

Guidelines for the
RESEARCH TOOLS PLAN

PhD Program in Government, Harvard University

The PhD in Government signifies the achievement of a broad understanding of ongoing discussions and areas of discovery in political science – the empirical and normative study of politics, government, and public policy – as well as the mastery of the specialized knowledge and tools needed to design and complete original research to advance frontiers of knowledge. Harvard PhD students master substantive fields, and also develop research-related skills needed to do cutting edge scholarship. All students in the program complete the introductory seminar on “Approaches to the Study of Politics” to learn about various ways in which scholars define questions and do original research. And all students are required to take at least one graduate-level course in quantitative social science methods. Beyond these basics, the program expects each student to develop the research-related skills and competencies best suited to his or her individual research interests. These may be skills in game theory and modeling, advanced statistical analysis, archival research, ancient or modern language, field work techniques, survey design, interviewing, case-based research, philosophy of social science, textual analysis, and so forth. Such skills will contribute to dissertation research, and prepare the Harvard graduate to do additional research of one or more kinds in his or her subsequent career.

The Research Tools Plan is intended to help each first-year student identify the research skills and competencies he or she needs to further individual scholarly aspirations. It makes sense to think ahead, so as not to arrive unprepared at the thesis stage. **Before the end of the first year, each student should consult appropriate faculty advisors and write a short Tools Plan of about two to five typewritten pages spelling out areas of research competence he or she aims to develop while in the PhD program. Please indicate in submitted memo which faculty member(s) were consulted.** The Research Tools Plan should address the following questions:

- What are your major areas of interest?
- Which fields do you intend to pursue for Generals? Though this information is non-binding and students can always change their minds later on (up to February of their G2 year), it would be helpful to have this information, in part for planning purposes and also to alert us early to cases where a student's course plans and General Exam plans seem misaligned in some way.
- What skills do you have already, and what additional or new competencies will you aim to develop to be prepared to do excellent research? How do these particular skills relate to your areas of interest?

- What specific courses or workshops regularly given at Harvard or elsewhere look promising as venues for deepening skills of the relevant kind? Do you need to learn about additional options?

This is an individual planning document, setting forth aspirations and outlining tentative plans that may change. It will not be graded or evaluated, and the plans can evolve if your research interests change in the coming years. A plan is better than no plan, even if it later evolves or changes, and students are encouraged to be as specific as possible about their intentions. **To be in good standing, each student must submit this short document (2-5 pages) to the Graduate Program Office by May of the first year.**

The requirements of the PhD program are relevant for the Tools Plan, though it is not a checklist. Each Government PhD student is required to complete the equivalent of 3.5 semester units of work on research competencies and skills by the middle of the fourth year. The Approaches seminar taken in the first year counts for 1.0 unit; and a quantitative social science methods course counts for another 1.0 unit. Semester-long courses of many kinds can provide additional units. In addition, the Graduate Policy Committee will provide regularly updated lists of workshops given inside and beyond Harvard that constitute 0.5 units of credit apiece toward this requirement.

Where possible, students should refer to specific courses or workshops in their Tools Plan. But the Plan itself is not an accounting device. It can identify areas in which the student will later search for specific options; and it can outline aspirations to develop skills through courses or workshops that might add up to more than the minimum required. The plan may also mention research assistantships that could help the student fulfill his or her aspirations, though such positions do not count toward fulfillment of the 3.5-units requirement. The point of the plan is to connect personal scholarly goals to plans for the enrichment of research skills during the course of doctoral study.

Some Example Tool Kit Courses

Tool Kit courses are courses undertaken by students, ordinarily in the first two years of graduate study, which give them essential skills necessary for carrying out cutting-edge research. In the case of empirical political scientists, such courses may include courses in qualitative, quantitative and formal methods and research design, as well as language courses. For theorists, language courses apart, they will be courses that develop advanced philosophical or historiographical skills or convey specialist ancillary knowledge (for instance, in law or classics or empirical political science) that will enable the student to carry out her or his thesis research effectively. Below is an example list of courses that students have pursued as part of their Tools Plan. This list is not exhaustive. In deciding on the appropriateness of tool kit choices, students should consult with faculty in the relevant subfield and with the DGS.

Courses

Gov 2010	Strategies for Political Inquiry
Gov 1011	Grad survey methods
Gov 2000/2001	Quantitative Methods
Gov 2002	Topics in Quantitative Methods
Gov 2005/2006	Formal Political Theory I & II
Gov 2008	Experimental Political Science
Gov 2009	Methods of Political Analysis
Gov 2030	Political Concepts: Field Seminar
Gov 2088	Ethical Foundations of Political Thought
Gov 2095	The Nature and Purposes of Political Theory
Econ 1227	Statistical Methods for Evaluating Casual Effect
Econ 2020a/b	Economic Theory
Econ 2053	Topics in Game Theory
Econ 2058	Network Models and Methods
History 2300	Methods in Intellectual History
History 2965	The Scope of History
History 2966	The Art and Craft of Historical Writing
History 2967	What is History? Concepts, Practices, Critique
Math 153	Evolutionary Game Theory
Math 243	Advanced Evolutionary Game Theory
Soc 202	Intermediate Quantitative Research Methods
Soc 203a	Advanced Quantitative Research Methods
Soc 203b	Analysis of Longitudinal Data
Soc 205	Sociological Research Design
Soc 209	Qualitative Social Analysis
Soc 235	Advanced Qualitative Methods
Soc 275	Social Network Analysis
Soc 303a	Advanced Topics in Quantitative Research
Stat 110/210	Introduction to Probability/Probability Theory
Stat 111/211	Intro to Theoretical Statistics/Statistical Inference
Stat 139/149	Statistical Sleuthing Through Linear Models
Stat 140	Design of Experiments
Stat 160	Design and Analysis of Sample Surveys
Computer programming courses	
Language Courses, including Harvard Summer School	

Workshops/Short-term Courses

GIS training workshops offered by the Center for Geographical Analysis within IQSS. They have been a great introduction to the tools of GIS and GPS:

<http://gis.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k235&pageid=icb.page189848>

The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) offers spring and summer schools in methods. They offer a great variety of methods courses (network analysis, stats, formal theory...).

<http://www.ecprnet.eu/summerschools/default.asp>

The Consortium on Qualitative Research Methods (CQRМ) promotes the teaching and use of qualitative research methods in the social sciences. See the annual summer Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR).

IUP Program in Beijing for Chinese Language skills.

HMDC Stata Workshop

The Bureau of Study Counsel's reading course (useful course on learning how to read quickly.)

ICPSR Summer program in quantitative methods of social research.

EITM, Empirical Implications of Theoretical Models Summer Institute at the University of Chicago.