

Guidelines for a Senior Thesis in Political Science (PSC 394)

The senior thesis is meant to be a learning experience that enables a student to put together ideas and information that the student has acquired during their college career, and to venture beyond the boundaries of any particular course. Students should keep in mind that a senior thesis should represent a fairly advanced level of work. A student should not propose to begin a project on a topic that he or she has never studied at all. The project should involve research (broadly defined to include field experience or other forms of gathering information and ideas). The thesis should be "original" in the sense of bringing ideas together in a way that is the student's own.

Specific expectations for the senior thesis project should be worked out between the student and the faculty advisor for the project. The student should develop a proposal that outlines the specific goals of the project, and is approved by the faculty member advising the project.

Who is eligible to write a political science senior thesis?

The independent research involved in a senior thesis represents the kind of work students can expect to do in graduate school. The senior thesis can be viewed as a prelude to graduate study. Students working towards graduate or professional school should consider doing a Senior Thesis.

- The senior thesis is open to seniors majoring in political science, with a minimum GPA of 3.3 in their major, or with approval of a political science faculty member.
- Though there is no specific course prerequisite, students engaging in a senior thesis project typically develop their project through PSC 300 (introduction to research methods and political analysis) or through PSC 393 (political science junior honors seminar).
- A student may apply a maximum of 4 credit hours of senior thesis credit toward their major.
- This course must be arranged with an individual faculty member who must approve the enrollment form.

Who Should Direct a Thesis?

Any full-time political science faculty member can direct a senior thesis. A student should approach one or more political science faculty members who specialize in the topic the student wishes to research, and with whom they work well. If a student wishes to work on a specific topic, but does not know a faculty member in that area of specialization, the student should consult with their advisor, the advising coordinator or the chair of the department. It is preferable that students choose to work with someone they know rather than choosing a topic and working with a faculty member with whom they have not worked. Students should be aware that faculty members are generally willing to work with students on a senior thesis, but are free to decline to work on a particular project.

It is important that students choose a faculty advisor who is willing and able to take an active role in guiding students, especially in encouraging their completion of the project. Students

should be aware that directing a senior thesis may be more time consuming than directing other types of independent-study projects. Both the student and the faculty advisor should have time available and a schedule that allows for regular meetings to discuss the progress of the project. The frequency and nature of these meetings should be discussed and agreed on by the student and the faculty member advising the project.

Student Responsibilities

As an independent project, the student writing the thesis has primary responsibility for the project, and should budget their time and energy so that the project is completed in a timely fashion. The faculty member advising the project should be a resource--offering guidance, suggesting readings, and offering critical responses to the student's work; but it is ultimately up to the student to produce the thesis.

Students doing a senior thesis should start thinking about a project that interests and excites them, identify a faculty members with whom they would like to work, and begin discussing and researching the project *at least one quarter before they plan on writing the thesis*. Students should not consider undertaking a senior thesis simply to fulfill requirements of the major or to get credits during a quarter in which course offerings do not fit the student's schedule. It is recommended that only students who have good organizational skills consider undertaking a senior thesis. Completing an independent project requires a great deal of self-direction, initiative and discipline.

How long should a senior thesis be?

There are no preset page limits for a political science senior thesis. Past senior theses have ranged from 40 to 140 pages. The length and nature of any specific project is to be determined by the student in consultation with the faculty member advising the project.

Grades for a senior thesis

A student should complete the senior thesis project within one quarter. *All preparatory work* towards writing should be accomplished the quarter prior to registering for the course. Reading, researching and writing for the project should be completed during the quarter in which the student is registered for the course. Faculty members will grade the senior thesis at the end of the quarter in which a student is registered. Incomplete grades should be given only if there are extenuating circumstances that hinder the completion of the project, *not* for a project that is unfinished as a result of poor planning and organization.

Once the thesis advisor has approved the final version of the thesis, the student should present two copies to the department. One will be kept by the faculty advisor. The other will be bound and placed in the departmental display case along with faculty publications.