

**POL 2812Y – PhD Dissertation Proposal Seminar
Professors Theresa Enright and Linda White**

Mondays 12-2 p.m.

CONTACT AND OFFICE HOURS

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weeks classes meet or by appointment.
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weeks classes meet or by appointment.
Please email me to set up a time.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is profoundly practical: to assist PhD students to produce a dissertation proposal by the end of the course. A dissertation proposal, which is a departmental and graduate school requirement, identifies what research question you want to tackle in your dissertation; it lays out the reason/justification for taking on that topic, and it outlines a plan for tackling that research.

In this course, we will discuss elements of research design, practicalities and varieties of proposal writing, and supervision and committee formation. For most of the course, however, we will workshop your ideas and drafts of key elements of the proposal. The course will include sessions with faculty and advanced graduate students talking about their own experiences with dissertation research and proposals. The culmination of the class is the presentation of your research proposal to your supervisor (and committee where possible) and the rest of the class.

Each step that you undertake in making progress towards that proposal should be in close consultation with your supervisor. Securing a supervisor is therefore a top priority and one you should embark on immediately if you have not done so already.

COURSE FORMAT AND DELIVERY MODE

Class sessions begin at 10 past the hour and end on the hour EXCEPT FOR THE FIRST TWO SESSIONS in September where we will utilize the full two hours.

A huge part of the success of this course comes from co-instructors and peers providing feedback on students' work, which is much easier to do in person. We also hope that this course helps build a peer community that will sustain students through the program and into their careers. As such, this course will be delivered in person ONLY.

We will support use of technology to facilitate participation virtually in exceptional circumstances such as illness. Please contact faculty members regarding remote participation in advance of a session.

REQUIREMENTS

This class is graded pass/fail. Each student *is required to*:

1. **Secure a dissertation committee supervisor.** *Deadline:* September 9, 2024.

We realize that this task may take some time but have put it up front to signal its urgency. If you will be unable to meet this deadline, please make an appointment to meet with one of the course instructors and/or the Graduate Director to discuss this issue.

2. **Produce a 1-2 page statement of research interests.** *Deadline:* September 9, 2024.

Please post your research statements to Quercus by 9 September 11:59 pm BOTH to “assignments” so faculty can provide feedback and to the corresponding “discussion post” so that all students can read your statement.

Professors will briefly present each statement in class Sept. 16 and 23 (a couple of minutes), followed by class feedback (for a total of 10 minutes for each student).

The statement should identify your dissertation supervisor, briefly describe your research interests, and ideally address the following three questions:

1: What is the puzzle or problem you wish to investigate, explain or understand?

What are you curious or passionate about? This may be an empirical or theoretical puzzle in your field, textual/interpretive puzzle, an insight into power/injustice, or a normative intuition.

2a: What is your research question and what kind of question is it, e.g., why (causal); how possible (constitutive)?

2b: Why is your question important (theoretically and/or practically)?

3a: How did you come up with it? And/or, if relevant...

3b: Is there a book that accomplishes something similar to what you want to do in your dissertation? In what way does it serve as a model?

3. **Develop, circulate and present* a 4-5 page pre-proposal.** *Presentations:* Weeks 11-14.

The proposal should i) outline your research question, ii) situate that question in the broader literature, including how your question responds to a puzzle or debate in the literature (i.e., what we already know), and iii) depending on the stage of your research, identify preliminary hunches

to answer your question (i.e., your argument, propositions, and/or hypotheses) and iv) propose a research design or strategy to examine whether your hunches are correct. For Theory students where iv) may be less relevant, you may identify a preliminary list of texts or sources you plan to consult and, if relevant, lines of inquiry you plan to pursue. **Please note that your personal deadline for this assignment is NO LATER than a week before the scheduled peer presentation, to give the class time to read your work.**

Sign-up for the sessions will be via Quercus.

Please post your pre-proposal BOTH to “assignments” so faculty can provide feedback and to the corresponding “discussion post” so that all students can read your pre-proposal.

*Format of presentations: A **peer** will briefly recap/present each proposal in class. A discussion will follow, with the rest of the class providing constructive feedback (approximately 15-20 minutes per pre-proposal).

Student peer presenters will sign up in advance for whose pre-proposal they wish to present.

4. Circulate and present your draft dissertation proposal. *Presentations:* Weeks 19-24.

Student presentations will be 5 minutes, followed by a 10-minute peer response and then a general Q and A (for a total of 30 minutes). Supervisors and committee members are invited to participate in these sessions (via your invitation and consent) scheduled for the last meetings of the course. **Your personal deadline for this assignment is no later than a week before your scheduled presentation to give the class time to read your work.**

Please post your draft proposal BOTH to “assignments” so faculty can provide feedback and to the corresponding “discussion post” so that all students can read your proposal.

Sign-up for the sessions will be via Quercus. As with the pre-proposals, student peer reviewers will choose whose proposal they wish to review.

5. Serve as peer presenter and peer reviewer for a colleague’s pre-proposal and proposal (see items 3 and 4).

6. Attend seminar sessions having read relevant readings, and/or the statements/draft proposals under review for that day and actively participate in seminar discussions.

***A Note on Readings and Where to Find Them**

Readings are assigned as “background.” Some may be familiar to you from methods or core courses. Some will be more relevant for some subfields than others. Their purpose is to provide a

wide range of resources to assist in developing different types of research projects. This list is by no means exhaustive, and we encourage you to consult with your supervisor, other faculty members, and peers to identify the resources most suited to your project. While we recommend that you consult works from the list relevant to your project, we do not plan to systematically discuss them. Additional readings may be suggested depending on the interests of students.

NOTE: All readings, in addition to being listed below, are listed with links or information where they are available. Readings not available online have been placed on course reserves at Robarts Library where possible or can be found at one of the other libraries on campus.

CLASS SCHEDULE

June 21 Workshop

10-11:10 a.m.: Introductions; What is a proposal?

Course set up, assessment of students' progress and needs, elements of a proposal discussion.

11:10 a.m. – 12 noon: Finding a supervisor and managing committees

Discussion with guests (Graduate Director (Theresa Enright) and seasoned supervisor and former Grad Director Jacques Bertrand) on approaching supervisors and different styles of working with committees.

12-12:30 p.m.: Lunch Break

12:30-2 p.m.: How do I get started?

Part I: Research questions can come from multiple sources—theory, day-to-day experience, empirical research. There are also very different kinds of questions that can be asked and different starting points, from finding a “puzzle” to diving into a text. In this session we examine different starting strategies and types of knowledge that might interest you, which therefore might drive how you think about and develop research questions. We will also discuss strategies of how to get started on your project.

Part II will involve splitting into small groups to workshop your ideas and see where you are in the process.

Please read in advance:

Karl Gustafsson and Linus Hagström. 2018. What is the Point? Teaching Graduate Students How to Construct Political Science Research Puzzles. *European Political Science* 17. Available online [here](#).

Julia Lynch. 2024. “Choosing a Research Question.” In Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman, eds. *Doing Good Qualitative Research*. OUP: 13-22. Available online [here](#).

The following additional readings are for your reference going forward. We DO NOT expect you to read them for this workshop session and will not discuss them explicitly. However, they may be useful as general background reading on research design and getting started.

Brady, Henry and David Collier, eds. 2010 (2nd edition). *Rethinking Social Inquiry*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. Available online [here](#).

Clark, William Roberts. 2020. "Asking Interesting Questions." In *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*. Edited by Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese. Newbury Park, CA: Sage: 7-25. Available online [here](#).

Horkheimer, Max. 1972. "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, M. O'Connell, trans. (New York, NY: Herder and Herder). Available online – Google chapter title.

King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton University Press, chapter 1. Available online [here](#).

Leopold, David and Marc Stears. 2008. *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*. OUP.

Yanow, Dvora and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. 2014. "Wherefore Interpretive: An Introduction." In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, 2nd Edition, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharp, pp. xiii-xxxi. Available online [here](#).

Fall Meetings

Week 1

September 9: No Class Meeting

Deadlines for choosing a supervisor and 1-2 pager. The latter should also be posted in the "discussions" on Quercus.

Weeks 2 and 3

September 16 and 23: Class discussions of research interests and puzzle/problem

Professors will briefly present each 1-2 pager followed by class discussion/feedback.

Week 4

September 30: Developing an Argument and Leveraging Evidence

This week we will explore the theory/design/method relationship. We will discuss strategies to link research questions to research designs that provide leverage on answering those questions. Topics of discussion may include how to situate a project in the literature (i.e., designing research in relation to what the literature expects and developing original arguments or choosing a theoretical framework that speaks to your question and the literature), case selection to maximize analytic leverage, choosing appropriate methods to know whether you're right or wrong.

Background Reading

Parsons, Craig. 2007. *How to Map Arguments in Political Science*. Oxford UP, Chapter 1. Available online [here](#).

Rogowski, Ronald. 2004. "How Inference in the Social (but not the Physical) Sciences Neglects Theoretical Anomaly." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, edited by Henry Brady and David Collier. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 75-83. Available online [here](#).

Thomas, Gary. 2011. "A Typology for the Case Study in Social Science Following a Review of Definition, Discourse, and Structure." *Qualitative Inquiry* 17 (6): 511-521. Available [here](#).

Yanow, Dvora. 2014. "Interpretive Analysis and Comparative Research." In *Comparative Policy Studies: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges*, edited by Isabelle Engeli and Christine Rothmayr. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 131-59. Available online [here](#).

Week 5

October 7: The proposal process: Faculty panel on their research design choices and thesis project experience. Selections of their work may be assigned as background.

Guests: Michael Donnelly, Emily Nacol, Ed Schatz

October 14: No class – Thanksgiving

Week 6

October 21: The proposal process: Advice from a panel of your peers

Guests: Rachael Desborough, Isaac Lawther, Jenna Quelch, Chen Zhong

October 28: No class - Reading Week

Week 7

November 4: Research ethics process and protocols

There are plenty of materials on research on human subjects. We recommend everyone view the video lecture by Dean Sharpe in advance of the session (link below). Beyond procedural ethics and the practical how to's, in this session we will discuss ethical consideration that underpin all social research. The short readings below may be helpful to get you started but please also bring to the discussion your experience in tackling these issues in other courses.

Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities and Education video with Dean Sharpe, Research Ethics Board (REB) Manager, UofT:

<https://play.library.utoronto.ca/watch/354bbdcbdf4cc8c144c26b094de6df5e>

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2012. "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45 (4): 717-723. Available [here](#).

Teele, Dawn. 2014. "Reflections on the Ethics of Field Experiments." In *Field Experiments and Their Critics*. Ed. Dawn Teele. Yale UP. Available online [here](#).

Weeks 8-10

November 11, November 18 and November 25: No class meetings; work on your pre-proposal

NB: As outlined above, you are required to pre-circulate your pre-proposal by no later than one week before you are scheduled to present it. No extension of this deadline is possible.

Weeks 11 – 12

December 2 and 5 (Thursday – Thanksgiving Make-Up): Presentation and workshopping of pre-proposals.

Winter meetings

Week 13 and 14

January 6 and 13: Presentation and workshopping of pre-proposals continues

Weeks 15-18

January 20-February 10

Work on your proposal; invite your supervisor and committee to attend your final presentation.

NB: As outlined above, you are required to pre-circulate your proposal by no later than one week before you are scheduled to present it to the instructors, the rest of the class and especially your peer reviewer. No extension of this deadline is possible.

February 17-21: Reading Week

Weeks 19-24

February 24, March 3, 10, 17, 24 and March 31: Proposal presentations

See instructions under requirements, #4 and #5, above.

Additional Background Resources:

Background Reading on Positionality/Reflexivity in Social Science:

Soedirgo, Jessica and Aarie Glas. 2020. "Toward Active Reflexivity: Positionality and Practice in the Production of Knowledge." *PS* (July): 527-531. Available online [here](#).

Thomas, Lahoma. 2024. "The Resarcher's Gaze: Positionality and Reflexivity." In *Doing Good Qualitative Research*. Eds. Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman. OUP. 23-46. Available online [here](#).

Zuroski, Eugenia. 2020. "'Where Do You Know From?': An Exercise in Pacing Ourselves Together in the Classroom." <https://maifeminism.com/where-do-you-know-from-an-exercise-in-placing-ourselves-together-in-the-classroom/>.

Background Readings on Case Selection:

Collier, David and James Mahone. 1993. "Conceptual 'Stretching' Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 87 (4): 845-855. Available online [here](#).

Geddes, Barbara. 1990. "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get." *Political Analysis* 2: 131-150. Available online [here](#).

Gerring, John. 2004. "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98 (2): 341-354. Available online [here](#).

Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review*. 65 (3): 682-693. Available online [here](#).

Background Readings on Choosing Qualitative, Quantitative, and Multi-method Approaches

Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds. 2014. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Strategies for Social Inquiry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available online [here](#).

Bennett, Andrew and Coin Elman 2006. "Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence." *Political Analysis* 14 (3): 250-267. Available online [here](#).

George, Alexander. L. and Andrew Bennett. 2004. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Course reserves.

Goertz, Gary. 2017. *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies: An Integrated Approach*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Available online [here](#).

Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz. 2006. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." *Political Analysis* 14 (3): 227-249. Available online [here](#).

Wittenberg, Jason. 2007. "Peril and Promise: Multi-Method Research in Practice." *Qualitative Methods* 5 (1): 19-22. Available online [here](#).

Wolf, Frieder. 2010. "Enlightened Eclecticism or Hazardous Hotchpotch? Mixed Methods and Triangulation Strategies in Comparative Public Policy Research." *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 4 (2):144-167. Available online [here](#).

Background Readings on the Relationship between Normative, Critical, and Empirical Methods:

Herzog, Lisa and Bernardo Zacka. 2019. "Fieldwork in Political Theory: Five Arguments for an Ethnographic Sensibility." *British Journal of Political Science* 49 (2): 763-784. Available online [here](#).

Carens, Joseph H. 2004. "A Contextual Approach to Political Theory." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 7 (2): 117-132. Available online [here](#).

Tully, James (ed.) 1988. *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*. Princeton. Princeton University Press. Course reserves.

CLASS ADMINISTRATION

Deadlines

You are all graduate students doing self-directed work and research. It is important to cultivate good professional habits. This means meeting all deadlines, and especially, ensuring that your colleagues will have sufficient time to read your work in order to offer quality feedback. We recognize that there may be unforeseen events, and are willing to adjust for those, but these

should be the exception rather than the rule. If there are issues that you think may affect your ability to turn in assignments on time, we suggest you contact your instructors *as early as possible*. Please just turn your work in on time.

Accessibility

Students who require special arrangements should contact the Student Accessibility Services at (416) 978 8060. Their email is accessibility.services@utoronto.ca. Some students find that they must wait to contact and secure approval from Accessibility Services: in these cases, **you should still contact instructors in advance**, to let me know you might require accommodations for assignments.

Academic Integrity

Please read the policy on [academic integrity](#). Academic dishonesty is a serious offense that can result in loss of credit, suspension, and possibly expulsion from the university. *All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Department*. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult [this page](#) from the Writing center. You can also make an appointment with either of us to discuss.

Plagiarism includes:

- copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes and references
- not citing a source used in your papers
- citing internet information without proper citation
- presenting someone else's work as your own
- *inadvertently* copying verbatim from any source.

Policy on Children and Childcare (adapted from Prof. Guy Grossman, University of Pennsylvania)

- Babies are welcome in class as often as is necessary to support breastfeeding.
- For older children, minor illnesses and unforeseen disruptions in childcare often put parents in the position of having to choose between missing class to stay home with a child and leaving them with someone you or the child doesn't feel comfortable with. While this is not meant to be a long-term childcare solution, occasionally, bringing a child to class in order to cover gaps in care is perfectly acceptable.
- We ask that all students work with instructors to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity including diversity in parenting status.

Finally, we understand that often the largest barrier to completing your courses once you become a parent is fatigue. The struggles of balancing school and childcare are exhausting!! We hope that you will feel comfortable disclosing your student-parent status to instructors, so that we may be able to accommodate any special needs that arise.