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General Syllabus for Doctoral Studies in Political Science

This document is a translation of the Swedish original *Allmän studieplan för utbildning på forskarnivå i Statsvetenskap*. In case of a discrepancy between the Swedish original and the English translation, the Swedish original will prevail.

1. Official approval

The general syllabus for doctoral studies in political science was adopted by the Faculty Board of Social Sciences at Stockholm University on 2012-04-03, and was last revised 2025-10-27. General provisions regarding doctoral studies can be found in the Higher Education Ordinance.

The general syllabus is valid from 2025-10-27.

2. Subject description

Political science is the scientific study of politics. Studies in the subject cover, for example: normative principles and basic political concepts such as power, democracy, legitimacy and gender; political actors, practices and institutions in Sweden and other countries; the organisation and role of public administration in society; and international politics, including both governmental and non-governmental actors and processes.

3. Programme objectives

Local Regulations

Doctoral studies in political science may be concluded with a licentiate or doctoral degree.

A doctoral student in political science may earn a licentiate degree as a stage in their doctoral-level education. The licentiate stage is not mandatory for a doctoral degree in political science.

3.1 Doctoral degree

A doctoral degree is awarded after the doctoral student has completed 240 higher education credits in a subject area for third-cycle education.

Knowledge and understanding

For a doctoral degree, the doctoral student must:

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- demonstrate broad knowledge of and a systematic understanding of the research field, as well as in-depth and up-to-date specialized knowledge within a defined part of the research field, and
- demonstrate familiarity with research methodology in general and the methods of the specific research field in particular.

Skills and abilities

For a doctoral degree, the doctoral student must demonstrate the following:

- demonstrate the ability to conduct scientific analysis and synthesis, as well as to independently critically examine and evaluate new and complex phenomena, issues, and situations,
- demonstrate the ability to critically, independently, and creatively identify and formulate research questions with scientific rigor, as well as to plan and conduct research and other advanced tasks using appropriate methods within given time frames, and to review and evaluate such work
- demonstrate, through a dissertation, the ability to make a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge through independent research,
- demonstrate the ability to present and discuss research and research findings with authority, both orally and in writing, in national and international contexts, in dialogue with the scientific community and society at large,
- demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge, and
- demonstrate the potential to contribute to societal development and support the learning of others, both in research and education as well as in other qualified professional contexts.

Judgement and approach

For a doctoral degree, the doctoral student must:

- demonstrate intellectual independence and scientific integrity, as well as the ability to make ethical judgments regarding research, and
- demonstrate a deepened insight into the potential and limitations of science, its role in society, and people’s responsibility for how it is used.

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Scientific thesis (doctoral dissertation)

For a doctoral degree, the doctoral student must have received a passing grade for a scientific dissertation (doctoral dissertation) worth at least 120 higher education credits.

3.2 Licentiate Degree

A licentiate degree is awarded either after the doctoral student has completed a program of at least 120 higher education credits in a subject at the doctoral level, or after the doctoral student completed a portion of at least 120 higher education credits of a program intended to culminate in a doctoral degree, provided that the university decides that such a licentiate degree may be awarded at the university.

Knowledge and understanding

For a licentiate degree, the doctoral student must:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding within the research field, including current specialized knowledge within a defined part of it, as well as in-depth knowledge of scientific methodology in general and of the methods of the specific research field in particular.

Skills and abilities

For a licentiate degree, the doctoral student must:

- demonstrate the ability to critically, independently, and creatively, and with scientific rigor, identify and formulate research questions; to plan and, using appropriate methods, carry out a limited research project and other qualified tasks within given time frames, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge; and to evaluate this work,
- demonstrate the ability to present and discuss research and research findings clearly, both orally and in writing, in national and international contexts, in dialogue with the scientific community and society at large, and
- demonstrate the skills required to participate independently in research and development work and to work independently in other advanced professional activities.

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Judgement and approach

For a licentiate degree, the doctoral student must:

- demonstrate the ability to make research ethical assessments of their own research,
- the potential and limitations of science, its role in society, and people's responsibility for how it is used, and
- demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge, and to take responsibility for developing their knowledge.

Academic thesis

For a licentiate degree, the doctoral student must have received a passing grade for a scientific dissertation worth at least 60 higher education credits.

4. Eligibility and prerequisites

National regulations

To be admitted to a doctoral program, the applicant must

1. 1. meet the general eligibility requirements and any specific eligibility requirements that the university may have established, and
2. be deemed to possess the general aptitude necessary to succeed in the program. (Chapter 7, Section 35 of the Higher Education Ordinance).

Local regulations

Eligibility requirements must be met by the application deadline.

4.1 General eligibility requirements

National regulations

In order to meet the general eligibility requirements for doctoral studies, the applicant must have

1. completed a master's degree,
2. completed courses equivalent to at least 240 higher education credits (of which 60 credits must be at the master's level), or
3. have otherwise acquired knowledge in Sweden or elsewhere that is essentially equivalent.

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The university may grant an exemption from the general eligibility requirements for an individual applicant if there are special reasons. (Chapter 7, Section 39 of the Higher Education Ordinance).

Local regulations
Decisions regarding exemptions from the general entry requirements may not be delegated beyond the faculty board level. The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences has the authority to decide on any exemptions from the general entry requirements.

4.2 Specific eligibility requirements

Local regulations
In order to meet the specific eligibility requirements for doctoral studies in political science, the applicant must meet four conditions:

- completion of 150 higher education credits, including master's level studies worth at least 60 higher education credits, in the subject of political science or equivalent education,
- completion of an independent project (thesis) in political science that is worth at least 15 higher education credits and that has received a passing grade,
- completion of 90 higher education credits in subjects relevant to the programme
- English proficiency equivalent to at least 550 credits on a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

The eligibility requirements may also be met by those who have acquired essentially equivalent competence within or outside the country.

Any assessment of equivalence regarding eligibility is made by the Director of Studies, and the decision is made by the Department Board.

5. Vacancy announcement and admission procedure

National regulations
Only as many doctoral students may be admitted to third-cycle education as can be offered supervision and acceptable study conditions in general, and who have student financial aid (Chapter 7, Section 34 of the Higher Education Ordinance).

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The university may admit to doctoral education only applicants who are employed as doctoral students. However, the university may admit an applicant who has some other form of student financial aid, if the university assesses that the funding can be secured throughout the program and that the applicant can devote a sufficient portion of their time to the program to complete it within four years for a licentiate degree or an artistic licentiate degree, and within eight years for a doctoral degree or an artistic doctoral degree.

Admission decisions are made by the university. Anyone wishing to be admitted to a doctoral program must apply within the timeframe and in the manner determined by the university.

When a higher education institution intends to admit one or more doctoral students, it must announce this through an advertisement or an equivalent procedure. However, no information need be provided:

1. in the case of admission of a doctoral student who is to pursue the program within the framework of employment with an employer other than the university,
2. in the case of admission of a doctoral student who has previously begun their third-cycle education at another university, or
3. if there are similar special reasons.

Local regulations
Doctoral education is provided to the extent that available resources permit. Information regarding admission to doctoral education is routinely posted on the department's website, and calls for applications are published in Stockholm University's recruitment tool.

The Department may admit candidates to doctoral studies twice a year. Admission decisions are made by the Department Board. The application deadlines are 6 February and 15 November each year, provided that vacant positions for doctoral studies are announced. Announcements are made no later than four weeks before the application deadline. During the spring admission round, admission is granted to the department-funded positions in the doctoral program. Admission of externally funded doctoral students may also take place at this time. During the fall admission round, only externally funded doctoral students are admitted. Decisions regarding the admission of doctoral students with funding other than a doctoral position are made by the Faculty Board. During the spring admission round, admission decisions are announced no later than the first half of June of the same year, and doctoral studies begin during the fall semester. For the fall admission round, admission decisions are announced no later than mid-December, and doctoral studies begin during the spring semester.

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Before a decision on admission is made, the department must ensure that a funding plan is established. The funding plan must be signed by the prospective doctoral student, the supervisor, and the department chair, as well as by the external funder, if applicable. The funding plan must also be included in or attached to the individual study plan.

Applications are submitted via the University's recruitment system and can be accessed through www.su.se. The application should be prepared in accordance with the instructions in the recruitment system and include information about the highest completed degree, other degrees, current employment, language skills, references, and other requested information. Applicants for doctoral studies in Political Science must enclose the following documents with their applications (in Swedish, English, Norwegian, or Danish):

1. Certified copies of grades and all referenced qualification documents, including theses, articles, reports and other academic works.
2. An outline describing the planned research or research focus. It must specify the main focus, a potential dissertation topic, and preferably also a clarification of a possible research problem, theory, method, and materials. This outline is not binding but may be revised during the course of the research process.
3. The names of two academic references.

5.1 Assessment and selection criteria

National regulations

Selection among applicants who meet the requirements under Section 35 and 36 shall be made with regard to their ability to benefit from the program.

The university determines which assessment criteria are to be applied when assessing an applicant's ability to benefit from the program.

However, the mere fact that an applicant is deemed eligible to have previous education or professional experience credited for the programme must not, during the selection process, give that applicant priority over other applicants. (Chapter 7, Section 41 of the Higher Education Ordinance).

Local regulations

Admissions are processed by a designated appointments committee. The ranking of candidates who meet the general and specific entry requirements will be made with reference to their ability to benefit from the program. The following assessment criteria will be used in the selection process:

1. The quality of previous written works (e.g., theses, articles, and reports):

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- Empirical substance
- Independence in structure and analysis
- Clear research design, i.e., clear research problem, clear research questions, well-justified delimitations, explicit connections to theory, and methodological awareness.

2. Prospects of the thesis project being completed within the intended time frame:
   - Previously demonstrated ability to complete tasks within specified time limits;
   - Problem definition and cogency in the research plan.

Decisions to admit candidates to doctoral studies are made by the Department Board.

Neither the decision to admit someone to doctoral studies nor employ someone as a doctoral student can be appealed.

More detailed information about the admission process can be found on the Department's website.

6. Programme content and structure

Local regulations

The doctoral programme in political science is structured in such a way that the studies normally require four years to complete for full-time students. The studies may also be structured in such a way that they can be completed on a part-time basis within a maximum of eight years. The Department does not have separate admissions to licentiate studies; a licentiate degree may be taken as a part of a doctoral degree. The Department provides education in the form of courses, seminars, and thesis supervision. The scope of the programme is expressed in terms of higher education credits, where one year of full-time study is considered equivalent to 60 higher education credits. A doctoral degree comprises a total of 240 higher education credits. A licentiate degree comprises a total of 120 higher education credits.

A doctoral degree requires the following:

- courses equivalent to 60 higher education credits;
- 180 higher education credits for the individual degree project presented in the form of a thesis;
- oral defence of an academic thesis at a public defence seminar, as well as a passing grade for the academic thesis.

A licentiate degree requires the following:

- courses equivalent to 45 higher education credits;
- 75 higher education credits for the individual degree project presented in the form of a thesis;
- defence of an academic thesis at a seminar, as well as a passing grade for the academic thesis.

All doctoral students admitted to doctoral studies in political science must follow this general syllabus. Any collaborations in the form of cotutelle or individual doctoral students' involvement with research schools or externally funded projects may only affect the individual differences in the training that are documented in the individual study plan.

The detailed structure of the programme is specified in Section 6.3 and in the individual study plan.

Seminars
Throughout their training, doctoral students are encouraged to participate actively in the Department's general higher research seminars ('Allmänna seminariet'), as well as in one or more of the research seminars linked to the Department's research profiles.

Routines for study and career guidance
Academic and career guidance is provided on an ongoing basis throughout the doctoral program through discussions with the supervision group and supervisors, through alumni activities, through career activities for doctoral students organized by the faculty, and through regular development meetings with the director of PhD studies or the department leadership.

6.1 Individual study plan

Local regulations
All active doctoral students in political science must have an individual study plan. The study plan must be drawn up by the supervisor and the doctoral student no later than a month after the doctoral student has been admitted to a doctoral programme. It should include a description of and timeline for the research project, prospective courses, and planned research visits at foreign universities. It must include a work plan with concrete intermediate goals for one year at a time. The form of funding and funding plan must be specified in the study plan. The individual study plan should be reviewed at least once a year. The plan is approved by a decision of the department chair, acting on behalf of the department board, and following consultation with the doctoral student and their advisor.

The doctoral student is entitled to an extension of the time frame under special circumstances, which may involve sick leave, military service, elected positions in trade unions or student organisations, or parental leave.

For details regarding the establishment, administration, and follow-up of individual study plans, see Chapter 6, Sections 29 and 30 of the Higher Education Ordinance; the regulations for third-cycle education and examination; the guidelines for the Humanities; and the regulations of the respective faculties.

6.2 Supervision and other resources

National regulations

At least two supervisors must be appointed for each doctoral student. One of them must be appointed as the primary supervisor. The doctoral student is entitled to supervision during the program unless the president decides otherwise based on Chapter 6, Section 30 of the Higher Education Ordinance.

Doctoral students are entitled to change supervisors upon request.

If a doctoral student substantially fails to fulfil the obligations set forth in the individual study plan, the president shall decide that the doctoral student shall no longer be entitled to supervision and other educational resources. Before such a decision is made, the doctoral student and their supervisor shall be given the opportunity to present their perspective on the matter. The assessment shall be made based on their statements and other available information. The assessment must take into account whether the university has fulfilled its own obligations in accordance with the individual study plan. The decision must be in writing and include a statement of justification. Resources may not be withdrawn for the period during which the doctoral student is employed as a doctoral student or receives a doctoral student grant. (Chapter 6, Section 30 of the Higher Education Ordinance).

If funding for the program has been withdrawn in accordance with Chapter 6, Section 30 of the Higher Education Ordinance, the doctoral student may, upon application to the president, regain their right to supervision and other resources. The doctoral student must then demonstrate additional academic achievements of significant quality and scope, or otherwise establish a reasonable likelihood that they can fulfil their remaining obligations under the individual study plan. (Chapter 6, Section 31 of the Higher Education Ordinance)

Decisions to withdraw resources, as well as decisions to deny requests to regain resources in accordance with Chapter 6, Sections 30 and 31, may be appealed to the Higher Education Appeals Board.

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Local regulations
At least two supervisors must be appointed for each doctoral student (at least one of whom must have research supervision training). One of them must be appointed as the primary supervisor. The person appointed as the primary supervisor must be employed by the department or, if the department so decides, by another department or institute within the faculty. If the primary supervisor is not employed by the department, one of the other supervisors must be. All supervisors must hold a doctoral degree, and at least one of them must hold the rank of docent or higher.

In the first year of study, newly admitted doctoral students are part of a special supervision group with regular seminar activities, where two or three of the Department's teachers with a doctoral degree have a shared responsibility for the supervision. During this year, the director of PhD studies is formally the primary supervisor, and another researcher from the Department is supervisor.

Doctoral students are entitled to change supervisors upon request. In such cases, the doctoral student may turn to the director of PhD studies in the first instance, or the department chair in the second instance. Towards the end of the first year of the program, and when a thesis proposal has been presented and processed at a seminar, a permanent primary supervisor and at least one other supervisor will be appointed for each doctoral student. Once the supervisors have been appointed, the supervisors and the doctoral student should clarify their expectations of one another and agree on the forms of supervision. The doctoral student's right to supervision is specified in more detail in the Department's Implementation regulations for doctoral studies.

The supervision group/supervisor shall provide the student with advice and guidance on how to select specialized courses and on how to focus, plan, and carry out the dissertation work. Through regular contact, doctoral students shall keep the supervisor informed of the progress of their work and seek advice on its future direction.

The director of PhD studies is responsible for informing newly admitted doctoral students about the terms and conditions of the doctoral program and their employment status during the first semester.

6.3 Courses and examinations

National regulations
Exams that are part of a doctoral program shall be graded according to the grading system prescribed by the university. The grade shall be determined by a teacher (examiner)

specifically appointed by the university. (Chapter 6, Section 32 of the Higher Education Ordinance)

Local regulations
Mandatory courses totalling 45 higher education credits at the doctoral level are taken primarily during the first academic year. The courses are: Research problems in Political Science (7.5 credits), Research Fields I and II (15 credits), Research Methods in Political Science (15 credits), Applied Methods (7.5 credits). A doctoral degree requires an additional 15 higher education credits in elective courses, chosen in consultation with the supervisor. Doctoral students who plan to teach must also take the course "Introduction to Teaching Political Science" (5 credits), which is offered by the Department of Political Science and is included among the elective courses. Doctoral students who teach are also encouraged to take additional credit-bearing advanced courses in university pedagogy as part of their elective courses. The assessment forms for the mandatory courses are specified in the course syllabi. Research ethics assessments are covered in the mandatory course "Research Problems in Political Science" (7.5 credits).

6.3.1 Credit transfer

National regulations
A student has the right to receive credit for prior knowledge and skills, provided they do not differ significantly from the learning outcomes of the program for which they are intended to be credited. This knowledge and these skills may have been acquired through the student's successful completion of a higher education program at a Swedish or foreign institution of higher education. Students may also receive credits for other forms of education if it is documented in accordance with Appendix 2 to the Regulation (2015:545) on the Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning or if, pursuant to a decision under that regulation, it corresponds to a level in the framework.

Furthermore, a student may receive credit for knowledge and skills acquired through professional experience or other educational programs.

The university shall assess whether prior education or professional experience can be accepted for crediting, and unless otherwise specified by law or regulation, only the student is eligible for such crediting.

Local regulations
Doctoral students may apply to have credits from other programs recognized toward their doctoral studies. If courses from other programs are recognized, one week's funding is deducted for every 1.5 recognized higher education credits. Further information regarding the

deduction of recognized credits can be found in the Implementation Regulations for Doctoral Education.

Applications for credit transfers are submitted via Ladok. In their application, the doctoral student must attach a course syllabus or equivalent, as well as a course certificate, diploma, or other documentation verifying the student's participation. The supporting documentation must include the name of the course and the institution where it was taken, an English translation, the number of higher education credits, the examination date, and the examiner. The Director of PhD Studies must approve the credit transfer before registration.

Crediting of prior education should be made at the start of the program.

6.3.2 Other mandatory elements

Local regulations

During their first academic year, doctoral students take a mandatory course that does not generate higher education credits: the supervision group. The doctoral program includes additional mandatory components that do not generate credits:

1) A thesis proposal seminar: In the end of the first year of study, the doctoral student will present a thesis proposal.
2) A midterm seminar: When about half of the thesis project is completed, drafts of parts of the thesis will be presented.
3) A final review seminar: At the final review seminar, a near-complete thesis manuscript will be presented.

6.4 Doctoral thesis and public defence

National regulations

The degree requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Fine Arts degrees state that these degrees require**,** among other requirements, a doctoral dissertation that has received a passing grade. The doctoral dissertation must have been defended at a public defence. There must be an opponent at the public defence.

At least one person who is not affiliated with the university where the doctoral candidate is being examined must participate in the grading of the doctoral dissertation.

The university is to communicate regarding the grading system to be used, as well as regarding the public defence and grading in general.

Local regulations

The thesis must document the doctoral student's capacity for scholarly methodology and presentation, as well as their ability to independently study a research problem.

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The thesis must either be a unified, coherent scholarly work (monograph thesis) or consist of a number of academic articles, authored by the doctoral student, with an introductory chapter (compilation thesis). The requirements concerning the quality and scope of the research are the same for both types of theses.

The doctoral thesis must be equivalent to 180 higher education credits at doctoral level. The doctoral thesis may be written in either Swedish or English. A thesis that is not written in English must have a summary in English.

Compilation dissertations typically contain three to five academic papers. At least two of the papers in the dissertation must be authored solely by the doctoral student. In co-authored papers, the division of labor among the authors must be clearly documented (See "Guidelines for theses" on the Department's website for more information).

The doctoral thesis should be defended orally at a public defence seminar, after which it will be awarded a grade of Pass or Fail. The defence may be held in either Swedish or English. The grading process will consider both the content and the defence of the thesis.

The opponent and the members of the examining committee will be appointed by the Faculty Board. Provisions regarding the examining committee, etc., can be found in Chapter 6 of the Higher Education Ordinance, in instructions issued by the Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and in Stockholm University's regulations[1].

6.5 Licentiate thesis and licentiate seminar

Local rules

The academic thesis must be equivalent to 75 higher education credits at doctoral level. The academic thesis should, at a seminar taking place during the semester, be reviewed by an external reviewer with at least a doctoral degree and high expertise in relevant fields and methods. The thesis may be written in either Swedish or English and must have a summary in both Swedish and English. The thesis should be available at the Department and the University Library for at least two weeks (during the semester) ahead of the seminar. Other political science departments at Swedish higher education institutions should be notified of the upcoming defence.

After consulting with the department chair, the department board appoints an opponent, a chair, and an examiner for each licentiate seminar. As an alternative to an examiner, a grading committee consisting of three members may be appointed; all members must hold at least a doctoral degree, and at least one member must hold a professorship. This decision may also be

[1] www.samfak.su.se and www.su.se/forskning/utbildning-på-forskarnivå

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delegated to the department chair. (See the *Rules for Licentiate Seminars at the Faculty of Social Sciences* for more information.) The courses and the thesis will be examined using the grades Pass or Fail. The grade on the thesis should be reported to the Faculty Board.

In all other respects, licentiate theses are subject to the same regulations as doctoral studies in general (where applicable).

7. Transition arrangements

Students who began their doctoral studies according to a previous general syllabus are entitled to follow either the new syllabus or the one that was in effect when they were admitted. Requests to follow the new syllabus should be made to the head of department in consultation with the director of studies and the supervisors.

8. Additional information

Complementary advice and instructions are provided in special implementation regulations established by the Department. More general rules can be found in the Higher Education Ordinance, in the Faculty of Social Science's guidelines, and in Stockholm University's regulations.