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


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

Requirements and Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis (determined by supervisor)</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation and Presentations</td>
<td>25%</td>
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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 29th**. 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 21st**. 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 15 – Introduction and Orientation**
September 22 – Choosing a Topic


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

September 29 – Choosing an Approach


October 5 – Case Study Research


October 13 – Guest Discussion, Professor Erin Tolley (Political Science, UofT)


October 20 – Formulating Questions and Hypotheses


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

October 27 – Conducting a Literature Review

Creswell, *Research Design*, ch. 2

November 3 – Quantitative Methods
Guest Discussion, Kenichi Ariga (Political Science, U of T)

http://www.jstor.org/stable/info/10.1086/681718

November 10 – Qualitative Methods
Guest Discussion, Kevin Edmonds (Political Science, U of T)


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


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”*

January 27 – Drawing Conclusions

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


February 2 – Optional class

February 9 – Writing Strategies

Creswell, Research Design, ch. 4

APSA Style Manual*

Ben Yagoda. 2015. In Search of Needless Words. Língua Franca. 8 September, 2015  

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