

Faculty Advising and Committee Responsibilities: Ph.D. in Urban Affairs

Thank you for volunteering to be an advisor to students in the PhD in Urban Affairs program. Your advising and committee membership assistance will go far in developing the next generation of urban affairs scholarship. This document contains descriptions, important links, and policies that guide doctoral students, their advisors, and committee members as students progress through our program.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Dr. Davia Downey at dcdowney@memphis.edu. All forms referred to in this document can be found on the Urban Affairs Ph.D. [website](#).

Program Overview

The Ph.D. in Urban Affairs is a 48-credit-hour doctoral degree. Students are expected to have a master's degree before being admitted into our program. Students in their last year of a master's can be considered for admission to the program but should be very close to completing their master's degree before applying.

The Ph.D. has three main benchmarks: Coursework, Comprehensive Exams, and Dissertation Research and Defense. The coursework consists of the following classes:

Core Classes

UAPP 8010 (Fall every year)
UAPP 8011 (Spring every year)
UAPP 8012 (Fall every year)
UAPP 8013 (Spring every year)

Focus Area Classes

Six courses from SUAPP-related subject areas. At least **2 classes** should come from **outside** a student's master's degree. **Fall 2023 and beyond:** Students will be required to have at least two theory courses in their program of study.

Example: An MPA student joins the program, takes 3 classes in PADM, one of which is a theory-based course, and is advised to take courses in SOCI and POLS based on their specific research interests. Of the SOCI and POLS courses, at least one should be theory-based.

Methods Coursework

Two classes in advanced research methods.

Any methods courses should be selected with the student's research in mind.

Students may take more than two methods courses, but please note that any pre-requisite or additional methods courses will not count towards the 48 credit hours for the degree.

Students should be advised to take quantitative courses that teach techniques beyond OLS regression wherever possible.

After a student has completed all coursework (or has completed at least 27 hours of coursework), they can take comprehensive exams. Full-time students are expected to complete their courses by the end of year two, and part-time students should be making good progress through the program and plan to take comps up to four years after starting their degree program.

Advising Basics

1) Initial Advising Responsibilities

- a) All incoming students are advised in their first semester of the program by the program director (Dr. Downey). All students are advised to contact faculty members who share their interests for continued advising. Advisors for all students should be completed by the Spring semester of a student's first year. If a student in your office asks for advice, please know they have found you because of your research interests. If you cannot add another advisee to your workload, please recommend other faculty members who share your interests with the student.
- b) **Faculty Responsibilities:** If students contact you for advising and their interests align, please accept these requests as your schedule allows. Document: [Advising Form](#)
- c) **Faculty Expectations:** Meet with advisee(s) at least **once** yearly to discuss a student's course schedule. Students must complete an annual self-assessment, and faculty advisors should review this assessment and provide comments on the form. An annual review of the advisee's progress should be submitted to the Ph.D. Director at the end of each Spring semester. Document: [Annual Program Report Form.](#)

2) Comprehensive Exam Responsibilities

- a) Advisors will typically also serve on comprehensive exam committees as the chair. As chair, your responsibilities are as follows:
 - i) Ensure the student has selected a majority of Urban Affairs-affiliated faculty members to sit on their committee. A comprehensive exam committee can have **no more than five members** in total and one external to the UM can sit on a comprehensive exam committee. Additionally, one member might come from a unit on campus un-affiliated with SUAPP as well.
 - (1) The [Comprehensive Committee Declaration Form](#) should be submitted to the Ph.D. Director in the semester **before** a student takes their exam.
 - ii) Collectively, the student and the committee should set a date for the written exam.
 - (1) All comprehensive exams are open-note, take-home exams lasting **up to 72 hours**.
 - (2) The committee chair must provide comprehensive exam questions to the director at least 48 hours before the exam date.
 - (3) Once the 72 hours have transpired, the director will provide the written answers to committee members for grading. Students are directed to submit answers in pdf format via email so the committee can check for plagiarism.

- (4) Any issues around plagiarism or incomplete exams should be communicated to the program chair immediately, as this will result in automatic failure for that exam attempt.
- 3) Comprehensive exam question format
- (1) Students should be presented with **5-6 total questions** and should answer **at least three** questions per exam.
 - (2) Due to the interdisciplinary nature of our program, we direct comprehensive committees to develop 2-3 questions that address the following aspects of our program:
 - (a) **Comparing Urban Theories and Frameworks** (UAPP 8010): These **questions should prompt students to compare/contrast urban problems, issues, or theories** (i.e., How do political scientists talk about political behavior, compare this to how anthropologists have discussed political anthropology?). These questions should always be derived from a student's annotated bibliography.
 - (b) **Research Methods and Analysis Approaches** (UAPP 8011): These questions should probe a student's understanding of **selecting, critiquing, or designing a methodology for any urban problem**. (i.e., How do criminologists use multivariate approaches in their research? Why are multivariate approaches frequently used to test empirical relationships between dependent and independent variables? What other issues arise from using multivariate analysis, and how important is it to include control variables in this type of research?) Again, these questions should be informed by the committee's review of the annotated bibliography they provide.
 - (c) **Community Based and Participatory Research** (UAPP 8012-8013): These questions should be designed to **probe a student's understanding of the benefits, pitfalls, and methods used in community-based or participatory research projects**. These questions can also interrogate the importance of using mixed methodologies or other participatory methods to answer a question of interest.
 - (d) **Research-Focused Questions** (Student-Driven and created with the committee): Each student in our program has their own research ideas, so the committee is encouraged to be mindful to ask questions that probe a student's understanding of their research questions, theories of interest, and methodological approaches. If committees have questions while developing their exams, please don't hesitate to contact the program director.
 - (e) **NOTES:** If you have taught a student in any course, please attempt to craft questions that align with the student learning outcomes outlined above and what you observed of that student while in your class.
 - ii) Set a date, time, and location for the oral exam. Oral exams should be scheduled no more than **two weeks** post-written portion.
 - iii) All fall comprehensive exams (written and oral) should be completed by **October 30th**. All spring comprehensive exams (written and oral) should be completed by **March 30th** each year.

- iv) If a student fails either portion of the comprehensive exam, notify the Ph.D. director immediately so plans can be made to reschedule.
- v) Upon the successful completion of comprehensive exams, students and the chair should complete and submit the [Comprehensive Exam Results](#) form to the Ph.D. Director.

4) Dissertation Committee Responsibilities

- a) Advisors may also serve as the chair or as a student's dissertation committee member. Students should provide a copy of the [Dissertation Committee](#) form to the Ph.D. Director before initiating any research. Students are also responsible for scheduling their Dissertation Proposal Defense with their chair and committee member. Students should submit a copy of the [Dissertation Proposal Defense](#) form to the Ph.D. director after setting a date with their advisor and committee.
- b) Committee members and the chair should periodically meet with the student to monitor progress.
- c) When students are ready to defend their dissertation, they should notify the Ph.D. director at least four weeks before the defense date so we can provide public notice. Students should fill out the [Public Defense Notice](#) form once a date, time, and location has been set.
- d) After a successful defense, students are responsible for providing a copy of the [Dissertation Defense](#) form to Ph.D. director.
- e) Other dissertation forms can be found on the [Graduate School's forms website](#). If a student is doing research with Human Subjects, all IRB training and IRB approvals must be in place before initiating fieldwork.

5) Graduation Responsibilities

- a) Dissertation chairs should expect to attend graduation to hood their doctoral candidates. Students must signal their readiness for graduation by filling out the [Graduate School Candidacy](#) form and [applying for graduation](#). A copy of all the forms referred to above **must be on file** with the Ph.D. director before students complete this step.