

# Senior Thesis and Thesis Seminar

**POL 499**  
**Wednesday 4-6**  
**Online**

**Seminar Coordinator:**  
**Donald V Kingsbury, PhD**

**Office Hours:**  
**Videoconference by appointment**  
[donald.kingsbury@utoronto.ca](mailto:donald.kingsbury@utoronto.ca)

**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 an established style guide (APSA is the convention, but with this – as all things – check with your supervisor). 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.

### **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 that any questions you have are not already answered in the syllabus. Substantive questions about your project are almost always best addressed to your thesis supervisors.

### **Purpose Statement**

Each student will be asked to hand in a short purpose statement (to her thesis supervisor *and* the seminar instructor no later than November 1. 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, and a short annotated 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 17 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 end of term conference in 2022.

### **Texts**

The primary text book for the seminar and all other materials are available online at the University of Toronto Website. The primary text will be:

David E McNabb (2016) *Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods*. Routledge.

## **Reading and Meeting Topic Schedule**

### **One: Big Questions**

#### **1. September 13 – Introductions and Orientation**

#### **2. September 20 – Why Research (in Political Science)?**

David E McNabb (2016) Research Fundamentals. In *Research Methods for Political Science*

#### **3. September 27 – Choosing a Topic, Choosing an Approach, Finding a Place**

Laura Zanotti, Courtney Carothers, Charlene Apok, Sarah Huang, Jesse Coleman, Charlotte Ambrozek (2020) Political Ecology and Decolonial Research: Co-Production with the Iñupiat in Utqiagvik. *Journal of Political Ecology* 27: 43-66

David E McNabb (2016) Research Approaches and Methods. In *Research Methods for Political Science*.

Activity:

Refining your Proposal (see also Chapter 5, ‘Preparing a Research Proposal’ in McNabb)

#### **4. October 4 – Case Selection**

David E. McNabb (2016) Explanatory Research: Case and Historical Methods. In *Research Methods for Political Science*.

Hossein Khosrowjahi (2011) A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies. *Arab Studies Quarterly* 33(3/4): 131-142.

Activity and Discussion:

Choosing your case(s)

#### **5. October 18 – Formulating Questions and Hypotheses**

David E McNabb (2016) Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods. In *Research Methods for Political Science*.

Activity:

Multidirectional Approaches to Questioning

## **Two: Research Practices, Methods, and Concerns**

**6.**  
**October 25 – Library Tutorial OR Interview Basics (TBD)**

**7.**  
**November 1– Library Tutorial OR Interview Basics (TBD)**

**\*\*Reading Week November 8\*\***

**8.**  
**November 15 – From the Annotated Bibliography and the Literature Review**  
(Purpose Statement Due)

**9.**  
**November 22 – Ethics in Research with Human Subjects**

In preparation for this class please watch:

‘Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment’ [http://youtu.be/L\\_LKzEqIPto](http://youtu.be/L_LKzEqIPto).

Activity:  
Working through the U of T Research Ethics Board application

**10.**  
**November 29 – Weighing Variables**

Erin Tolley and Mireille Paquet (2021) Gender, Municipal Party Politics, and Montreal’s First Woman Mayor. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 30(1): 40-52.

Activity: Determining Causality

**11.**  
**December 6 – Progress report presentations**

Each student will give a 5 minute summary of their progress thus far, highlighting ground gained and challenges to be tackled in the New Year.

## **Three: Writing**

**12.**  
**January 10 – No Class. Work on Your Abstract**

**13.**  
**January 17 – Abstract Workshop**

Activity: Cut and paste 3 abstracts from the articles you have read during the first phases of your research. Circulate them to the seminar for peer review and discussion.

**14.  
January 24 – Organizing and presenting results**

**15.  
January 31 – Writing Strategies**

**16.  
February 7 – Optional Peer Review Workshop**

**17.  
February 14 – Academic Writing: Free of ‘Needless Words’?**

Check out one of the many debates about Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*:  
<https://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/24/happy-birthday-strunk-and-white>

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

(If you try to read directly from the Chronicle’s website you’ll need to set up a free account)

**\*\*Reading Week February 21\*\***

**18.  
February 28 – Workshop: Writing your introduction**

Please come prepared with a draft (or outline) of your introduction

**19.  
March 7 – Optional Peer Review Workshop**

**20.  
March 14 – Workshop: Effective Revising**

**21.  
March 21 – Optional Peer Review Workshop and Writers’ Block Party**

**22.  
March 28 – Preparing Your Presentation**

**23.  
April 4 – Presentation Format and Specific TBA**