

POL 2812Y – PhD Dissertation Proposal Seminar
Mondays, 12-2PM
Prof. Jessica Green
Office Hours, Weds 2-4 (**Please sign up on Quercus**)
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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.

Over the course of the year 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 must 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.

To be clear: This course does *not* engage in depth with the *content* of your proposal. Most of the feedback you receive will be about the design and feasibility of your project. Much less of it will be about the potential contribution and intellectual merit. I am simply not an expert on all of the topics that you will be exploring, and therefore, can only provide very cursory input about substance of your proposal. Rather, most feedback – both from me and your peers – will be about the design and proposed execution of the research project.

REQUIREMENTS

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

1. Secure a dissertation committee chair. *Deadline: NO LATER THAN November 21*
I 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 one-page (max) statement of research interests. *Deadline: September 26, Oct 3.* This statement should also preview preliminary or possible research questions for circulation to other students in the class. **Please note that your precise and personal deadline for this assignment is**

no later than two days before your scheduled discussion, to give the class time to read your work.

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

Q1: 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.

Q2: What is your research question and what kind of question is it, e.g., why (causal); how possible (constitutive);

Q2a: Why is your question important (theoretically and/or practically)?

Q3: How did you come up with it? Or:

Q3a: 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 pages pre-proposal. **Deadline: Nov 21, Nov 28, Dec 5, Jan 9, Jan 16** Presentations will be 10 minutes, followed by a peer response and Q and A of 10 min.

The proposal should i) outline your research question, ii) situate that question in the broader literature, including why your question responds to a puzzle, debate or gap in the literature (or what we already know), and iii) depending on the stage of your research, identify preliminary hunches to answer your question (i.e., your argument, theory, propositions, and/or hypotheses) and propose a research design to examine whether your hunches are correct. We will spread these presentations between the last two weeks of the Fall term and the first two weeks of the Winter term. **Please note that your precise and personal deadline for this assignment is no later than a week before your scheduled presentation, to give the class time to read your work.**

*Format of presentations (see the assignment tab on the Quercus course page for full instructions): One student will briefly recap/present each proposal in class. Broader discussion will follow, with the rest of the class providing constructive feedback.

4. Circulate and formally present your draft proposal. **Deadline: Mar 1 – Apr 5 (weeks 21-26).** Presentations will be 15 minutes, followed by a peer response and Q and A of 15 min. So each student will have a total of 30 minutes. Supervisors, committee members, and interested faculty are invited to participate in these sessions (via your invitation and consent) scheduled for the last meetings of the course. **Again, please note that your precise and personal deadline for this assignment is no later than a week before your scheduled presentation, to give the class time to read your work.**

5. Serve as peer reviewer for the pre-proposal and proposal of a colleague (see items 3 and 4) and present that review in class.

6. Attend seminar sessions having read the statement/pre-proposal/proposal under review for that day and actively participate in seminar discussions

CLASS MECHANICS and LEGAL

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. I recognize that there may be unforeseen events, and am 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, I suggest you contact me *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 me in advance**, to let me know you might require accommodations for assignments.

Email and communication

COVID permitting, I will hold weekly office hours in person on Wednesday from 2-4 PM, and I will be very glad to meet with you at those times to discuss your project. **You must sign up for office hours using the course calendar on Quercus**. If you require an online meeting, please let me know when you sign up on Quercus.

I generally use email to address simple yes/no questions and to make arrangements about logistics; if you have any substantive concerns, please come to my office hours.

I will do my best to respond to your messages, but please don't expect a rapid response. I will not be responding daily to emails about the class and will not check my email on evenings and weekends. As such, please plan ahead if you need to reach out to me.

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 me 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.
- I ask that all students work with me to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity including diversity in parenting status.
- Finally, I 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!! I hope that you will feel comfortable disclosing your student-parent status to me, so that I may be able to accommodate any special needs that arise.

CLASS SCHEDULE

FALL

Week 1, Sept 12 – Introduction

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

Week 2, Sept 19 – Finding a supervisor and managing committees

- Discussion with instructors and Graduate Director on approaching supervisors and different styles of working with committees.
- Prof. Theresa Enright, Director of Graduate Studies, will join us to walk you through the process.

Week 3, Sept 26 – Getting 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.
- Part II will be break-out groups, where we will begin discussion of your research topics.

Week 4, Oct 3 – Research interests / puzzles

- We will continue small group discussions of research topics

Week 5, Oct 10 – NO CLASS, UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY

Week 6, Oct 17 – Faculty Panel

- Faculty will join to discuss their approaches to research design, case selection and methodologies. Selections of their work may be assigned as background.
 - Prof. Emily Nacol, Political Theory; other profs. TBA

Week 7, Oct 24 – Grad Student Panel

- Advice on the dissertation path by your recently ABD peers on their proposal writing and completion experience.

Week 8, Nov 7 – NO CLASS, READING WEEK

Week 9, Nov 14 – NO CLASS, *Work on pre-proposals*

Week 10, Nov 21 – Presentation and Workshopping of Pre-Proposal

- 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.**

Week 11, Nov 28 – Presentation and Workshopping of Pre-Proposal

Week 12, Dec 5 – Presentation and Workshopping of Pre-Proposal

WINTER

Week 14, Jan 9 – Presentation and workshopping of pre-proposal

Week 15, Jan 16 – Presentation and workshopping of pre-proposal

Week 16, Jan 23 – Panel on Ethics, Fieldwork and other topics that may arise

Week 17, Jan 30 – No class this week. Time to work on draft proposal

Week 18, Feb 6 – No class this week. Time to work on draft proposal

Week 19, Feb 13 – No class this week. Time to work on draft proposal

Week 20, Feb 20 – Reading Week, no class.

Weeks 21-26 – Feb 27, Mar 6, 13, 20, 27 & Apr 3: Presentation of draft proposal and peer feedback

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