

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I apply?

The **Application Instructions** as well as a link to the on-line application form are available here: http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

2. Can I apply just for a Master's degree in Political Science?

No. We do not admit students just for a Master's degree in political science at Michigan State University. However, if you are admitted to the doctoral program, you can earn a Master's degree partway through the doctoral program as long as you meet various standards and requirements.

The Political Science Department and the Economics Department jointly run a Master's degree program in Public Policy. Click on this link if you are interested in that program: <http://pls.msu.edu/index.php/mpp-program/welcome>.

3. Can I begin my doctoral studies in the Spring semester?

No. Due to the sequencing of courses for first-year doctoral students, we only admit students for the Fall semester of each year.

4. How do I get my letters of recommendation to you?

Letters of recommendation must be submitted through the Michigan State University (MSU) on-line application process. After you submit your on-line application materials, you will receive an email prompting you to create an account with our on-line **Grad Portal**. You will then upload the names and email addresses of our letter writers. The system will then send an email to each of your references asking them to upload the letters of recommendation for you to our system. Detailed instructions can be found in items # 6 and #7 in the **Application Instructions** available at: http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

5. How do I get my transcripts to you?

Please request official transcripts from each college or university you have attended (both undergraduate and graduate). These transcripts absolutely MUST be mailed by the college or university directly to the department at this address:

Ms. Karen Battin
Graduate Programs Assistant
Department of Political Science
Michigan State University
368 Farm Lane, 303 South Kedzie Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824

*** You must be certain to tell the college or university to mail your transcripts to the above departmental address. Do not tell the college or university to send your transcript just to “Office of Admissions” at Michigan State University. Any transcripts sent to “Office of Admissions” at Michigan State University will disappear; they will not be forwarded within MSU to the above departmental address.

*** If your transcripts are sent only to the “Office of Admissions” at MSU, your application file will be incomplete and you will not be considered for admission by the Department of Political Science.

For more details see item #8 in the **Application Instructions** at:
http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

6. Do I need to take the GRE or can another test such as the GMAT be substituted?

The University requires your GRE scores to be considered for admission. The GRE is one of several criteria that the department uses to evaluate applications. Without GRE scores your application will not be considered. For more details item #9 in the **Application Instructions** at: http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

7. Are there minimum GRE scores that we require for consideration?

We do not have any official minimum requirement for GRE scores. The admissions committee that evaluates your application will look at your application as a whole, including but not limited to the fit between the applicant and the department. The applicant’s personal and academic statements, the applicant’s transcript or transcripts, and the applicant’s letters of recommendation are all important components of a file.

However, for recent entering classes the average scores for the Verbal part of the GRE test were in the 85-to-90 percentile range, and the average scores for the Quantitative part of the GRE test were in the 60-to-65 percentile range. We do admit some students with lower scores, and scores in or above these ranges are not a requirement. In fact, having very high GRE scores does not guarantee admission for anyone; we consider a wide range of factors besides GRE scores. But applicants with scores substantially below the 50th percentile are very unlikely to be admitted.

For more details see item #9 in the **Application Instructions** at
http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

8. Who is required to take the TOEFL (or IELTS) test of competence in the English language?

Michigan State University requires evidence of competence in the English language from all non-native English speakers.

However, if you earned a BA or BS degree from a regular 4-year degree program in the United States, you do not have to take a test of competence in the English language. Similarly, if you earned a Master's degree from some US universities, you do not have to take a test of competence in the English language. For more details see item #10 in the **Application Instructions** at: http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

9. Is a minimum TOEFL score required for admission to the doctoral program?

We have recently increased the TOEFL score required for admission to the doctoral program. We are now looking primarily at applicants with overall TOEFL scores above 100, and ideally closer to 110 or higher. For overseas students whom we are seriously considering for admission we are now also conducting Skype interviews before we make a final admission decision. For more details see item #10 in the **Application Instructions** at: http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

10. Is there a required format for the Personal Statement or the Academic Statement?

No, but do consult items #3 and #4 in the Application Instructions for the kinds of information in which we are interested in your Personal Statement and your Academic Statement. The admissions committee will be focused on how your skills, interests, strengths, and weaknesses fit with the department. We are also interested in why you believe you have the ability to make research contributions to the field.

It is best to avoid sending a purely generic statement of purpose. We are interested in why you want to pursue a Ph.D. in political science, and why you want to do this at Michigan State University. For more details see items #3 and #4 in the **Application Instructions** at: http://polisci.msu.edu/downloads/Application_Instructions.pdf.

11. Should I include in my application any papers that I have written?

No. We will not consider additional materials beyond what is required for the application. You should include any noteworthy achievements in your Personal Statement or in your Academic Statement.

12. Can the Department of Political Science waive the application fee due to financial hardship?

No, we cannot. It is the University, not the Department of Political Science, that imposes the application fee. In fact, the department's admissions committee cannot process any application until the MSU Office of Admissions notifies us that the application fee has been paid.

13. If I email you my GRE scores and other details, can you tell me what are my chances of being admitted?

No. The reason is that we do not look at applications in isolation. We consider each application relative to the other applications. Therefore we cannot provide even a rough estimate of your chances of admission prior to our final admissions decisions.

14. What is the timeline for hearing about a decision on my application?

The department's admission committee will begin looking at application files soon after the January 2 deadline. We may make some acceptance decisions by the end of January, but other decisions may be made in February and March or even later. We sometimes put students on a "waiting list" and then wait until after April 15 to see how many of our earlier offers of admission are accepted. We normally do not send out our final rejection decisions until very late in the spring after our entire class has been constructed.

However, if you have received offers of admission and financial aid from another school, it is a very good idea to let us know what the school is and what the content of the financial-aid offer is. In this case, please contact the following two individuals and let us know this information:

Ms. Karen Battin
battink@msu.edu

Professor Ani Sarkissian
asarkiss@msu.edu