

Senior Thesis and Thesis Seminar

POL 499
Thursday 4-6
University College 57

University of Toronto
2016-2017

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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)

William Strunk and EB White. 1999. *Elements of Style*. New York: Pearson.

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%

Email Policy

I do my best to respond in a timely fashion (usually within 48 hours) to all student emails. Please do not expect an immediate response, especially on evenings and weekends. Also, please be sure than any questions you have are not already answered in the syllabus.

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 26th**. 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 4th**. 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 7th mini conference.

Reading and Meeting Topic Schedule

***indicates readings are available on Blackboard**

September 7 – Introduction and Orientation

September 14 – Choosing a Topic

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

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

September 21 – 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.*

September 28 – Formulating Questions and Hypotheses

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 7.

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

October 5 – Ethics Review Board

Guest Discussion, Dean Sharpe (Ethics Review Board, U of T)

October 12 – Library Research Methods

*****TBD**

October 19 – 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.*

October 26 – Qualitative Methods

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 2 – No Class

November 9 – Reading Week, no class

November 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 16 – Field Work and Case Study Research
Guest Discussion, Ariana Fernández (Political Science, U of T)

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.*

November 23 – 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 30 – Initial Research Design Presentations

December 8 -- Initial Research Design Presentations

January 4 – No Class; Abstracts due via email

January 11 – Analysis and Interpretation

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

Cresswell, *Research Design*, ch. 10

January 18 – 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 25 – 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 1 – Optional class

February 8 – 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 15 – Research & Writing Workshop (Optional)

February 22 – Reading & Writing Week

March 1 – Research & Writing Workshop (Mandatory)

March 8 – Research & Writing Workshop (Optional)

March 15 – Research & Writing Workshop (Mandatory)

March 22 – Research & Writing Workshop (Optional)

March 29 – Conference Preparations

Public Presentation of Thesis Research Date and Location TBD