Course Objectives:

This seminar creates a structured environment in which the student will study research approaches and methods for each of the four fields within the political science discipline, fully conceptualize his or her honors thesis, and complete the first phase of the thesis research. Each member of the class will develop a thesis proposal, give an oral presentation in class about his or her research project, and write the first chapter of the thesis. Students are also strongly encouraged to study past honors theses, both within and outside his or her subfield. The seminar will also serve as a “capstone” course by exposing each student to specialized research from each of the fields within the political science discipline.

Course Requirements

I. Thesis Memo and Proposal
1. Memo. Confirms Field Selection, Advisor Selection, Topic Selection, Statement of Argument, Preliminary Outline, signed by Advisor, 1 page in length, due 4 September.

2. Eight-page proposal. Discusses thesis argument in detail. Makes a claim and indicates how that claim will be supported in the thesis with evidence/data/textual references. Research method/approach clearly summarized. Includes detailed outline for each chapter, and annotated bibliography (i.e. a bibliography with three or four sentences on each item, indicating how each text will be useful for you). Submit three copies of the proposal, two to Prof. Smith and one to your Advisor. Send a third copy to the rest of the class via e-mail. Comments from the Advisor will be reflected in your grade. Due before fall break 10 October.

II. Seminar Presentation

1. During Part II of the course, each student will give an oral presentation on their thesis projects. One, two or three students will present during each class meeting. During this part of the course, the class will meet twice a week for two hours each meeting.

For further information about the presentation requirements, see my guidelines below.

III. Thesis First Chapter

1. An essay that features a clear and concise statement of the thesis research problem and your argument; a comprehensive and critical engagement with the relevant literature in the field; an initial development of the different dimensions of your argument; a discussion of the appropriate research approach/method that you will use; a detailed outline of the chapters for the rest of the thesis; a statement of anticipated and/or preliminary findings; and an indication of anticipated research challenges. The first chapter may be revised later, but the version that you submit for this course must be fully edited in the Chicago Manual of Style format, as presented in Turabian. 15 pages in length. Submit three copies, one to Prof. Smith and one to your Advisor. Advisors will be asked for specific comments that will be reflected in your grade. Due 5 December.

Please see the remarks about the thesis below.
Seminar participation

1. Attendance. It is expected that you will attend all of the course meetings. More than one absence without a documented medical excuse is not allowed, and will reduce your grade substantially.

2. Class participation. Each student should study their peer’s proposals in advance, ask informed questions during class, and participate in a constructive manner in the peer reviews of the students’ thesis proposals.

Course Grading

Seminar Presentation: 20%

Thesis Proposal: 30%

1. Memo: 5 %

2. Proposal: 25 %

Thesis First Chapter: 40%

Seminar participation: 10 %
Grades and deadlines

The organization of an honors thesis program involves complex scheduling. A professor typically requires one or two weeks to read and to return your work. Further, your ability to meet the deadlines specified in this syllabus will serve as an indication of your organizational skills. For these reasons, all deadlines are absolute. Any work that is submitted after the deadline will receive at least a one and a half letter grade penalty (i.e. a B+ grade will automatically become a C-) unless you present a documented medical excuse. Please also note that in order to pass this course as a whole, you must achieve a passing grade in every one of the course requirements. Furthermore, students obtaining a grade of less than B+ in GOVT 494 may be asked to leave the Honors Program.

Resources

1. The library.

I will assume that you have already obtained a fluent mastery of the library resources, including the latest research aids that are available through the library gateway. If you have not done so, I would urge you to explore these resources as soon as possible by viewing the library web pages and asking the reference librarians for assistance.

2. Course texts.


“Seven Steps to Effective Library Research.” Available at: [http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref](http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref), click on Tutorials and Skills Guides.


4. Student thesis proposals. To facilitate peer review of thesis proposals, the students will distribute their proposals to the class via e-mail.

5. Meeting with Advisors. It is your responsibility to meet on at least a weekly basis with your thesis advisor.

**Working With Human Subjects**

If any aspect of your research involves some sort of interaction with others (interviews, fieldwork, oral history, etc.), then it is imperative that you familiarize yourself with Cornell’s Human Subject Research Protocol. Go to the website [http://www.osp.cornell.edu/Compliance/UCHS/homepageUCHS.htm](http://www.osp.cornell.edu/Compliance/UCHS/homepageUCHS.htm) and establish whether or not you must file an application. If your project does come under the jurisdiction of this policy, then you must obtain official permission to proceed with your research before you begin any work with human subjects.

**Class Schedule**
Part I

(Before fall semester begins: Meet with your advisor. Sharpen your research proposal. Conduct reading in the field, in consultation with your advisor.)

28 August

Introduction. Presentation of course syllabus. Each student will briefly outline his or her tentative thesis proposal. Appropriate Advisors will be suggested.

4 September: Memo due.

For the rest of the first half of the course, students should work steadily, on an independent basis and under the supervision of their advisor, on the development of their thesis proposal, their plan for the project as a whole, and their initial research. At this stage in the Honors Program, students are strongly encouraged to read at least two or three of the past theses in their subfield. Students are advised to read at least one thesis from outside their subfield as well. A collection of the past theses from the Department which received a grade of summa or magna have been placed on reserve at Uris Library.

10 October

No class meeting, however, your thesis proposal is due. Submit two copies to Prof. Smith (place in faculty mailbox by 4 pm, 10 October) and one copy to your Advisor. Send a copy via e-mail to the rest of the class.

(fall break)
Part II

The class will meet twice a week. Attendance is mandatory. Students will present their thesis proposals, by subfield, in alphabetical order.

16 October

American Politics

Peter Cohl
Kate Finley

21 October

Russell Franklin
Jason Frasco

23 October

Jo Galardy
Stacy Pace
28 October

Mike Rosenberg
Brian Schartz

30 October

Michael Sellman

Comparative Politics

Daniel Braun

4 November

Morgan Brihannala
Jason Canavan

6 November
Tian (Sarah) Huang
Nerses Setyan

11 November
-
Ilya Shulman
Josh Tetrick

13 November
International Relations
-
Sahar Hakakian
Michael Holloway

18 November
-
Hania Kronfol
Greg Seaberg

20 November
Linda Toth

(Thanksgiving Break)

2 December

- Bradley Grossman
- Barry Le Vine

Thesis chapter one due. Submit two copies to Prof. Smith (place in faculty mailbox by 4 pm 5 December) and one copy to your thesis advisor.

Notes on Course Requirements

The Seminar Presentation

Public speaking in an academic context is an acquired skill. Although it receives a somewhat smaller emphasis than essay writing in a typical university curriculum, public speaking is an extremely important tool. Every academic and professional must master this art.

1. You should review and re-write the draft of your proposal in order to transform it into an “audience friendly” presentation paper.
2. You should divide the presentation as follows: a) a brief introductory paragraph, stating your main argument and laying out the structure of the presentation; b) a concise summary (one and a half to two pages) of the project as a whole; c) a critical exploration of one, two or at most three concepts or problems in the project; d) a concluding section.

3. As a presenter, you are taking on the role of a teacher for your peers in the seminar. Make sure that you lay out your arguments in an accessible and yet academically sophisticated voice.

4. Your concept/problem exploration section of the presentation will be more technical and, possibly, self-critical. Identify the most important concepts or problems in the project. Limit yourself to three at most; you will need to give a thorough treatment to each one. Define the concepts or problems you have selected. Discuss your research plans. If you find it helpful to do so, you may cite brief passages from the academic literature, but do not fill your presentation with long direct quotations from other authors.

5. Introduce your own concerns about the research project, but only in the concluding section of the presentation, that is, after you have carefully laid out your main argument and explored the most significant concepts/problems. You might consider, for example, the following questions. Does my project deal with a significant research problem? Is it organized effectively? Have I produced a precise and feasible research question? Am I taking a position, instead of simply summarizing the work of others? Will I be defending my position according to the research protocols of my academic field? Will my conclusions be well supported by the evidence/textual interpretation that is presented in the body of my thesis? In what manner will my thesis be original? Does my thesis fit in the politics discipline, and does it allow me to demonstrate that I have learned to think like a student of politics? What aspects of the project seem the easiest, and which ones will I have to work hardest on? How does this project compare to my previous academic research projects? Which textual sources or academic advice have I found most useful so far, and why?

6. Prepare for your oral presentation in the seminar. During the presentation, you will present your paper, speaking slowly and clearly. You will have "the floor" to yourself; you will not have to field questions from seminar participants until after you have finished speaking.
7. You will have approximately 30 to 35 minutes for your presentation. Then you will answer questions from the class for about 20 minutes. Plan to read some of your paper directly, and to speak extemporaneously at several junctures. In these latter moments, you will stop reading your paper, and you will lead the class through one of the concepts or problems in your project.

8. When you are speaking extemporaneously, remember that you will be teaching the class. Distribute hand-outs, use overheads, write on the board, or use power-point. Lead the class through your handouts. You might use, for example, a long passage from an academic text containing key conceptual definitions that you are working with, several short passages documenting a debate in the academic literature, tables with data, and so on. Ask the class to read the texts you want to explore, read a key sentence or two out loud, or point to a specific part of a table or graph, and give your critical commentary, and show how the concepts/problems relate to your project.

9. Time yourself and make sure that your presentation will fit into the guidelines. Practice your presentation several times. Try to visualize yourself performing in a calm and competent manner. Use your usual methods for dealing with "performance anxiety" (e.g. breathing techniques, meditation, relaxation exercises, etc.) We have all had to overcome extreme nervousness about public speaking at one time or another. As with essay writing, competent public speaking only comes with practice.

10. You might also find it useful to write a one-page outline for your presentation, with a statement of your thesis argument, and distribute copies to the class.

The Political Science Thesis

The political science discipline embraces a wide variety of quantitative, qualitative, normative and conceptual forms of research. Your thesis should feature the type of research approach/methodology/design that is appropriate to your field and your research problem. You should consult with your Advisor to ensure that you are working within the conventions established by the relevant academic literature. Although there are many differences between the various types of political science theses, we can nevertheless identify the features that they should have in common.
1. Purpose. In the honors thesis, the student should build on the knowledge and skills that he or she has acquired over the course of his or her degree, demonstrate his/her mastery of a specialized body of academic literature, and show that he or she is able to conduct intensive research on an independent basis, to meet deadlines, to formulate a significant research problem, to utilize relevant research methods in an appropriate manner, to produce original results or conclusions, to analyze data/texts, to advance arguments that are supported by the evidence, to present his or her research in an appropriate academic format.

2. Length and Format. 40-80 pages, double-spaced, standard font (12 point) and margins. References should be organized according to the note-number system, following the *Chicago Manual of Style*, as presented in the Turabian manual. The table of contents, text, tables, graphs, bibliography and other matter should also conform to the *Chicago* style.

3. Presentation. All thesis material must be well-organized and meticulously edited for spelling, grammar, punctuation, coherence, style and format.

4. Originality. An honors student will probably not be able to explore completely new intellectual territory, given the time constraints that he or she faces. However, a thesis ought to have an "original" dimension. It could, for example, ask a new question within a defined set of problems, develop a fresh perspective on an established puzzle, take a research question that has been already identified in the literature and address it in a creative manner, or add new features to existing studies. The student must demonstrate his or her capacity for innovative thinking and critical analysis, clearly establish his or her own individual position vis-a-vis the research problem in question, and systematically build a case in support of his or her position. The thesis may be a development of a term paper that the student has already written, but it must differ substantially from the previous work.

5. Rigor. The thesis argument must be developed out of a sustained dialogue with the appropriate academic literature. All references must be fully noted. The thesis research must be conducted systematically according to the research protocols that are specific to the field in which it is situated. The conclusions must build logically on the evidence or textual interpretations that are presented in the main body of the text.

6. Breadth and quality of research. The honors thesis is the product of an effort that is equivalent to two courses taken over two semesters. It is therefore distinct from the research paper that is written as a course requirement in its breadth and depth. The student must demonstrate his or her
mastery of a comprehensive body of relevant texts. A good thesis differs from the research paper in that it deals with more complex ideas or problems, asks more probing questions, presents more detailed evidence or textual interpretation, and generates more insightful conclusions.

Common weaknesses in student theses

1. Absence of an argument. Theses that merely summarize other texts or wander aimlessly from point to point are insufficient. Take a position, state clearly what your position is, and demonstrate that your position is fully supported by the textual references and/or data, according to the appropriate research approach. Use an outline and make sure that each part of the thesis advances your case. The thesis is not a report or a summary of the literature. You must advance and defend a specific and original claim.

2. Lack of rigor. You must respect the research protocols of your field. Do not, for example, cite material from dubious sources on the internet or from popular magazines. Work closely with your Advisor to make sure that you have not violated the research method that is relevant for your thesis. Define all terms and avoid extraneous jargon. Carefully explain how you have conducted your research and then lead the reader through your findings. Do not make unsupported assertions. Make sure that your concluding remarks follow logically from the evidence and/or interpretations that you have presented. You may gesture towards other possible avenues for research in passing, but only in the briefest terms. (e.g. "Although it is beyond the scope of this study on third party candidates to speculate on the outcome of the year x election, it might be fruitful to investigate conditions a, b, and c and their relationship with variables d, e, and f ...") Always bear in mind the limitations of your project.

3. Insufficient and/or poor quality research. This problem usually arises when the student has not started working on the thesis early enough, has not stayed in close touch with his or her Advisor, and/or has not continued to make an effort over the two semesters.

4. Data seduction. Students who are new to research sometimes think that their objective is simply to pile on the data. The thesis is not a report; it’s a sustained argument that engages with the scholarly literature. With every bit of evidence or textual analysis you provide, you should ask yourself how this material advances your presentation of the argument. Credit is not given simply for compiling a massive amount of facts or by doing extensive close readings. You must make a claim and support it with the evidence or with a compelling textual analysis.
5. Concealing a null result. As an undergraduate researcher, you may very well find yourself in the following situation. You may arrive at a well-conceived hypothesis, having finished a sufficient amount of background reading and having engaged in consultation with your advisor. Then you might plunge into the research, and then slowly discover that your hypothesis cannot be supported by the evidence. Now if you were a senior researcher, you would typically start over with a fresh research design. Hopefully, if this does happen to you, it will occur early enough such that you can also begin again. Again, close and consistent consultation with your advisor will help you negotiate this situation. In the worst-case scenario, it will be too late in the year for you to take a completely new direction. In this case, you should write up your findings honestly. Be entirely forthcoming about what you could not prove and why, and show the work that you did. What you must not do is to try to conceal the results by exaggerating, distorting or concealing the data that does not work for you. Examiners always respond more favorably to a well-designed project that honestly reports a null result, than to a work that attempts to advance claims that remain unsupported.

6. Poor writing. Do not use the casual language that can be found in e-mail, personal journals, conversations with friends, or journalistic articles. Leave plenty of time for sustained reflection, several revisions of the chapters, and re-writing of the thesis as a whole. Edit your work very carefully. Use the style guide to ensure that your references are properly constructed.

7. Padding. Do not fill out your thesis with long direct quotations from academic texts. When you do cite from texts, make sure that you integrate the quoted material into your own text. Discuss not only the cited text’s obvious meaning but its subtle and complex dimension as well. You should not rely on the quotations themselves to make your argument for you. You should not merely find a few quotations and string them together. Make sure that you are not simply presenting a list of text summaries. With every reference to a text, your own argument should become more clear, convincing and sophisticated.

8. Poor organization. Present the different parts of your argument in a logical order. Explain to the reader why you are proceeding from one part to the next. Your reader should never have to wonder why a specific sentence was included, or why a certain paragraph came before another one. Build your case in a logical manner.

9. Misuse of first-person material. Personal reflections and autobiographical information may be acceptable, but only insofar as they are integrated into your argument. You should keep in mind that personal material is never an adequate substitute for academic analysis.
10. Setting up a "straw man." When commenting on an academic text, give it the benefit of the doubt. Make sure that you are responding to the strongest possible case that could be made for the text. If you are opposed to the argument in the text, you must nevertheless recognize its strengths. By the same token, you must indicate the weaknesses and contradictions in the texts that you favor. If you agree with the text without carefully reconstructing its position, then your agreement will come too easily and you will fail to note the text's own contradictions and weaknesses. If, by contrast, you criticize the text without considering its strengths, you will be reducing the text to a "straw man" and engaging in polemical attack where subtle, detailed and sensitive assessment is required.

11. Too much unexplained terminology, “name dropping” and writing that “shows off” the student’s exposure to state-of-the-art texts but does not really explain the problem at hand. Remember your audience. Write for the “non-expert scholar.” Make the work accessible to a professor who studies politics, but who is not located in exactly the same sub-field, methodological paradigm or school. And, at the same time, write for the specialist professor as well. By keeping this double audience – the specialist, and the non-expert scholar – in mind, you will tend to explore advanced problematics using technical terms with precision while, at the same time, avoiding unnecessary jargon and an opaque form of expression. Define all terms, give examples, use tables and illustrations, lead the interested non-expert scholar through the debates, and teach the reader about the significance of your work. As you write, consistently ask yourself whether something that appears obvious and self-explanatory to you is in fact accessible to both the specialist and the non-expert scholar. The audience rule not only helps you to develop a better form of communication; it also helps you to become a better specialist yourself. By writing on a problem in a manner that teaches the non-expert scholar, you will test and refine your own advanced knowledge. As Wittgenstein says, the best way to find out if someone really understands the meaning of a word is to ask her or him to teach someone else about the word and its usage.

12. Staying too close to a single point of view. Many students become so convinced that a given perspective, their favourite professor, a school of thought, or a theory is absolutely correct that they neglect to refer to rival approaches and to consider their relative strengths and weaknesses. Again, it is impossible for a thesis to build a convincing argument for its position unless the alternatives are given the most sympathetic reading possible. The academic essay differs sharply from a speech in a debate or a lawyer’s closing statement in a trial. The student must avoid the temptation to assert his or her position in a dogmatic manner. He or she ought to aim to construct the thesis argument in a compelling manner through extensive references to rival viewpoints in the politics literature. The production of a balanced thesis is entirely the student's responsibility; indeed, because each thesis is graded by a committee of diverse faculty members, the thesis writer would be well advised to consult several faculty members in the Government Department during the research stage, and to anticipate the responses of potential faculty critics throughout the project. We do not give marks for
agreeing with us and we do not subtract marks when students disagree with us either. However, we do expect you to engage in a disciplined manner with our arguments.

13. Neglecting the boundaries of the Politics discipline. By the senior year, our Majors will have had an opportunity to engage with a number of faculty members from many Departments, and will have taken courses in several fields of study. Interdisciplinary exploration is of course a good thing, but the student must bear in mind that their thesis project is located in the politics discipline first and foremost. The Government Department faculty committee that grades the thesis will therefore expect the student to engage extensively with the scholarly literature in the politics field, and to demonstrate that the student has learned how to think like a student of politics. We boast a very diverse faculty, and our Department happens to have a very wide-ranging understanding of the discipline. The student therefore has the opportunity to pursue these goals under the direction of any number of faculty advisors who represent several different schools of thought. In the end, however, the student must locate himself or herself very clearly in the discipline as it is defined by at least one of our subfields in order to satisfy this basic requirement.

Thesis Deadlines

You should submit the final version of your thesis on April 22 at the latest to the Government Department office. Submit three copies, in plastic spiral bindings, with plastic covers.

Throughout both semesters, you will need to give your Advisor up to two weeks to read and to return your drafts. The depth and breadth of the research involved in the thesis, and the amount of time it will take to “digest” that research and produce your drafts, is such that you will need to make a substantial effort over a considerable length of time. The “all-nighter” approach simply will not work. It is imperative that you begin your work on the thesis as early as possible, plan your work far in advance, work consistently, and leave plenty of time for revisions. The following is a suggested schedule for your thesis research and writing. Absolute deadlines are marked with an asterisk.

Before the fall semester begins
Sharpen your research proposal. Meet with the initial Advisor assigned to you by the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Consult the Government Department web page for a list of faculty and their research interests. Contact possible faculty advisors and discuss your ideas. Implement their suggestions. In consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies, choose an Advisor and secure his or her commitment to work with you on your thesis. Begin research and reading the academic literature.

mid August-early September

Meet with advisor, finalize your argument. Prepare memo. Meet with your Advisor again and receive approval for your memo. Continue to meet with your Advisor on at least a weekly basis in the fall and in the spring.

4 September: Thesis Memo: Submit to Prof. Smith*

September-October

Develop a grasp of the relevant literature, refine your argument, establish research design/method/approach, begin empirical research and/or detailed textual analysis (depending on your research method.) Prepare thesis proposal.

10 October*

Submit proposal to Prof. Smith and your Advisor. Circulate a copy to the 494 class via-e-mail.

October-November-early December

Complete your survey of the relevant literature. Refine your argument further, taking into account the comments that you receive on your proposal. Continue your research. Prepare chapter one.

5 December*

Submit chapter one to Prof. Smith and your Advisor.
December-January-February

Revise chapter one in response to comments. Complete your research; write up the rest of the thesis. Submit drafts of your thesis chapters to your Advisor, allowing for a one- or two-week "turn-around" time. Begin the final revisions of your thesis as a whole.

March

Final revisions of the thesis chapters. Research should be already substantially complete.

last week in March

Submit a complete draft of the entire thesis to your Advisor.

early to mid-April

Address your Advisor's comments as you revise the thesis for the last time.

22 April*

Submit final version of the thesis.

Last revised: 25 August 2003