

# Senior Thesis and Thesis Seminar

**POL 499**  
**Wednesday 4-6**  
**Sidney Smith Hall 2101**

**Seminar Coordinator:**

**Donald V Kingsbury, PhD**

**Office:** 1 Devonshire Place, Room 366S  
Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**Office Hours:** Th 12-3 (and by appointment)

**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%

### **Course Activities and Projects**

Most weeks in the syllabus I have identified an activity designed to help us in our writing process. These include preparation for peer review, considerations for effective proposals, and some potentially odd ways of tackling writer’s block. Specific instructions will be circulated prior to each meeting either in class, or via quercus. There are three major assigned activities:

*Refine your Proposal* – You all wrote a proposal as part of your application for admission to the course. However, for most students that was months ago. More to the point, many proposals were less roadmaps for project completion than statements of intent. During the first three weeks of the course we will work to make your proposals a functional document for you and your advisor, with a clear research question, thesis statement, and plan for success.

*Hot Seat (Rounds 1-4)* also known as an elevator pitch, the hot seat exercise is meant to help researchers focus their attentions while considering how to make the work compelling to outside or unfamiliar audiences. Students will have no more than 2 minutes to introduce their project (we will be timing). Your pitch needs to cover the key elements of your project in an engaging and informative fashion. Your ‘hot seat’ presentation should – *at a minimum* – cover the following (not necessarily in this order):

- Hook: Provocative question
- Who: Actors/institutions/stakeholders
- What: Puzzle/problem/target of research
- When: time period
- Where: scale/location
- Why: Who cares?
- How: what are you doing that is a) new; b) important; c) contributing to the discipline

After your 2 minute pitch, your colleagues will have the chance to ask questions. Be prepared! We will hold 4 hot seat sessions throughout the year. Students should prepare a pitch for each scheduled session (it is completely normal if your pitch changes throughout the course of your research). We will draw names from a hat on the scheduled session to determine which students present on a given day, and in what order.

*Abstract* Students will submit a working abstract of the thesis to the seminar instructor and her supervisor no later than **January 25th**. The abstract should be roughly 200 words in length and will be circulated among the class for workshopping at the January 18 meeting. Each student will

revise her abstract in tandem with her thesis throughout the second semester. After revisions, final drafts of the abstract will be circulated in advance of end of term conference in 2023.

### **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.

### **Course Policy on Classroom Courtesy**

Students are strongly encouraged to ask questions and participate in vigorous debate. Some of the issues we discuss are sensitive in nature. It is important that we respect views different from our own, and are mindful that comments that are racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise disrespectful or offensive will not be tolerated.

In order to ensure that class is a productive and enjoyable experience for everyone, please observe the additional rules of classroom courtesy:

1. Except for laptop computers, all other personal electronic devices such as cell phones, tablets, etc. must be silenced and put away during class.
2. Please give your full attention to class. Laptop computers should be used **ONLY** for taking notes. Refrain from reading extraneous materials during class meetings.
3. Avoid disrupting class with unnecessary arrivals and departures from the classroom.
4. Make an effort to arrive promptly and wait until break or the end of class before leaving the classroom for non-essential phone calls and other similar purposes.

### **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.

\*Available via U of T library website

## **Reading and Meeting Topic Schedule**

### **One: Big Questions**

#### **1. September 14 – Introductions and Orientation**

#### **2. September 21 – Why Research (in Political Science)?**

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

Activity:

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

#### **3. September 28 – 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:

Peer Review of Proposals

#### **4. October 5 – Case Selection**

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

Thea Riofrancos (2021) From Cases to Sites: Studying Global Processes in Comparative Politics. In *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry*, Erica Simmons and Nicholas Rush, eds. Cambridge University Press, 107-125.

Suggested:

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

Activity and Discussion:

Choosing and narrowing case(s) and/or site(s)

**5.**  
**October 12 – Formulating Questions and Hypotheses**  
**(Final Proposals Due to Professor and Advisors)**

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

Activity:  
Keywords and Topic Sentences (in preparation for the library tutorial)

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

**6.**  
**October 19 – Library Tutorial**  
**\*\*Please note this meeting will be held remotely via Zoom, we will not meet in our normal seminar room\*\***

Margaret Wall, Research Librarian at Robarts Library

**7.**  
**October 26 – Interview Basics, Purpose Statements, Midterm Check-in**

Lee Ann Fuji (2017) Chapter 4: Strategies for Conducting Interviews, In *Interviewing in Social Science Research*. New York: Routledge, 53-72.

Activity:  
Hot Seat Round One

**8.**  
**November 2 – From the Annotated Bibliography and the Literature Review**

Activity:  
Peer Review Purpose Statements

**\*\*Reading Week November 9\*\***

**9.**  
**November 16 – 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 23 – Weighing Variables, Refining Analysis**

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:

Hot Seat Round Two

**11.**

**November 30**

Midterm Wrap Up: 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.

**12.**

**December 7 – Optional Make Up Day/Writing Workshop**

**Three: Writing**

**12.**

**January 11 – No Class. Work on Your Abstract**

**13.**

**January 18 – 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 25 – Organizing and presenting results**

Activity:

Hot Seat Round Three

**15.**

**February 1 – Writing Strategies – To Outline or to draft?**

**16.**

**February 8 – Optional Peer Review Workshop**

**17.**

**February 23 – Reading Week, no class**

**18.**

**March 1 – 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)

Activity:

Hot Seat Round Four

**19.**

**March 8 – Optional Peer Review Workshop**

**20.**

**March 15 – Workshop: Writing your introduction**

Activity:

Peer Review Introductions

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

**21.**

**March 22 – Optional Writing Workshop and Writers' Block Party**

**22.**

**March 29 – Preparing Your Presentation**

**23.**

**April 5 – Presentation Format and Specific TBA**