

Guide for Ph.D. students in Security Studies (August 2025)

<http://www.k-state.edu/securitystudies/phdprogram/>

Forms and important information are available at

<http://www.k-state.edu/grad/academics/forms/>

When you start the program:

Get in touch with your major professor. At admission to the Ph.D. program, you were assigned to a member of the faculty who serves as your committee chair (your major professor). When you begin the program, you should set up a face-to-face meeting with that professor to talk about your background, research and career interests, and potential dissertation topics. You should keep your major professor informed of your progress through the program and any problems that arise.

You can change major professor if it makes sense for your research program. It does happen that students' research interests change over their time in the program, and you may find that you're better served with a new major professor. Unlike at the M.A. level, Ph.D. major professors must be specifically certified to supervise a doctoral dissertation. Usually, individual professors, the Security Studies office, and the Graduate School can tell you if a particular professor is certified to chair Ph.D. committees.

Keep in mind: no professor is obligated to take on any particular student. Make sure that you're changing major professors for a good reason and that the new major professor has agreed to take you on.

During your first semester:

Make it a point to network with your fellow graduate students and take advantage of professionalization opportunities that arise. This is more of a challenge for students doing the program remotely, so make sure you're investing the time to meet your peers and stay in touch with your major professor on your own outside of classes. The Graduate School, the Career Services office, and various academic programs sponsor speakers and opportunities to prepare you for completing your dissertation and finding a job once you're done. Quite often, these opportunities include online options.

You need to take responsibility for your own professional development. Seek out opportunities and begin thinking early about life after graduate school. Be proactive about career preparation, about building credentials through education, training, publications, and professional contacts.

Talk to the professors in your classes as well as other professors with relevant interests. You should be thinking early on about which professors would be helpful to work with on your dissertation.

Start thinking about a dissertation topic. As a Ph.D. student, you should have some idea about the sorts of research that interest you. In doing your coursework, look for ways to make your courses complement your dissertation by building expertise and surveying literature for potential topics.

Now is not too early to be preparing for your eventual admission to candidacy. Maintain careful records of the materials you cover in your coursework in order to help you prepare you to write your prospectus and the two required addenda that link your dissertation topic to central issues and schools of thought in both Political Science and History.

During your second semester:

Complete and submit your program of study to the Graduate School. The Graduate School requires a completed program of study by the end of your second semester. The program of study is a form listing the courses you plan to take and specifies the committee of professors who will oversee your dissertation.

It is quite common for your initial program of study to have a list of courses that does not precisely match what you eventually take; changing the program of study at a later date is relatively simple.

Ph.D. committee (aka supervisory committee)

<http://www.k-state.edu/securitystudies/phdprogram/#committee>

Part of the Program of Study is your supervisory committee. The Graduate School requires at least three members on the committee in addition to your chair. Four is the minimum; more is permissible, but you need to make sure you have a good reason. The Security Studies program requires at least one member from history, and at least one from political science—your committee chair / major professor counts for fulfilling that requirement.

It is possible to have faculty from outside KSU on the Ph.D. committee if they contribute particular expertise. Consult with your committee chair early to complete the necessary paperwork to add an outside member. It's certainly worth the effort for the right person, but it can take some time for grad school approval. Consult with your major professor if you think there's an expert on some aspect of your dissertation who would work well on your committee. Make sure you have a good reason: service as a committee member is not compensated.

The supervisory committee is extremely important. Start talking to potential members in your first semester. No professor is obligated to serve on any particular supervisory committee, so professors may quite reasonably expect you to take a course with them to demonstrate your commitment to their particular field of expertise. You should choose members of the committee for the particular contributions they can bring to your ultimate success in the program.

At some point in the second semester, meet with your supervisory committee so that all members can reach a consensus on your general plan and on your specific dissertation plan.

The dissertation topic

The Security Studies Ph.D. is an interdisciplinary program, but it has not specified what that means in terms of the forms dissertations may take. You should make sure that all members of the committee agree on the general shape of your dissertation. It is an excellent idea for you to circulate by email to your committee your notes on the meeting and the conclusions the group reached.

You should plan on keeping your committee informed of your progress. While a face-to-face meeting of the entire committee every semester should not be necessary, a detailed email update to the committee every semester should be the minimum.

Progressing through the program and coursework

<http://www.k-state.edu/securitystudies/phdprogram/#coursework>

Use your time efficiently. Take the required courses (HIST 911 and 912; POLSC 900 and 901) as soon as they are offered so you're not stuck waiting for them. Make your summers count. While only a couple of courses are offered in the summer, you can also take language classes or work independently on your research.

Directed readings courses (HIST 985 or 986 and POLSC 985) arranged with a faculty member are a potential option when summer course offerings are limited (as is often the case). Keep in mind that the Graduate Handbook (Chapter 3.D.2) limits you to six credits (two courses) of individualized courses, and you need to save three credits for your final 985/986 with your major professor.

Note that a student is expected to sit for the exam for admission to candidacy in the semester that immediately follows their coursework in HIST 985/986 or POLSC 985.

Exam for admission to candidacy (“Preliminary Examination”)

<https://www.k-state.edu/securitystudies/academics/phdprogram/exams.html>

When a student has completed all coursework and drafted the dissertation prospectus and addenda, she or he is ready to sit for the exam for admission to candidacy. The Graduate School calls this the “Preliminary Examination.”

Note these deadlines:

- The Graduate School requires the student to submit the form “Request for Preliminary Examination Ballot” at least one month in advance of the meeting date.
- The Security Studies program requires that the student circulate to all members of the Ph.D. committee the prospectus and addenda at least one month in advance of the meeting date.

To be admitted for candidacy, the Ph.D. committee must give the student a grade of “Pass” on the prospectus, the Political Science addendum, and the History addendum. These grades are developed in an assessment of both the written materials and the oral component done in the meeting with the Ph.D. committee.

A detailed description of how the admission of candidacy works, what materials are required, and how one’s performance can be accessed here: [Exam for admission to candidacy.](#)