

The Program in Political Philosophy, Policy, and Law (PPL) at the University of Virginia

Student Handbook 2025-26

Welcome to the Program in Political Philosophy, Policy, and Law for the 2025-26 academic year. This year the program is being run by Director Justin Snedegar and PPL Postdoctoral Fellow Elizabeth Levinson. This is our first year working together, and we're looking forward to making PPL as rewarding as it can be. We're also excited to work with all of you.

This handbook is the first place you should go if you have questions about the program. We'll also post useful materials on the PPL website and distribute them to you either as part of your required PPL classes or by email. Consider this handbook the most up to date and authoritative source on program policies and requirements. If you have any questions that are not addressed in the handbook, please ask one of us.

Justin Snedegar (Director)
Elizabeth Levinson (PPL Postdoc)

I. What is PPL?

The major in Political Philosophy, Policy and Law (PPL) provides undergraduate students with an opportunity to pursue intensive study of the connections between political philosophy and legal theory, legal thought and historical change, law and public policy. The major is based firmly on the view that the study of law has a rich humanistic tradition and that its pursuit encourages sustained reflection on the fundamental values of political association. Because the domain of law, policy, and political philosophy is huge, a principal objective of the major is the integration of diverse disciplinary perspectives. But interdisciplinary dialogue on political and legal ideas, processes, doctrine, and policies can be fruitful only if the participants engage one another from a position of disciplinary strength. As a major, PPL is grounded on this presumption.

II. Faculty & Staff

Director: Justin Snedegar, PPLProgram@virginia.edu

Office: Cocke Hall 107

Office hours for Fall 2025: Tu & Th 11-12, or by appointment

Assistant Director: Elizabeth Levinson, qwc8uj@virginia.edu

Office: Gibson Hall 342

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Administrative: Sharon Marsh, mmm4@virginia.edu

III. Major Requirements

1. General Requirements

In order to graduate, PPL students must complete:

- a. Three required PPL courses
- b. Three co-requisite courses
- c. An eight-course interdisciplinary core

2. PPL Courses

- a. PPL 2010 Morality, Law, and the State – Fall semester of third year
- b. PPL 4005 Thesis Preparation (1 credit) – Fall semester of fourth year. If study abroad or scheduling conflicts make this impossible, alternative arrangements may be made in consultation with the director.
- c. PPL 4010 Capstone Research Seminar – Final semester

3. Co-Requisites

The co-requisites are (1) one course in the history of political thought, (2) one course in legal history and public policy, and (3) ECON 2010 (Microeconomics). Co-requisite courses must be completed by the end of the third year.

The first two co-requisites must be selected from the following menus. If you think a class not on this list should count as a co-requisite, let the Director know.

- a. History of Political Thought
PHIL 1730 Introduction to Moral and Political Philosophy
PHIL 2560 Classical Political Philosophy
PHIL 2780 Ancient Political Thought
PHIL 3640 Political Philosophy
PLPT 1010 Introduction to Political Theory
PLPT 3010 Ancient and Medieval Political Theory
PLPT 3020 Modern Political Theory
PLPT 3030 Contemporary Political Theory
- b. Legal History and Public Policy
HIUS 3752 Early American Law
HIUS 3753 Modern American Law
PLAP 3810 Constitutional Interpretation
COMM 3410 Commercial Law I

No more than one co-requisite course may count toward the fulfillment of the requirements for the interdisciplinary core. ECON 2010 may NOT count toward your core classes if you are minoring in Economics.

4. Interdisciplinary Core

In consultation with the director or assistant director, each student will craft an interdisciplinary curriculum of eight courses. The requirements for the interdisciplinary core are as follows:

- a. At least three courses must deal with the theoretical foundations of PPL; these courses must be from at least two different departments.
- b. At least three courses must deal with policy; these courses must be from at least two different departments.
- c. The other two courses may come from either category.
- d. At most one course from the PPL co-requisites may be counted toward the interdisciplinary core.

Please note that any PLPT course and any PHIL course with significant ethical/political content will count as a theoretical foundations course.

Graduate level courses above the 5000 level are permitted, but only with the consent of the instructor. These courses must be taken as independent studies.

For an extensive but non-comprehensive list of courses that count towards the interdisciplinary core, please see below. If you think a course you have taken or are considering taking should count but is not on the list, see 'Course Approval', below.

5. Final Project

All PPL students are required to submit a research project/thesis in their final semester in the program. The PPL research project should be an article-length paper (35-40 pages), on some fairly focused topic.

The range of possible topics is enormous. The one requirement is that the topic be genuinely interdisciplinary, blending philosophical and empirical analysis, seeking to both evaluate and explain the political institutions, legal practices, or policies under discussion.

Different topics require different approaches, so there is no one-size-fits-all template for a PPL thesis. The only things that are clearly excluded are: 1. Purely empirical studies purporting to explain institutions/events/texts/historical episodes with no reference to arguments about their philosophical significance; 2. Highly theoretical philosophical speculation with no connection to political, legal, moral practices.

Students complete their capstone projects in PPL 4010, which is offered only in the Spring semester. However, all 4th year students must also take the 1-credit PPL 4005 Thesis Preparation class in the prior Fall semester. This provides a formal mechanism by which students can start to identify topics, advisors and working bibliographies so that these are in place by the time they start their capstone class in January.

Final grades for your research project are agreed between your capstone instructor and your thesis advisor, subject to review by the Director (to ensure consistency across the two sections). PPL is a distinguished major, and so students are eligible for honors. Please note, however, that you can receive honors only if your final UVA GPA is 3.4 or higher. (This is a College

rule, not a PPL rule.) Levels of honors (distinction, high distinction, highest distinction) are determined by the Director, in consultation with your capstone instructor.

IV. Timeline for Students

Third Year

1. Ensure that your major has been changed to PPL in SIS
2. Take PPL 2010 in the fall
3. Think about possible topics for your final year research project. Don't delay until the last minute. Keep in mind that you will not only need a topic, but also an advisor. It's often easier (but not necessary) to secure an advisor with relevant expertise if you have taken a class with them; bear this in mind as you select your classes. Contact the director or assistant director if you need advice about possible research topics.

Fourth Year

4. Ensure that your major has been changed to PPL in SIS
5. Take PPL 4005 in the fall, where you will identify a thesis topic and faculty advisor
6. Meet with the director or assistant director in the fall to fill out course checklist
7. Take PPL 4010 in the spring

V. Policies

1. Course Approval

You must obtain approval from the Director for any courses you wish to count toward your PPL major that are (a) neither required PPL courses nor (b) pre-approved PPL courses. Approval for other courses may be sought at any time (before, during or after the completion of a course). To seek approval for a course, please submit an email to the Director, explaining why you think the class ought to count toward your major, attaching a course syllabus if available.

Please note that the Director's approval won't be immediately reflected on SIS. The fact that an approved course is not listed as such on SIS is not a reason for concern. This is why it is a good idea to keep your course checklist up-to-date.

2. Double Majors

PPL Students are permitted to double-major, subject to satisfying College rules and those of other Major concentrations (always be aware of the rules for your other major). The college permits only 2 courses to count simultaneously toward two majors, and some departments impose further restrictions. College rules for double majoring: <https://college.as.virginia.edu/declaremajor>.

3. Minors

In general, the College prohibits courses from counting toward both a minor and a major simultaneously. They make some exceptions for students in Interdisciplinary majors like PPL, but even then there are restrictions, so you should keep this in mind as you plan your classes. The College rules about minoring are discussed at the website above, and also at: <http://college.artsandsciences.virginia.edu/declareminor>. Students may not minor in PPL.

4. Transfer Courses

PPL students may only count up to six credits of class work from non-UVA institutions without permission. You may petition the director to allow an additional 3 credits toward the major.

5. Study Abroad

PPL students are encouraged to pursue study abroad programs. The one restriction is that you cannot study abroad during either your first or last semester in the PPL program (normally the Fall of your third year and the Spring of your fourth year) because these are semesters when the mandatory PPL 2010 (gateway) and PPL 4010 (capstone) are offered.

Note that although PPL majors are all expected to take PPL 4005 (thesis preparation seminar) in their final Fall semester, an exception to this rule can be made for those who plan to study abroad during that semester. However, to qualify for that exception, students must make arrangements with the Director for some alternative form of thesis preparation during the Study Abroad period. You should consult the Director before departing for your Study Abroad program if possible, and in any case before the sign-up period for Spring classes.

6. Registration and SIS

SIS can be difficult, particularly with interdisciplinary majors. If you have questions or concerns, please contact the director. We will get your issues sorted out, but, in the meantime, don't worry too much. If you want to know where you are in terms of program requirements, please consult the course checklist.

PPL Course Checklist

Name:

Graduation semester:

PPL Courses:

Course	Semester	Grade
PPL 2010: Morality, Law, & the State		
PPL 4005: Thesis Preparation		
PPL 4010: Research Seminar		

Co-requisites:

Requirement	Course	Semester	Grade
ECON 2010	ECON 2010: Microeconomics		
History of Political Thought			
Legal History and Public Policy			

Interdisciplinary Core (at least 8)

Theoretical Foundations (at least 3):

Course	Semester	Grade

Policy & Law (at least 3):

Course	Semester	Grade