

Political Science Junior Qualifying Examination Handbook

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1 Policies

The Junior Qualifying Examination in Political Science is taken very seriously by the faculty. It consists of two parts: passing a Junior Seminar and writing a research design over the course of a semester with a professor in the department. The research design portion is typically based on the subject matter in a concurrent 300- or 400-level course, and consists of three parts: An initial short written proposal; a draft research design based on that review; and the final product, a revised research design. Junior Qual Samples are accessed via the Junior Qual Moodle.

The research design portion of the examination is typically written in conjunction with or following completion of a 300- or 400-level course that the student is taking in Political Science in the semester immediately preceding their senior year, but may be taken earlier as long as the two empirical introductory courses and one 300- or 400-level course have been completed. In the first week of classes, the student submits a request to write the research design to the qual czar and a professor with whom they are taking a 300- or 400-level course. No more than five designs can be written in a semester under any one professor. When there are more than five requests, the five design writers are selected at the department's discretion. Designs may not ordinarily be written based on the content of 200-level political science courses.

Students going on terms abroad must make early arrangements to complete the three requirements of the junior qualifying examinations. This is their responsibility. Standard accommodations can be made for students on terms abroad in their second semester of their junior year.

Junior Qualifying Examination Schedule

Week 1	Request to Qual Czar and Professor
Week 3	Proposal Due
Week 12 <i>Week 11 of instruction</i>	Draft Research Designs Due
Week 16 <i>Finals week</i>	Final Papers Due

2 Junior Qual Website

To assist you with the qual, a number of frequently-updated and electronic resources have been placed online. Please consult: http://academic.reed.edu/poli_sci/resources/juniorqual.html.

Important resources include:

1. **This Year's Deadlines.** These are posted at the beginning of the academic year and are updated to reflect any subsequent changes in dates or locations of events. The Qual Czar will also send any updates to the Qual mailing list via Moodle.
2. **Junior Qual Samples.** The Qual Czar has placed sample research designs on the qual Moodle.
3. **Core Source Materials for a Literature Review.** In junior seminar, you will typically write a literature review before writing your research design. This includes specialized sources for subfields of political science, sources for locating and borrowing books and journal articles, databases and indexes for scholarly literature and current news, tools for locating legal information, government publications, and statistics. See <http://libguides.reed.edu/politicalscience/psqual>

3 Components of the Research Design

To clarify the process, we have broken the research design into four parts. All four must be completed by the end of the second semester of a major's junior year, and are listed below in chronological order.

1. **Request.** The student submits a formal request to write a research design with a professor on the Qual Moodle.
2. **Proposal.** The proposal is a short (2-3 page) statement of the puzzle or question on which a literature review could be conducted.
3. **Draft Research Design.** The design puts forward a hypothesis or thesis for further research. The design should be about 5 pages. The design states clearly the thesis or hypothesis, significance of the question, method to be used, the steps to be followed, and the outcome expected.
4. **Final Research Design.** The final research design is expected to incorporate and be responsive to feedback from faculty during the entire process.

4 Evaluation of the Junior Qualifying Examinations

A student must successfully complete the junior qualifying examination by the end of their junior year in order to register for Pol 470, Thesis. The department as a whole evaluates the research design. However, the Proposal, Draft Research Design, and Final Research Design must be submitted by the specified due date to Moodle. Students who fail to submit one or more of these materials on time will fail the Examination. The Junior Qual Czar shall set the deadlines in with the approval of the department; particular professors may not alter these arrangements for students. Students who miss deadlines may petition the department, though this is far from the normal expectation of things. The Department expects all deadlines to be met in a timely fashion.

The Department would like to stress a few points on evaluation. First, and most obviously, incorporate whatever relevant feedback or advice you heard from your professor and/or Qual

Czar into the research design. Speak about it with your professor and the Qual Czar if any input is unclear. Failure to incorporate feedback can lead to a conditional pass.

Once your designs are in, the process from there proceeds as follows. The department will meet and go over the research designs. We assume that your work this semester is evolving and so the final product will represent improvements in detail, clarity and organization from the draft design.

Our priority will be with dealing with the senior orals and grades, so we are unlikely to get back to you sooner than a week after the end of the final examination period. As is the custom, the Department's assessment of your qual will be delivered by email as well as a hard copy to your mail box.

There are three possible outcomes for the qual: pass, conditional pass, and fail. Fail happens rarely, though it has happened. The conditional pass is more common than a fail assessment. This means that the submitted document lacks in some respect and the department places some conditions that you must perform to pass fully. This may include simply providing missing material, rewriting certain elements of the design, and so forth. Obviously the ideal situation for us and you would be if all of you passed the qual—and we certainly hope you do.

5 A Step by Step Guide

5.1 Some General Tips

In a general way, the Qual process (including both the junior seminar and the qual itself) reproduces various kinds of assignments that you are going to have to do during thesis though not necessarily in the sequence that it happens for thesis. The semester-long process allows you to redo components of the design, and the design is assessed only upon final submission at the end of the semester.

There are a number of different strategies for proposing a topic, conducting a literature review (in the junior seminar), and writing a research design (for the qual). The junior seminar and the qual are designed to complement each other, and most students find it advantageous to take both in the same seminar. The samples on the website reflect some possible approaches, but do not exhaust all valid options. Some options include:

- An empirical question (e.g., what explains the 1994 Republican Revolution?) with an specific, empirical literature review looking at different authors' explanations for the specific phenomenon (national disaffection with government and realignment) in question rather than election outcomes in general; the research design then proposes to investigate a "hole" in the empirical literature: e.g., rather than looking for national explanations, move to the regional level and identify individual "battlegrounds."
- An empirical question (e.g., what explains the size of China's nuclear arsenal?) with a mechanism-focused literature review investigating different general causal mechanisms (technical, economic, political, doctrinal) for the size of nuclear arsenals rather than explanations for China's specific arsenal; the research design lays out how to measure relevant variables and apply the theories to China.
- A theoretical question (e.g., what lessons do the Marxist and republican traditions of interpretation of Machiavelli have for contemporary politics?) with a literature review that is centered around interpretations of a particular theorist; the research design proposes to test the internal coherency of combining present-day leftist thought with classical Marxist readings of Machiavelli.

- A theoretical question (e.g., does the civic republican theory of negative liberty provide better guarantees of liberty?) with a literature review that looks at different writers on positive and negative liberty as well as theorists who have spawned the revival of civic republican notions of negative liberty; the research design proposes to examine the internal consistency of the latter theorists' arguments as well as its compatibility with a wider system of beliefs about liberty as non-interference.

5.2 The Proposal: Choose Your Research Question Thoughtfully

For the proposal, we would like a clearly stated question. If you think you can suggest one, propose the broad outlines of what you're thinking of framing for your research design. We know, of course, that your design may change. But try out what the possibilities might be for you and get feedback from us. Please keep in mind that your first requirement as a senior will be to submit a thesis proposal by the end of the first month to the division (not the department), so you might as well learn how to do it now. You do not have to have any faculty member sign off on your qual proposal before turning it in.

The way you define your question in the long run affects the number and range of sources and the quality of the arguments you can pull together. The choice of question can therefore be strategic. This is the first place in the assignment where your creative judgment and skill come into play.

Some questions are simply enormous (What is the literature on revolution, terrorism or Congress or John Rawls?) and there are many well-traveled paths. In these areas, the goal is to narrow the topic in a way that there is a puzzle, question, proposition or hypothesis to explore. For example, "Is a presidential system more liable to gridlock than a parliamentary system?" may yield a variety of different positions in comparative politics. Or "Has Hobbes really solved the "Problem of the Fool" in the *Leviathan*?" Each of these questions directs your attention towards a range of different answers to this question.

A question may also be a non-starter because there is very little information on it or all the information you can find on it is of one sort (say, journalistic coverage or by just one author). Here you may need to think about ways to revise your question so you can grasp a variety of research sources. Here your instructor may be able to give you good advice.

You must state in your proposal the significance of the question in political science. What is the existing literature you have found so far on this question? While understanding "what views of Osama bin Laden might exist in the United States?" might be a question of interest to you, you need to explain why a political scientist might be interested in this question.

5.3 Research Design: Crafting a Program for Research

Why draft a research design now? In Thesis, your first responsibilities will be to propose a research design and conduct a literature review, and your design must be something you can complete within a year. So the qual tests your ability to frame that project. One common error in the qual research design is to propose surveys or studies that would take either a portion of a lifetime or a multimillion dollar grant to complete. If you sense that this is the case with the strategy or question you have come up with, then you need to either rethink your strategy or refine your question. All seniors in the Division of HSS must submit a research proposal in the first month of thesis, so it is good to be familiar with this format. The Junior Qualifying Examination thus includes your mastering the first skill you need to draw on for Pol 470, thesis.

Your next task is consequently to design a draft research proposal. Typically, this will be based on a literature review you have written in junior seminar or another course. We expect the

initial research designs submitted to be *drafts*, just as the schedule says. That is, we expect substantial improvement on them when they are resubmitted at the end of the semester, incorporating faculty comments as well as other improvements along the way. Even so, if the draft is incomplete or inadequate, we may, in some cases, ask for resubmissions.

Even though the designs are drafts at this stage, the department expects to see the following elements incorporated into the designs.

1. You should offer a clear thesis or puzzle based on the review and state its significance to political science (not just to politics). Why is this research question important (the inevitable “who cares?” question)? This question should be plausible in light of the literature review you have just conducted. Think about the literature you have read and place your design within the framework of the literature.

2. Propose a way and methodology to test, prove, or disprove your thesis, outline the stages through which the research would proceed, and tell us what you expect to find based on the literature you have reviewed thus far. What would it take to convince you that you are wrong (identifying the truth conditions for your claim)? Whether the material is empirical or theoretical, each student must answer this question in plausible and feasible ways. Keep in mind that if you cannot answer this question, then there is no difference between what you are doing and mythology or rhetoric.

This document should be no longer than 5 pages and must have an acceptable system of citation. Your literature review should be of great assistance to you, but remember that a literature review opens the way for *many* research papers, not just one. If you are uncertain on how to proceed with the literature you have read, you should speak as soon as possible with your class instructor.

Though there is no expectation that the student will have the time to answer it, the strategy you propose *must be feasible*. This means that a student could pursue and complete the strategy you propose over the course of a year given the resources normally available to one.

This is of course not (yet at any rate) a research paper. If you *did* write a research paper based on the literature review, you would need to go over your review again and delete a lot of material as many of the sources you cover may not be directly related to your research design.

Your final task is to edit your draft research proposal and turn it in as your final research design. We expect improvement from the draft in this submission, incorporating faculty comments as well as other improvements along the way. Even so, if the draft is incomplete or inadequate, we may, in some cases, give you a conditional pass and additional guidance for completion.

6 Junior Qual FAQ

Is the junior qual a research paper? No, it is not. You are not researching a topic. In the literature review, you are cataloging what there is that has been written about a topic. Your review should have the capacity to identify various materials (books, articles, etc.) using various approaches, theses, or methodologies. In the research design, you are proposing a paper, not writing it.

How do I know if there is enough on a topic? One simple test is to go to the Library of Congress Catalog (<http://catalog.loc.gov/>) and type in the two or three keywords on your topic. If you type in “revolution,” for example, or “Marx and Weber,” you’ll get over 10,000 hits. Obviously you can’t read 10,000 books in a semester. Rethink your proposed idea until it is both scholarly and manageable.

How realistic should my research design be? Your research design should be something you can complete within a year. Your qual tests your ability to frame a project of the sort your thesis will be like. One common error is to propose surveys and studies that would take a portion of a lifetime or a multi-million dollar grant to complete. If you sense that this is the case with the strategy or question you are using, then you need to either rethink your strategy or refine your question.

What happens at the end of the process? There are three possible outcomes: pass, conditional pass, and fail. Fail means that the student must take the qual again (not necessarily another qual paper; it may be an exam instead). Conditional means that the student’s submissions were lacking in some respect and that the student is unprepared to start thesis until certain skills are mastered. In this case, the department assigns some conditions that must be satisfied before the student can register for thesis. This may include rewriting a portion of a submission or some additional exercise. All conditions must be satisfied by the start of the next semester, and failure to submit the condition is automatically a fail. Pass is the best result, of course, and you will receive written notification when you can register for thesis.

When does notification happen? We notify students after the end of the semester. Keep in mind that faculty are focused primarily on senior grades, and they may not get to reviewing the junior quals until well after finals week, depending on the semester.