

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

TE TARI TORANGAPŪ

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

GUIDE TO POSTGRADUATE STUDY

This Guide is intended for anyone who wishes to join the Department of Politics as a Masters or PhD student. It sets out what the Department of Politics expects of its postgraduate students, but also explains what the Department does to help students to benefit from the unique learning experience that postgraduate study presents.

Why Undertake Postgraduate Studies?

Staying on, or returning to university to do a Masters or PhD in Politics at Otago is one of the best career investments that you can make. Once considered a luxury, post-graduate study has now become essential for anyone who wants to secure a competitive edge in the job market where first degrees have become the norm. To excel in that market, you have to be able to identify problems, analyse them, place them in a broader intellectual framework, and systematically generate possible solutions to them. That, exactly, is what completing a research degree will teach you to do.

Above all, doing a Masters or a PhD is an exciting and challenging experience. There are few things as pleasing as developing and then sharing your insights and ideas with a broader research community, and having them recognise your contribution. At Otago we aim at helping you to experience this to the fullest.

An MA in Politics and a PhD in Politics are offered by the Department.

The Department also contributes to teaching and supervision in two taught Masters programmes:

MASTER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (MIntSt)

The MIntSt programme is multidisciplinary in nature and consists of four Masters level courses taught by staff from four disciplines and a 20,000 word research project which is started at the beginning of what is an intensive twelve month course. The components of the programme are:

International Politics (INTS 502) – Semester 1
International Legal Issues (INTS 504) – Semester 1
The Global Economy (INTS 503) – Semester 2
International History (INTS 501) – Semester 2
Research Project (INTS 505) – Full Year

Applicants for the MIntSt should normally hold a four year Honours degree at a level of Upper Second or above or hold the international equivalent, or have alternative qualifications or experience acceptable to the Pro – Vice Chancellor in the Humanities. For further details, please consult the MIntSt website at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/mintst>

MASTER OF INDIGENOUS STUDIES (MIndS)

(For detail, see: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/courses/qualifications/minds.html>)

Do I Qualify for an MA or PhD in Politics?

Minimum entry requirements for postgraduate study in Politics are:

- Completion with an overall average of B (70%) or above of a four-year degree (or equivalent accepted by Senate for this purpose) with Politics as a major.
- Achieving a minimum of a B+ (75%) in a major research essay or dissertation in Politics during the last year of the first degree.

A candidate who does not meet these requirements, but who has a first degree with an overall average of a B+ in the final year Politics courses (or courses in a cognate discipline), can apply to be accepted into the one-year Post Graduate Diploma in Arts – with Politics (PGDipArts – Politics).

Detail about the PgDipArts is available in the Department's Course Information Handbook and online at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/politicalstudies/hons.html#pgdip>

How Do I Apply?

There is more than one step involved in applying for a postgraduate programme, so make sure that you complete all the steps.

- Postgraduate study consists of a programme of research on a chosen research question. The first step is to decide on the research question that you want to explore, by discussing options with a staff member who you have identified as a potential supervisor. Staff profiles are available on the departmental web site at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/politics> If you are not sure whom to contact, approach the MA Coordinator or the PhD Coordinator for advice (contact details can be found below under the respective degree details).
- We ask prospective students to send a proposal to the Coordinator of the relevant degree. The proposal need to be no more than 2 pages in length, but it should encompass a working title, a clearly defined focus (ie a central research question), and a structure or framework that will help you achieve the stated goals of the doctoral project (ie section and chapter headings). In addition, we expect prospective candidates to send us a detailed CV, an academic transcript, a sample of your recent academic writing, and contact details of two or three referees. Once you have provided this information the Department will carefully review your proposal, and make a decision on whether we can support the proposal and provide academic supervision.
- Once you receive confirmation that supervision is available for your intended project you can go ahead and apply formally to the University of Otago for admission as a post-graduate student. This part of the application process is not handled by the Department of Politics, but by the University.
- Master of Arts students can access the application form from the Division of Humanities: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/humanities/policies/index.html>
- International students (students requiring a visa to study in New Zealand) have to apply through the International Office: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/international/postgraduate/index.html>
- All other students apply via: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/enrolment/>

Master of Arts (MA)

The Master of Arts in Politics is a research-based programme with a minimum duration of one year. Students can start at any time of the year and they engage in a programme of research and learning leading to the production of a thesis of 30 000 to 40 000 words, which is internally and externally assessed. The MA can be done on a full-time or a part-time basis. It typically takes twelve to eighteen months of full-time study for students to complete a dissertation ready to submit for examination. Although students can start at any time acceptable to their supervisor, we recommend that they enrol at the beginning of the month as fees are charged for the entire month even when they enrol at the end of it. For further details students should contact the Department's MA Coordinator, Dr Vicki A. Spencer vicki.spencer@otago.ac.nz

Entry requirements

The Master of Arts is aimed at candidates who have completed a four-year Arts degree with Politics as a major, and who have achieved at least a B+ average across the papers/courses in their final year *and* at least a B+ for their dissertation at the Honours level in Politics or a cognate discipline. Acceptance as a candidate for the MA degree also depends upon the Department being able to provide adequate expert supervision in the intended area of research.

Admission

Applications are to be made to the Division of Humanities Academic Administration Officer and should be accompanied by a 1-2 page outline of the proposed research (working title, brief summary of the research problem to be tackled, methods to be used, and mention of any consultation with Politics staff). If you are also applying for an Otago scholarship, you should submit both applications together.

Before the Department can approve an application, a staff member must be willing and able to act as a supervisor to guide the candidate through the research and learning programme appropriate for the project to be undertaken. The MA Coordinator will circulate student research proposals to staff members in the applicable subject area if a student has not already made arrangements with an individual staff member. Once the Coordinator has assessed eligibility for admission and a supervisor has agreed to take on the project, application forms go the Head of Department to be signed and then to the Divisional Office for final approval. If you have also applied for a scholarship, it then goes to the postgraduate office where your scholarship application is assessed separately. Application forms for the MA are available either from the Divisional Office or the Divisional website at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/humanities/policies/index.html>

Guidelines on how to get from a research interest to a research proposal can be found at.

Research themes

We strongly encourage a student to link his/her project with the research interests of staff members. Staff profiles are available on the departmental web site at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/politics>
See the *Appendix* for guidelines on how to develop a research proposal.

General

For detailed general information on the Masters degree at Otago University, please consult the following URL: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/masters/index.html>

Scholarships

There are a number of competitive scholarships for Masters studies. University of Otago Scholarships can be applied for at any time and are considered on a monthly basis, while there are various other scholarships with set annual deadlines. See

http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/postgraduate_scholarships.html

Contact:

Postgraduate Scholarship Administrators

Tel: 64 3 479 5292 or 64 3 479 9018

Email: scholarships@otago.ac.nz

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The PhD is the crowning achievement in a student's academic career and is recognised as a degree of in-depth and innovative scholarship. It comprises a programme of individual study, research, and learning with a minimum duration of two-and-a-half years, and a maximum of four years (full-time). It is possible to do the PhD as a part-time student, and prospective students can enrol at any time during the year. For further details students should contact the PhD-coordinator, Prof Philip Nel, philip.nel@otago.ac.nz

Entry requirements

Prospective candidates must have completed either

- a) a four-year Arts degree with a substantial research component (equivalent to an Honours dissertation at Otago), and must have achieved at least an upper second class Honours (75% plus) for their fourth year of study in Politics, or
- b) an accredited Masters programme with an appropriate research component

Where appropriate, the Department may insist that a candidate should complete a paper in Research Methodology before engaging in PhD study.

Acceptance as a candidate for the PhD degree depends upon the University being able to provide adequate expert supervision in the intended area of research.

Admission

Admission to the PhD degree programme shall be subject to the approval of the Senate.

Applications are to be made on the prescribed form available from the Research Higher Degrees and Scholarships Office (<http://www.otago.ac.nz/research/gradresearch/office.html>)

Prospective candidates should first of all contact the Head of the Department and provide him/her with an outline of the proposed research project in the form of a research proposal (see the *Appendix* for guidelines on how to develop a research proposal). If an application is recommended by the Department and approved by the University, a supervision committee will be appointed to guide the candidate through the research and learning programme appropriate for the project to be undertaken. The Department's recommendation depends on whether it has a suitable primary supervisor for the project proposed by the candidate.

Research themes

We strongly encourage a student to link his/her project with the research interests of staff members. Staff profiles are available on the departmental web site at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/politics>

General information on PhD study at Otago

PhD <http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/index.html>

See also the *Handbook for PhD study*

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/handbook/index.html>

Scholarships

1. The University of Otago provides a number of competitive scholarships for doctoral studies. Candidates can apply for these at any time during the year. See:

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/index.html?scholarship=Doctoralincludingphd>

Contact:

Postgraduate Scholarship Administrators

Tel: 64 3 479 5292 or 64 3 479 9018

Email: scholarships@otago.ac.nz

2. **New Zealand International PhD Scholarships**

The New Zealand International Doctoral Research Scholarships are funded by the New Zealand Government.

To be eligible for a scholarship, students must:

- a) Meet the requirements for entry into a doctoral programme at a New Zealand university.
- b) Hold an 'A' grade average or equivalent in their tertiary studies to date.

Applications will be considered from international postgraduate students who meet the above criteria, including those who have already applied for entry to a New Zealand university. A limited number of scholarships are available to students already enrolled at a New Zealand university. Applications close on the 15th of July each year.

- Further details and application materials are available on the <http://www.newzealandeducated.com> website, <http://www.newzealandeducated.com/scholarships>. In addition to scholarship application, applicants must apply and be accepted for postgraduate study at the University of Otago.

Once You Have Been Accepted ...

The rest of this Guide provides information on the obligations and entitlements of a student who has been accepted into one of the Department's post-graduate programmes. We begin by looking at the sources of information and assistance that you can draw upon, followed by a list of what the Department expects of you, and ending with the resources that the University/Department provides you with.

Assistance and Contacts

Channels of Communication

Your research supervisor is the first port of call should you be in need of academic assistance.

Matters relating to finances and resources can be discussed with the Department Administrator, Sharon Pine, sharon.pine@otago.ac.nz

Students in the MA and PhD programmes elect two class representatives (one for each programme) who represent their collective interests and who are invited to consult with the HoD.

The Associate Dean for Post-graduate Affairs: Division of Humanities is Prof Judy Bennett: adgs.humanities@otago.ac.nz. She is available to support post-graduate students with concerns that cannot be resolved at the departmental level.

The Graduate Research Services of the University is the place to go if you need assistance with enrolment matters <http://www.otago.ac.nz/research/graduate/otago004145.html>

Obligations and Expectations

- After enrolling, you should meet with your supervisor as soon as possible to discuss and finalise a student-supervisor agreement. This agreement is intended to provide clarity on mutual expectations, and to set out the frequency and nature of student-supervisor interaction. Templates for a Memorandum of Understanding can be downloaded at: (Masters) www.otago.ac.nz/study/masters/index.html#3 and (PhD) www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/#supervision.

- Normally, a supervisor and her student will meet once every fortnight for at least thirty minutes.
- Postgraduate students can take advantage of courses offered by the Student Learning Centre. For details see: <http://hedc.otago.ac.nz/hedc/sld/Postgraduate-Students.html>
- All post-graduate students and staff attend a Research Day that is held annually, usually in August or September. MA students attend this Research Day only once, while PhD students are required to attend every year for the duration of their study.
- Postgraduate students are obliged to attend and participate in the Department's Research Seminars.
- Every postgraduate student must present a paper on his/her research, either at one of the Department's Research Seminars, or during an annual Research Progress day (usually in August).
- From time to time, the Department hosts academic visitors of note and postgraduates are invited to join in the social events that are arranged to honour these visitors.
- The Department encourages postgraduate students to join the New Zealand Political Studies Association, and to participate in this organisation's annual conference. PhD students are encouraged to present a paper at one international academic conference at least (see "Entitlements" below for detail about the financial support available).
- MA and PhD students are encouraged to apply for available positions of tutor, by sending their CV to the Department Administrator, and by indicating which papers/courses they would want to serve as tutor. Although preference is given to full-time MA and PhD students in allocating tutorships, the Department cannot guarantee that you will be appointed as a tutor.
- Make sure that your detail is recorded on the post-graduate webpage of the Department's website. Please see the Department's Administrative Assistant for further assistance.
- If you are a PhD student you need to fulfil confirmation requirements. You can find details on confirmation at:
<http://www.otago.ac.nz/study/phd/handbook/otago001982.html>

Entitlements

1. Research material and expenses

The Department receives a small budget for MA and PhD students. The main purpose of this budget is to assist you in producing and binding the final product of your research – the thesis. In addition, the budget can be used for:

- Photocopying research material
- Ordering research material via inter-library loans
- Materials required for research and books relevant to the thesis

- Printing of visitor cards (PhD students only). One set of 100 cards, with university logo and personal information.

Please consult Sharon Pine on matters related to this budget.

2. Study Space

Desk space is allotted to post-graduate students. Telephone and printing facilities are also available. Please see Sharon Pine for further details.

3. Conference Support

Divisional Policy

‘The Division of Humanities will fund a PhD student \$2,500 + conference registration for **one** international conference, or actual fare and conference registration for **one** Australasian conference, where the conference is of international standing, and the most appropriate conference in the student’s research field.’

Department Household Rules

- PhD students to apply to Division in first instance and in all cases.
- All applications to the Department to be done on prescribed form that can be obtained from Sharon Pine, the Departmental Administrator.
- Department will provide up to \$2,000 per PhD student presenting a paper at international conference (once only per student, and only during the first three years of enrolment in the case of a full-time student). Supervisor to justify relevance of conference and paper to be delivered for PhD project. Departmental support may be used in conjunction with Division grant. Budget to be presented; HOD approval.
- Department will contribute up to \$400 per MA/PhD student for presenting paper(s) at annual NZPSA conference. PhD students may be supported for up to two conferences/workshops over first three-years of registration, but only if supervisor(s) and HoD are satisfied that sufficient research progress has been made since attendance of previous conference. MA students supported only once. Supervisor(s) must recommend attendance. Budget to be presented; HOD approval.
- All applications for international conferences must be accompanied by airfare quotes obtained from Orbit or Brooker. Local/Australian airfares can be ascertained electronically (students to consult with the Department’s Administrative Assistant in this regard).
- Students are encouraged to apply first for conference funding provided by organisers of main conferences/conventions in the field (IPSA, ISA, NZPSA, Australian Political Science Association, etc).

GETTING FROM A RESEARCH INTEREST TO A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A summary prepared by Philip Nel

Good research is *focused* research. Skilful researchers formulate a clear *research aim* as a means to focus their research, and then identify a number of *research questions* that flow from this aim.

Your choice of a research aim and research questions are determined by theoretical assumptions about the world and the meanings that we attach to the words that we use to speak about this world. Thinking carefully about how you want to focus your research thus also helps you to work through and question your own theoretical and conceptual assumptions.

Example:

I am interested in doing research on ‘the politics of global health’. This interest stems from my hearing about the Millennium Development Goals, of which three are related to health matters. However, I realise that ‘the politics of global health’ is a large topic, and that I have to focus my research to make it manageable. How do I go about it? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Decide what exactly it is that interests you about this topic

To do so, you have to consider:

- * What you mean when you use the concepts ‘politics’, ‘global’, and ‘health’. These concepts are controversial, so it is no use just to rely on a dictionary definition. Consider the different connotations that a term such as ‘politics’ have, for instance.*
- * Whether you want to focus on one specific issue, say action taken to address malaria, or on a number of issues (for example, communicable diseases in general)*
- * What the reigning theoretical approaches in this field of study are, and how you relate to them*
- * What you think you will have to forego if you do not undertake this study (why is this study important to you personally)*

Example:

After I took the steps suggested above, I decided that what really interests me is that a communicable disease such as HIV-AIDS seems to be affecting more women than men in certain parts of Africa. As I am committed to gender issues, and I want to make a contribution towards the achieving of the MDGs, this focus will satisfy me intellectually and emotionally.

Tip: Make sure that your research interest really excites you, and write down the reasons why it does. If you cannot come up with good reasons why you should be excited about a research interest, it is probably better to move on to something else.

2. Formulate a research aim/problem

The next step is to re-formulate your research interest into a focused research aim.

One excellent way to do this is to think in terms of a *problem* that you want to ‘solve’ through your research.

A research problem is a short statement of a significant intellectual puzzle that is implied by your research interest.

A well-formulated research problem suggests why others (your readers/audience) should also be interested in its solution.

Example:

I am interested in the gender-specific nature of HIV-AIDS in South and East Africa. Through my initial research I found that most policies aimed at addressing the AIDS epidemic in these parts of the world are impervious to the fact that AIDS seems to be affecting disproportionately more women than men. My research aim is to determine why this is so, and what the consequences of this are. In view of the devastating impact of HIV-AIDS on Botswana and Kenya in particular, the social cost of not ‘solving’ this research problem is considerable.

Tip: See how authors of journal articles use the first few paragraphs of their ‘Introductions’ to make their research problem also the reader’s problem – thus, getting and keeping the reader’s attention. If you do not know of any good articles to study as guides to good academic writing, ask your supervisor to suggest one or two.

3. The final step is to deduce a number of specific research questions that you have to answer in order to solve the research problem / meet the research aim. Ask yourself: *what are the specific questions that I have to answer in order to meet the stated research aim?*

Clearly formulated research questions will indicate what the appropriate methodology is that you should use. ‘The methodology’ refers to the theoretical frameworks, research sources, and research techniques that you will use in order to answer the research questions.

Examples of research questions flowing from the above formulation of my research aim:

- a) To what extent is HIV-AIDS a gender-specific phenomenon in Botswana and Kenya?
- b) What are the gender-specific dimensions of the AIDS debates in Botswana and Kenya (if any), and how are these dimensions reflected in policy documents / policy discourse?
- c) What are the degrees of success achieved by these policies?
- d) If these policies are largely unsuccessful, what could possibly explain their lack of success? How can we determine the *net effect* of the absence of a gender-specific focus? (There may be other reasons for the lack of success, and I will have to find ways to ‘control for’ these other factors.)

Tip: Try to formulate your research questions as clearly and unambiguously as possible. While you are writing down these questions, think about the possible meaning(s) of core concepts (such as ‘gender’, ‘gender-specific’, and ‘policy’ in the above example). If you are unsure about the meaning of core concepts, consult encyclopedias or glossaries of the social sciences. Do not rely solely on general dictionaries, though. They provide information only on the denotation of a term, not on its (often controversial) connotations in the social sciences.

4. You are now ready to draft a research proposal. A research proposal must contain the following:

- a) A statement of the research problem and its related questions and a brief analysis of the main concepts used in this statement** (conceptual analysis includes a discussion of the possible connotations of a contested concept and the reasons why you prefer one connotation over others)
- b) A discussion of the reasons why this research problem is important to the wider academic (and/or policy) community**
- c) A summary of the theoretical approach and research methodology that you intend to use in trying to solve the problem**
- d) A brief discussion of how you are delimiting the study** (= drawing a clear boundary between what you are focusing on and what will be excluded)