

International Studies Program  
DePaul University  
MA Thesis Policies  
Approved June 4, 2007

All graduate students must complete the coursework for INT 590 and present an acceptable thesis proposal before entering the thesis phase of the program.

A grade for INT 590 shall be earned only after a thesis proposal is successfully presented to and defended before a thesis committee.

A thesis committee shall consist of one advisor and two readers. At least one member of the committee shall be drawn from INT program faculty.

Defense of the thesis *proposal* shall be convened by the thesis advisor only when that advisor believes that a defensible proposal has been completed.

Upon the student's successful defense of the thesis proposal, the thesis advisor shall assign a grade to the proposal and report that grade to the instructor for INT 590. The instructor shall then report that grade as the permanent grade for INT 590.

Students shall choose graduate electives in consultation with their thesis advisor.

Early drafts of the thesis will be presented to the thesis advisor for comment. The thesis advisor shall read no more than four drafts of the thesis.

Students shall register for INT 592 as an independent study course under the supervision of the thesis advisor for the quarter during which the student (with the advisor's concurrence) intends to defend the thesis.

The thesis advisor shall set the date for the thesis defense. The thesis advisor shall convene the defense only when that advisor believes that the student has presented a defensible version of the thesis.

The readers' duties are limited to reading one draft of the thesis prior to the thesis defense, attending the defense, deciding whether or not to pass the thesis, and deciding whether or not to pass the thesis with honors. (Readers may, but are not required to, provide comments on drafts before the defense).

If the committee at the thesis defense decides to pass the thesis upon the student's completion of directed changes, the thesis advisor shall certify when those changes have been completed.

No faculty member may serve as a thesis advisor for more than three students at any one time.

### **Thesis Proposal**

A thesis proposal does three things: it identifies your research problem, it takes account of what other scholars have had to say about that problem, and it tells how you hope to resolve that problem. Please note that the proposal that you write must be acceptable to your advisor. If you have not yet acquired a thesis advisor, you will need to do so as soon as possible. If at all possible, you should be in touch with your advisor while you write the proposal. Your proposal will be formally accepted by the program after you defend it before your advisor and two readers. For more details, see the policies in Appendix I of this syllabus.

The thesis proposal has four basic parts:

- (1) Background information and research agenda
- (2) Small literature review (Three sources or so)
- (3) Research design and methods
- (4) Bibliography (750+ items)

See Professor McIntyre's INT 590 syllabus for further clarification.

# **SAMPLE SYLLABUS - SUBJECT TO CHANGE FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY**

International Studies 590: Thesis Research I  
~~Summer I, 2008~~  
~~TuTh 5:45-9:00~~  
~~990 W. Fullerton, Room 2401~~

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## ***Course Description***

This class is devoted to writing research proposals for master's theses for the M.A. in International Studies. It includes a broad survey of topics in design and method that are intrinsic to scholarly research, whether that research is pure or applied. But aside from the material to be covered during the course, we must also negotiate an important transition in your graduate career: from a more-or-less compliant student to a scholar working independently on a major project. To make that transition, we need to break down some of the barriers that characterize most classes. I will, for example, talk at you less and put you on the spot more, asking you to elaborate on the state of your project during each class. You will find this uncomfortable at first, but it will become less uncomfortable as it becomes clear that everyone is working through exactly the same sorts of confusion, and that the only way to work through such confusion is to talk about it, get help from others, and offer help in return.

Writing a master's thesis is different from writing an undergraduate paper (or even an undergraduate senior thesis) in some obvious and not-so-obvious ways. The most obvious difference, of course, is that the master's thesis is longer. That alone will require you to learn some new skills. If you're like me, you wrote undergraduate papers by reading a bit, thinking a lot, and when you had your ideas and information in focus writing the paper in one huge rush. That won't work for a paper of this scope. Human memory is limited, and you simply can't remember all of the information you need, what its limitations were, how you found it, and so forth, without having some way of systematically filing and retrieving what you know. But the trickiest problems in designing an academic study have to do with the subtle ways we fool ourselves into believing what we want to believe. If we go out assiduously looking for evidence that what we already believe is true, we can probably find it. The problem is that we are always attuned to that evidence and ready to shut out competing, inconvenient evidence. Most of learning how to design and carry out a research project has to do with making sure that you pay attention to the evidence you would prefer to ignore. You might think of it this way: in previous work, you have started with an idea and tried to prove it true; in your thesis, you will start with an idea and try to prove it false.

## ***Readings***

If you have not already purchased *The Research Imagination* (available in the DePaul bookstore) you should do so now. Two other particularly valuable books are Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., and Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. These books should be available in any halfway-decent bookstore. Other useful books are listed in Appendix II.

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## ***Class Schedule***

### **June 17**

Tonight we will have a preliminary discussion of your thesis project including:

- topics
- advisors
- research questions
- broader significance

### **June 19**

For tonight, read chapters 1-2 of *The Research Imagination*. We will discuss theory and method in relation to your projects. Here are two tasks to get you ready for the discussion:

- Write a short essay on the difficulties you might expect to face in meeting the three canons of the scientific method – objectivity, precision, and replication – when answering your research question.
- From the work you have already done in the program, choose two competing theories that would make different predictions about the answer to your research question. What predictions would they make and why? Which theory do you think is more reasonable and why? What type of information would you need to decide which theory is more likely to be correct?

### **June 24**

For tonight, read chapters 3 and 5 of *The Research Imagination*. Complete these exercises in preparation for tonight's discussion.

- Review some of the professional journals in your field and choose two articles pertinent to your research topic. Analyze the articles according to the “research cookbook” approach found in chapter 3. How did the authors of the articles imagine each of the seven essential components of social investigation listed in Table 3.1? In your opinion, which article reflects more research skill and insight, and why?
- Familiarize yourself with the policies of DePaul’s Institutional Review Board (found at <http://research.depaul.edu>). Complete the mandatory training for researchers and bring the certificate of completion to class. Review the IRB’s policies, procedures, and levels of review. If you believe that your research is non-reviewable or exempt, come to class prepared to state why. If your research requires IRB review and approval, familiarize yourself with the IRB’s review procedures and make plans to work with your advisor to submit a research proposal to IRB as soon as possible.

### **June 26**

For tonight, read chapter 4 of *The Research Imagination*. Complete these exercises in preparation for tonight's discussion.

- Choose a research article relevant to your research topic. (Not one of the articles you used on June 24). How much attention does the author devote to assessing and evaluating the quality of the measures used in the research? How does this

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attention (or lack of it) contribute to (or detract from) the quality of the article?

- Choose a variable or concept of particular interest to you and triangulate, that is, suggest as many concrete measurement strategies as you can. Try to explain how the different strategies affect or compensate for each other's weakness.

### July 1

For tonight, read chapter 6 of *The Research Imagination*. In addition, skim chapters 7-19. Complete these exercises in preparation for tonight's discussion.

- Decide which chapter among chapters 7-19 will be *most* helpful for your research project. Come to class prepared to tell why.
- What kind of sampling did you do when you chose to come to this MA program? How did that sampling affect the choices you made? Do you think your decision was based on adequate sampling? How could different sampling have changed your decision?
- Select one observational or qualitative study relevant to your research project (not among those you used on June 24 or 26) and critique its sampling procedure. Does the author of the study you chose deal with issues of sampling reliability and validity? If so, how?

### July 8-17

During these last four classes we will discuss specific research methods based on the chapters most relevant to your projects. Before July 3, I will send you a schedule for the last four classes including readings and exercises.

### July 22

Final version of proposal due

Note on due dates: You will see in the next section that your thesis advisor will assign your final grade for this class. There is no direct sanction for turning your assignments in on time. When you do turn your assignments in on time, you have a claim on my labor in the form of comments that will help you write a better proposal. I will not provide comments on assignments turned in late.

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## ***Thesis Proposal***

Your main task in this course is to write your thesis proposal. A thesis proposal does three things: it identifies your research problem, it takes account of what other scholars have had to say about that problem, and it tells how you hope to resolve that problem. Over the course of the next five weeks, discussions in class and weekend writing assignments will help you produce such a proposal.

*Please note that the proposal that you write for this class must be acceptable to your advisor as well as to me. If you have not yet acquired a thesis advisor, I can suggest possible candidates. If at all possible, you should also be in touch with your advisor while you write the proposal. Your proposal will be formally accepted by the program after you defend it before your advisor and two readers. After that defense, your advisor will send me a grade for your proposal, which I will then record as the grade for this class. For more details, see the policies in Appendix I of this syllabus.*

## **Weekend Writing Assignment I (due Tuesday, June 24)**

Construct a bibliography of no fewer than 500 sources for your thesis. These sources should all be from scholarly sources (i.e., scholarly books, journal articles, research papers, etc.) Use the full range of electronic databases at your disposal, including the catalogs of the ILCOSO library network, *Columbia International Affairs Online*, and no fewer than six of the relevant bibliographic databases available through DePaul's library portal ([www.lib.depaul.edu](http://www.lib.depaul.edu)). This bibliography should be alphabetized and presented in Turabian's reference list style. You can save yourself an immense amount of labor by downloading the software program EndNote or by installing Zotero as a plugin to Firefox. Chapters 5-6 of *The Craft of Research* will be helpful, as will chapter 3 of Turabian. For further guidance, see Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Search. Once you have completed this bibliography you should identify the most important books in your field and begin to read them. You will need to have completed this work in order to complete the writing assignment due on July 8.*

## **Weekend Writing Assignment II (due Tuesday, July 1)**

Write four to five pages on the research problem you intend your master's paper to solve, the research questions you will be asking in order to solve the problem, and the story you plan to tell that will help answer those questions. To help you with this assignment, please read chapters 1-2 of Turabian and chapters 1-4 of *The Craft of Research*. If possible, add a section that ties your research problem to larger theoretical debates in the field. Frame this section as an introduction to your proposal by structuring the introduction in three parts: contextualizing background, statement of problem, and gist or promise of solution to the problem. For more details on how to structure an introduction this way, see ch. 16 of *The Craft of Research*.

## **Weekend Writing Assignment III (due Tuesday, July 8)**

Write a 4-5 page review of the most relevant literature in your field. This review should incorporate at least three important works from your field. Identify the principal arguments among scholars in the field, and situate your argument in relation to them by comparing your hypotheses to others'. Finally, identify your primary hypothesis and

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formulate it as a thesis statement. Chapters 4-5 of *Turabian* and 7-10 of *The Craft of Research* will help you. For further guidance on this assignment, see Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Review*.

### *Weekend Writing Assignment IV (due Tuesday, July 15)*

Based on in-class discussion and suggested readings, suggest a methodological approach to your research question that will help you take account of inconvenient evidence. You should tell the reader why this methodological approach is best suited to the question you want to answer, as well as how you plan to sample, measure precisely, and reduce bias and error. This section should be 4-5 pages long.

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## **Appendix I: MA Thesis Policies**

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## **Appendix II: Books on Research Design and Methods**

### General

Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*

Howard Becker, *Telling about Society*

John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*

Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*

Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior*

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*

Charles Ragin, *Constructing Social Research*

### Style Guide

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed.

### Writing

Howard Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*

Joan Bolker, *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*

Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*

### Literature Review

Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Search*

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### Philosophy

Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*

Michael Crotty, *Foundations of Social Research*

### Data Analysis

Richard Jaeger, *Statistics: A Spectator Sport*

Neil Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*

### Ethnography

Robert Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Robert Weiss, *Learning from Strangers*

### Case Studies

Howard Becker and Charles Ragin, eds., *What Is a Case?*

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*

Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method*

Charles Ragin, *Fuzzy-Set Social Science*

Theda Skocpol, ed., *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*

### Formal Analysis

David Kreps, *Game Theory and Economic Modelling*

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## **Historiography**

Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*  
Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*  
William Kelleher Storey, *Writing History*

## **Displaying Information**

Edward R. Tufte, *Envisioning Information*  
\_\_\_\_\_, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Visual Explanations*

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## **Appendix III: Methods Courses at DePaul**

ANT 201\* Ethnographic Methods

ANT 202\* Archaeological Methods

ANT 203\* Professionalism and Ethics in Anthropology

ECO 375 Introduction to Econometrics

ECO 380 Mathematical Economics

ECO 510 Econometric Methods for Business Analysis

ECO 555 Economics/Decision-Making

ECO 576 Advanced Econometrics

GEO 241\* Geographic Information Systems I

GEO 242\* Geographic Information Systems II

GEO 243\* Remote Sensing

GEO 244\* Geographic Information Systems III

HST 401 Historical Methods/Bibliography

HST 421 The Historical Discipline

HST 422 Seminar/Primary Source Analysis

PSC 300 Political Analysis/Research

SOC 379 Introduction to Statistics and the Social Sciences

SOC 380 Research Methods in Sociology I

SOC 381 Research Methods in Sociology II

SOC 382 Qualitative Methods

SOC 411 Social Research

SOC 412 Data Analysis

SOC 413 Qualitative Methods

SOC 414 Literature Review Writing Project

SOC 450 Advanced Statistics I

\*Because these courses are not designated 300-level or above, special arrangements will need to be made to take these courses and receive graduate credit for them

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## **Tip Sheet: Part A (Problem and Argument)**

For whom is this a problem? What kind of a problem? Is it the same problem for you and your audience? For that matter, who is your audience? Is it just your thesis committee, or is there a wider audience? (see *The Craft of Research*, Part I, esp. the checklist on pp. 26-27).

What sorts of broad interests do you have? What narrower, researchable, topics can be drawn from these areas of interest? (In general, a suitably narrow topic is one that can be turned into an interesting sentence. For this trick, see *The Craft of Research*, pp. 39-40).

Out of this list of plausible topics, what one can sustain your research project? Can you work on it for a year or more without tiring of it? Are there resources at DePaul that will enable you to finish the job (not least an advisor)?

What questions does your topic raise? Throw as many questions as you can at your topic, without bothering, initially, to sort them or classify them. Then sort the questions and decide which question is the primary question motivating your research, and which other questions are subordinate to it (See *The Craft of Research*, pp. 40-45).

Are you stuck for a topic? Check out the tips on finding topics on pp. 49-50 of *The Craft of Research*.

You have a topic and a question? Great. Now the next question: *so what?* What's at stake in your research? What motivates your question? Fill in these blanks to help clarify: I am studying \_\_\_\_\_ (topic), because I want to find out \_\_\_\_\_ (question), in order to help my reader understand \_\_\_\_\_ (rationale). (See *The Craft of Research*, pp. 45-48).

Look at your rationale. It should help you decide whether you will be engaging in pure or applied research. What's the difference? In both types of research, you define a research problem whose immediate cost, if not solved, is further ignorance. But applied research more or less directly guides you toward some practical action in the world, while pure research aims primarily at knowledge for its own sake. (See *The Craft of Research*, ch.4)

If you're having difficulty getting from a question to a research problem, as defined in ch. 4, it's probably a sign that you're engaged in pure research rather than applied research. Since the "problems" of pure research are primarily defined by the ongoing conversation among experts in the field, and you are all novice scholars, it's not surprising that you may not know how to find a research problem right off. The literature review will help, of course, but there are also ways to jump start the move toward a research problem. See esp. pp. 62-64 in *The Craft of Research*.

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How do I go about defining my argument? What distinguishes a good argument from a bad one? (See ch. 7 in *The Craft of Research*).

I've gone around and around trying to clarify my problem and argument. Now that I think I understand it myself, how can I present it straightforwardly to my reader so that s/he will understand it straight off? (See *The Craft of Research*, ch. 2, 14, and 16).

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## **Tip Sheet: Part B (Literature Review and Sources)**

How can I find the sources I need? What sorts of bibliographical tools are available? How can I find a convenient state-of-the-art essay or book that will bring me up to speed on the field? Whose brain should I pick to find out more? (See *The Craft of Research*, ch. 5)

Once I've assembled a large bibliography, how do I sort through it to find out what's really important? (See *The Craft of Research*, pp. 76-80).

Once I've decided on the really important sources, how do I read them critically? (See *The Craft of Research*, pp. 87-94).

How should I take notes on my sources? (See *The Craft of Research*, pp. 95-99).

How can I systematically relate the evidence I gather to my argument? (See *The Craft of Research*, ch. 9).

In your review of the literature, is someone making an argument that sounds wrong, but you're not sure why? Try putting their argument into a syllogism, looking especially for the unstated major premise. (See Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 147-150)

Do you find an author making very strong claims about large institutions or structures, claiming that they "must" be such-and-such a way, or do such-and-such a thing? Skeptical? Try asking "or else what?" What would happen if the institution *didn't* act that way? (See Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 160-164)

Put other people's concepts to the test, whether you find them in reading or in fieldwork. *Especially* if you find someone using a term you don't understand, don't retreat into an air of false knowingness; press on to find out "what they mean by that". It can often help unlock some of the thorniest problems in your research. (See Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 150-160)

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## **Tip Sheet: Part C (Research Design and Methods)**

ABOVE ALL, KEEP THIS QUESTION IN MIND: IF I WANTED TO “PROVE” THAT THE *OPPOSITE* OF WHAT I BELIEVE IS TRUE, HOW WOULD I GO ABOUT IT? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT WOULD *DISCONFIRMING* EVIDENCE LOOK LIKE WITH REGARD TO MY WORKING HYPOTHESIS OR HYPOTHESES? (See Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 20-28)

Are you going to have extensive firsthand acquaintance with your object of study? If not (or even if you will), what sorts of images of this object do you bring with you? What is the basis for them? How can you make them better informed? (See Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, ch. 2, esp. pp. 12-20, 35-44)

In the story you’re telling, do you think things worked out the way they did because they *had* to work out that way, or do you think they worked out that way by chance? (See Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 28-35, 57-58)

Does it feel like you’re getting stuck in a wooden and mechanistic story? Try dividing people not by *types* but by *activities*, and break down big abstract structures into *people doing things*. (see Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 44-57)

Getting stuck on “dependent” and “independent” variables? Try thinking of this as a story, a process, a narrative. Ask “how” rather than “why”—and then find the variables embedded in your story. (See Becker *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 57-66)

Since you can never “look at” all of the relevant evidence, how are you going to make sure that the evidence you do “look at” is not biased in favor of a preconceived conclusion? In more formal terms, how are you going to design your “sample” and what is that sample going to do for you? (See Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, ch. 3. N.B.—The matter of selecting a “sample” is *not* merely a problem for quantitative methods).

As you begin to read in the literature, find others’ arguments, and formulate your own, keep a list of key terms—concepts—that crop up. How are you using these concepts in your writing? What premises are embedded in the way you use them? Are you making assumptions that you don’t want to make, taking things for granted that are questionable? Becker, in ch. 4, has a number of exercises for breaking lose from conventional usage. Especially good are “Bernie Beck’s trick” (say this without using the conceptual term) and the Wittgenstein trick (what’s the difference between your concept and a banal description of the same sort of activity).

Deciding on a method will often be the *last* thing you do. Don’t let math anxiety keep you from the method most appropriate for your study. Basic statistics are not hard to learn, software packages now do most of the computation that was so onerous in the past, and there are any number of good introductory courses here at DePaul (and elsewhere): you can be up to speed in ten weeks. Once you have gotten far enough in your proposal to figure out what your key concepts are, what you’re trying to explain

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(the “dependent variable”) and what you think the plausible explanations (the “independent variables”) are, try out the three methods located in Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, pp. 164-214. If analytic induction is the best fit, then you’re probably doing a qualitative study; if qualitative comparative analysis (“truth tables”) fit best, then you’re doing a comparative study; and if property space analysis unlocks the doors, then you will find yourself doing a qualitative study. Methods are (or should be) driven by the question you’re trying to answer, not vice versa.