MEMORANDUM

TO: John Townshend
   Dean, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences

FROM: Elizabeth Beise
      Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs

SUBJECT: Proposal to Modify the PhD in Government and Politics (PCC log no. 13057)

The proposal to modify the non-coursework requirements of the PhD in Government and Politics has been administratively approved. A copy of the approved proposal is attached.

The change is effective Fall 2014. Please ensure that the change is fully described in the Graduate Catalog and in all relevant descriptive materials.

MDC/

Enclosure

cc: Marilee Lindemann, Chair, Senate PCC Committee
    Barbara Gill, Office of Student Financial Aid
    Reka Montfort, University Senate
    Erin Howard, Division of Information Technology
    Pam Phillips, Institutional Research, Planning & Assessment
    Anne Turkos, University Archives
    Linda Yokoi, Office of the Registrar
    Alex Chen, Graduate School
    Wayne McIntosh, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences
    Irwin Morris, Department of Government and Politics
THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK
PROGRAM/CURRICULUM/UNIT PROPOSAL

- Please email the rest of the proposal as an MSWord attachment to pcc-submissions@umd.edu.

- Please submit the signed form to the Office of the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs, 1119 Main Administration Building, Campus.

College/School:
Please also add College/School Unit Code-First 8 digits: 01202800
Unit Codes can be found at: https://hypprod.umd.edu/html_Reports/units.htm

Department/Program:
Please also add Department/Program Unit Code-Last 7 digits: 1281701

Type of Action (choose one):
☒ Curriculum change (including informal specializations)
☐ Curriculum change for an LEP Program
☐ Renaming of program or formal Area of Concentration
☐ Addition/deletion of formal Area of Concentration
☐ Suspend/delete program

Italicics indicate that the proposed program action must be presented to the full University Senate for consideration.

Summary of Proposed Action:
The field of International Relations (IR) within the Department of Government and Politics proposes to change the format of their Ph.D. comprehensive exam from a written take home exam only to a written take home exam with an oral exam component. The current exam requires students to answer 3 questions from 4 different sections. The field chair designs the exam using questions solicited from members of the field. Students take the exam home and have 32 hours to answer the questions. A committee of 3 faculty members from the field grades the exam. The IR faculty agree that the current exam falls short in terms of evaluating students' ability to critically assess and compare bodies of IR scholarship and to identify and design plans for new research—key goals of the exam. The IR faculty find that students spend too much time and effort on summarizing and describing relevant literatures at considerable length while not enough effort is devoted to synthesis, critical assessment, and developing ideas for new directions in research. To ensure more focus on these areas, the IR faculty proposes that the written exam be supplemented with a follow-up oral exam and that students be given a strict limit of no more than 10 pages per answer on the written exam.

Departmental/Unit Contact Person for Proposal: Michael J. Hanmer

APPROVAL SIGNATURES - Please print name, sign, and date. Use additional lines for multi-unit programs.

1. Department Committee Chair
   Michael J. Hanmer
   3/14/14

2. Department Chair
   Donald Morgan
   3-10-14

3. College/School PCC Chair
   Charles Stansor
   3/14/14

4. Dean
   Wayne McIntosh
   3/14/14

5. Dean of the Graduate School (if required)
   Wayne McIntosh
   3/14/14

6. Chair, Senate PCC
   Maurice Fain
   5/2/14

7. University Senate Chair (if required)
   Elizabeth 
   5/9/2014

8. Senior Vice President and Provost
Proposal to Change the Format of the Comprehensive Exam in International Relations
Submitted by Department of Government and Politics to BSOS PCC

Goals of Comprehensive Exam
The goals of the comprehensive exam in International Relations (IR) are to evaluate students’ abilities to
• understand the core theories and empirical findings in the field,
• critically assess and compare relevant bodies of IR scholarship,
• identify and design plans for new research, and
• teach IR courses to undergraduate and graduate students.

Structure of Current Exam
The current written exam requires students to answer a total of three questions from four different sections. Each section covers a different portion of the IR field, including general theory, conflict and security, international political economy, and international organization and law. In each section students are given at least two questions from which to choose. The field chair designs the exam using questions solicited from members of the field. Students take the exam home and have 32 hours to answer the questions. A committee of three faculty members from the field grades the exam.

Concerns with Current Exam
There is agreement among the IR faculty that the current written exam falls short in terms of evaluating students’ ability to critically assess and compare bodies of IR scholarship and to identify and design plans for new research. The concern of IR faculty is that students spend too much time and effort focused on just summarizing and describing relevant literatures at considerable length while not enough effort is devoted to synthesis, critical assessment, and developing ideas for new directions in research. GVPT has not gone through enough exams to leverage the learning outcomes assessments in drawing these conclusions.

Proposed Change and Rationale
As a result of the concerns identified above, the IR faculty proposes that the written exam be supplemented with a follow-up oral exam and that students be given a strict limit of no more than 10 pages per answer on the written exam. The general format of the written exam would otherwise remain the same as described above.

The reason for adding the oral exam is that it will provide an opportunity for faculty to better assess the knowledge and competency of the students on issues of critically analyzing and comparing literatures and developing plans for new research through a series of follow-up questions that will build off of the student’s written exam. The oral exam is intended therefore to be linked closely to the student’s written exam with the oral defense focused on concerns or questions faculty have after reading the written exam. The oral exam will be limited to 1.5 hours and will be scheduled as soon as feasible but no later than four weeks after the written exams have been completed by students. Every effort, however, will be made to schedule the oral defense within two weeks of the written exams for the benefit of the students and faculty alike. The faculty serving on the oral defense committee will be the same committee members who have read the student’s written exam.

With this new proposed format, students’ grades on the comprehensive exam will be determined on the basis of their overall performance on both the written and oral components. Performance on both components will be combined to reach a final decision on the student’s grade. As a result, students will not be assigned separate grades on each part of the exam but will instead be graded on the basis of whether they demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the scholarly literatures based on the cumulative evidence provided in their written answers and oral defense. If the committee, however, decides that the student has not passed the comprehensive exam because he/she did not demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and understanding of work in the field, then the student will be given an opportunity to retake the written exam with another follow-up oral exam during the next regularly scheduled date for taking comprehensive exams. This follows the current retake option for the written exam.
The benefits of the newly proposed format for the comprehensive exam are threefold:

- faculty will have more opportunities to gain information about student abilities and competency through the oral defense and that added information can help to address gaps and concerns that might have been raised by the student’s answers on the written exam;
- the limit of 10 pages per answer on the written exam will help students think harder about what is most important to convey in their answers and encourage them to synthesize and develop more general points and conclusions about the literature as opposed to a series of detailed summaries of individual pieces of scholarship;
- the oral defense will provide an additional opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge and competency when faculty have reservations regarding the student’s performance on the written exam. A strong oral defense can help reveal the full extent of the student’s knowledge and abilities that was not apparent in the written portion of the exam.

**Process**

The process for taking the paper/oral comprehensive exam is as follows. First, the student will notify the Director of Graduate Studies of his/her intention to take an exam in International Relations and provide: 1) a list of faculty who might serve on the committee, and 2) provide syllabi for the courses taken toward the field requirements. Next, the Director of Graduate Studies and the International Relations field chair will charge a committee and inform the student who will serve on the committee. Thus far, this follows current practice. New to the process is that the faculty exam committees and the students taking the exam will begin the process of scheduling the oral exam through the Graduate Coordinator on December 1 for January exams and July 1 for August exams. The oral exam dates should thus be set and communicated to the students and faculty committee members by December 7 for January exams and July 9 for August exams. The student will then take the written exam during the regularly scheduled periods as determined the Department with the oral defense to be scheduled within two weeks after the written exams.

If the format change is passed, students admitted under the current exam format will have the option to take the exam under the new or old format.

The proposed change will not have any impact on resources, related programs, or other relevant contexts.