American politics. The student will also be expected to show proficiency in knowledge of the Western tradition of political philosophy – both classical and Modern – which informs the American political order.

The defense is open to all members of the Graduate Faculty and College administration, but only the three members of the examining committee may vote on the student's performance, with three votes required for approval. An unsuccessful defense means that the thesis will not be accepted and the M.A. degree will not be awarded. A second and final defense will be permitted by the examiners after the student has made the required revisions or has prepared more adequately for the panel's questions.

Time Limit

The master's thesis must be completed and successfully defended within two years after the completion of master's coursework. Periods for which a Leave of Absence is requested and granted are not counted toward this limit. Extensions to this limit may be granted by the Graduate Committee.

Scholarship Policy and Grade-Point Minimum

At the end of each semester, the Graduate Dean will review students' academic performance. A cumulative grade point average of 3.3 is required for continuance of scholarship support. The continuance of support is also contingent upon student adherence to the personal conduct policy (see below).

A cumulative grade point average of 3.0 for all master's coursework is required for graduation.

Transfer of Graduate Credit

Master's students may petition the Graduate Dean for a transfer of credits from previous graduate study. No more than 6 credits may be transferred into the M.A. program, and the transfer of credits is not automatic. Petitions for transfer credit must be for work completed within the last five years, strictly compatible with Hillsdale's Politics curriculum, must have been done at an accredited university or college, and must have received the equivalent of a "B" or better. Pass/fail courses may not be transferred. The Graduate Dean will make the final determination on any transfer of credit, and on how it will be applied to the specific requirements of the M.A. program.