

# Senior Thesis and Thesis Seminar

**POL 499**  
**Thursday 4-6**  
**University College 255**

**University of Toronto**  
**2015-2016**

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**Thesis Supervisor:** per application and approval by the Department

## **Overview**

This seminar is open only to students whose applications for the Senior Thesis Program have been approved by the Director of Undergraduate Studies. It is intended to serve as a forum in which students who are writing a senior thesis can present and discuss their work and consider various approaches to research in Politics. The readings for the seminar are required for all participants. They are meant to facilitate students' individual thesis work and to provide insights into the research and writing processes, as well as to expose students to different ways of presenting the results of their work. While each student has a primary responsibility to her own project and to her specific supervisor, all students enrolled in the Senior Thesis Program are expected to fully participate in the work of the seminar. Final assessment in the seminar will reflect both the thesis itself (as determined by each student's supervisor) and participation in the seminar (as determined by the seminar instructor).

A thesis is a 15,000 word (~40 page) research paper on any topic chosen by the student, in consultation with a thesis supervisor. The thesis should contain appropriate footnotes and a bibliography, and in general it should conform with the specifications of the APSA style guide (available for consultation on Blackboard). Once chosen, the thesis will be further developed over the course of the academic year in consultation with the supervisor. It is the responsibility of each student to schedule and hold regular meetings with her supervisor in addition to those of the seminar.

Our aim will be to help students write a thesis that of which they can truly be proud. Our meetings are meant to host conversations that will help us all through the highs and lows of researching and writing a major piece of work such as a senior thesis. The seminar begins with a consideration of the issues involved in choosing and honing a topic, and how to go about formulating the salient questions for the research process. We will then

proceed to a consideration of methodological considerations, including the formulation of questions and hypotheses, conducting a literature review, and the methodological prerogatives of the major subfields of Political Science as a discipline. In the second semester, students will concentrate primarily on the completion of their research and the actual writing of the thesis. A summary version of the thesis research will be presented at a ‘mini conference’ which will take place in the final week of classes.

## **Materials**

John Creswell. 2014. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications. (Available at the U of T bookstore)

All other materials will be made available on Blackboard, or via the students’ own ingenuity.

## **Requirements and Assessment**

Thesis (determined by supervisor)	75%
Participation and Presentations (determined by Seminar Instructor)	25%

## **Purpose Statement**

Each student will be asked to hand in a short ‘purpose statement’ (see Creswell, ch. 6) to her thesis supervisor *and* the seminar instructor no later than **October 29<sup>th</sup>**. The purpose statement should be 2-4 pages in length and should include a working title for the thesis, a discussion of the research question, the first stages of the literature review, and a short working bibliography. The purpose statement is not going to be graded or circulated; its purpose is for the supervisor and the seminar instructor to have an opportunity to offer feedback on each student’s research and writing plans.

## **Abstract**

Students will submit a working abstract of the thesis to the seminar instructor and her supervisor no later than **January 21<sup>st</sup>**. The abstract should be roughly 200 words in length and will be circulated among the class for workshopping at the January 28 meeting. Each student will revise her abstract in tandem with her thesis throughout the second semester. Final drafts of the abstract will be circulated in advance of the April 7<sup>th</sup> mini conference.

## **Reading and Meeting Topic Schedule**

**\*indicates readings are available on Blackboard**

### **September 15 – Introduction and Orientation**

## **September 22 – Choosing a Topic**

Creswell, *Research Design*, pp. 25-27.

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, “Improving Research Questions”\*

## **September 29 – Choosing an Approach**

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 1.

Cynthia Enloe. 2014. Gender Makes the World Go Round: Where are the Women?.  
*Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley:  
University of California Press, 1-36.\*

## **October 5 – Case Study Research**

Flyvbjerg, B. 2006. Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2): 219-245.\*

Campo-Engelstein, L. & Meagher, K. 2011. Costa Rica's ‘White Legend’: How Racial Narratives Undermine Its Health Care System. *Developing World Bioethics*, 11(2): 99-107.\*

## **October 13 – Guest Discussion, Professor Erin Tolley (Political Science, UoffT)**

Erin Tolley. 2015. Racial Mediation in the Coverage of Candidates’ Political Viability: A Comparison of Approaches. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 41(6): 963-984.\*

Irene Bloemaraad. 2012. What the Textbooks Don’t Tell You: Moving from a Research Puzzle to Publishing Findings. In *Handbook of Research Methods in Migration*, 502-520. Carlos Vargas-Silva, ed. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishers.\*

## **October 20 – Formulating Questions and Hypotheses**

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 7.

Thomas Kuhn. *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Intro, Chapters IX & X.\*

## **October 27 – Conducting a Literature Review**

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 2

Waskar Ari. 2014. *Earth Politics: Religion, Decolonization, and Bolivia’s Indigenous Intellectuals*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, Ch. 1.\*

**November 3 – Quantitative Methods**

**Guest Discussion, Kenichi Ariga (Political Science, U of T)**

Ariga, Kenichi. 2015. Incumbency Disadvantage under Electoral Rules with Intra-Party Competition: Evidence from Japan. *Journal of Politics* 77 (3).  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/info/10.1086/681718>

**November 10 – Qualitative Methods**

**Guest Discussion, Kevin Edmonds (Political Science, U of T)**

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 9.

Michael Burawoy. 2000. Introduction: Reaching for the Global. In *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections and Imaginations in the Postmodern World*, Michael Burawoy, et al, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.\*

**November 17 – Writing a Proposal, Abstract, or Purpose Statement**

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 5, 6.

Hannah Walker and Dylan Bennett. 2015. The Whiteness of Wisconsin's Wages: Racial Geography and the Defeat of Public Sector Labor Unions in Wisconsin. *New Political Science* 37(2): 181-203.\*

**November 24 – Initial Research Design Presentations**

**December 8 -- Initial Research Design Presentations**

**January 5 – No Class; Abstracts due via email**

**January 13 – Analysis and Interpretation**

**\*\*\*Circulation and Discussion of Abstracts\*\*\***

Cresswell, *Research Design*, ch. 10

**January 20 – Theory**

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 3

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, “Constructing Causal Theories”\*

Alexander Keller Hirsch. 2014. Sovereignty Surreal: Bataille and Fanon beyond the State of Exception. *Contemporary Political Theory*. 13(3): 287-306.\*

## **January 27 – Drawing Conclusions**

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, “Maximizing Leverage”\*

Donald V. Kingsbury. 2014. Between Multitude and Pueblo: Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution and the Government of Un-Governability. *New Political Science*. 35(4): 567-585.

## **February 2 – Optional class**

## **February 9 – Writing Strategies**

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 4

*APSA* Style Manual\*

Ben Yagoda. 2015. In Search of Needless Words. *Lingua Franca*. 8 September, 2015  
<http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2015/09/08/in-search-of-needless-words/>

Steven Pinker. 2014. Why Academics Stink at Writing. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 26 September, 2014.  
<http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Academics-Writing-Stinks/148989/>

## **February 16 – Research Workshop and Presentations**

## **February 23 – Research Workshop and Presentations**

## **March 2 – Research Workshop and Presentations**

## **March 9 – Optional Class**

## **March 16 – Conference Preparations**

## **March 23 – Mini Conference – Public Presentation of Thesis Research**