

Political Science, Public Policy & Administration, International Affairs

SENIOR HONORS PROJECT GUIDELINES

GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY

1. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- a)** Students not already in the Honors Program (as Track I or Track II) at the start of their junior year (or with 3 to 4 semesters remaining) must have a 3.50 cumulative GPA or higher to be eligible to begin a senior honors project as a Track III honors student. **b)** Students must have a 3.25 GPA in the major in order to be eligible to write an honors thesis. Students must have a 3.25 in the major at the time they register for the A phase and they must maintain this 3.25 GPA while working on the honors thesis. The honors thesis coordinator will verify that each student's GPA meets these requirements before allowing them to register for 499 each semester. If a student's GPA falls below 3.25, his/her committee will review the student's progress on the thesis and reserves the right to terminate the thesis process at that point.
- c)** Ideally, students should have completed POSC/INTA 295 prior to beginning the thesis. At the latest, students should complete 295 by the end of the A portion of the thesis. The honors thesis coordinator will verify that 295 has been successfully completed before allowing students to register for the B portion.

2. COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEES

- a)** 499A students must meet with the honors thesis coordinator no later than the first week of class to define their topic and establish a committee.
- b)** One-year/adjunct faculty will not be allowed to serve on honors thesis committees. However, we encourage students to consult with those one-year/adjunct faculty members who have expertise relevant to the student's thesis.
- c)** Honors thesis committees are comprised of three faculty members. The chair must be a member of the political science department. No more than one member may be from outside the department.
- d)** The honors thesis coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that committees include faculty members with expertise appropriate to the thesis topic. It is particularly important that the committee chair have methodological and substantive expertise that will allow the student to successfully complete his/her research. It is acceptable (and, in fact, often helpful) if one member of the committee does not have expertise in the subject and is able to view the material as an "outsider."
- e)** Department faculty are expected to serve on honors thesis committees when asked by the honors thesis coordinator to do so (unless they can provide reasonable justification for refusing). In making these requests, the coordinator will be sensitive to the number of thesis committees to which each faculty member is already committed. The teaching benchmarks should be revised to indicate that a "satisfactory" teaching score (a 2) requires that faculty members are responsive to these requests from the coordinator.

3. CHECKPOINTS

- a)** Any incomplete received for one phase of the honors colloquium must be completed by the time class begins for the next phase or the student will not be allowed to continue in the colloquium.

- b) Barring extraordinary circumstances, students will not be allowed to take the A and B phase of the colloquium simultaneously.
- c) Colloquium grades will be assigned by the committee chair in consultation with the committee. It is the responsibility of the colloquium instructor and the readers to communicate concerns regarding the student's progress to the committee chair. The colloquium instructor will email students' grades to their committee members each semester so that readers are kept "in the loop."

4. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

Although theses will vary in precise structure and number of chapters, every thesis must contain the following sections:

- a) **Abstract:** The title of the thesis must be followed by a one-paragraph (maximum 300 words) abstract that summarizes the research question, theoretical argument and/or hypotheses, research approach, and results.
- b) **Introduction:** This section identifies the question the researcher is posing and explains why that question/problem is an important topic. The introduction should also provide a brief overview of the paper's structure.
- c) **Literature Review:** This section summarizes all of the major theoretical contributions by researchers in this field. The purpose of the literature review is to demonstrate that the student has mastered the prevailing theories, and is familiar with how researchers measure, examine, or analyze the relevant concepts. A literature review is not a long string of direct quotations from various authors; rather, the student must demonstrate their own understanding of this material by summarizing, analyzing, comparing, organizing, and critiquing this work in their own words. It is particularly important to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, insight, and utility of current research on this topic, rather than simply reciting others' works. Are there gaps in the literature? Unresolved controversies? Poorly defined concepts? In short, a thorough literature review will not only describe but critically assess the current state of the literature. If the thesis involves an empirical test of hypotheses, these hypotheses must be justified based on this literature and formally stated in this section.
- d) **Research Design:** The length and precise content of this section will vary based on the nature of the research question being posed. However, this section must specify in detail the methods the student will use to investigate the research question. The thesis is not a book report. The student must make an original contribution to the discipline, and this requires having a research question that can be tested or evaluated in a systematic manner.^[1] This section details those systematic methods. For empirical theses, this involves specifying the operational measures of each variable, data sources, and statistical techniques (or qualitative methods), and evaluating the reliability/validity of key measures and the internal and external validity of the overall design. For normative theses, this involves specifying the analytical methods, sources, and standards of evidence the student will employ to answer a theoretical question, prove the credibility of a particular interpretation, or examine and test a new understanding of a specific text, concept or principle.
- e) **Analysis:** One or more chapters which present the results of the data analysis, case studies, or application of the model/theory. For normative theses, at least one chapter should focus on drawing reasoned conclusions based on the theoretical analysis of the question raised. This might involve the recognition of more than one credible interpretation. The parameters for this analysis should be clearly established in the preceding section (research design). Students must follow the requirements of the Honors College and the preferences of their thesis committee regarding the display of tables and figures, if these are to be used.

f) Conclusions: This section summarizes the results of the analysis and discusses the implications of these findings. Where relevant, students should tie their findings back to the theoretical arguments and controversies highlighted in the literature review. Depending on the research topic and methods used, the conclusions section may include conditional forecasts, suggestions for further research, or policy recommendations.

g) Bibliography: The bibliography will only contain works actually cited in the thesis. It must include at least 25 sources.

5. OVERLAP BETWEEN THE THESIS PROJECT AND OTHER CLASSWORK

a) Students may not turn in, for credit in other classes, portions of the thesis that are substantially unaltered.

b) Students may, with the permission of both their thesis adviser and the professor teaching the course in question, turn in for course credit material that is related to the thesis project but differs substantially from the material contained in the thesis. For example, a senior seminar student may do a paper on the same general topic as their honors thesis, but must undertake a substantially different literature review (with a different focus than the thesis), develop new hypotheses, and conduct new data analysis.

6. GRAMMAR AND STYLE

a) All work must be spell-checked before being submitted to the student's thesis committee.

b) The thesis is a formal project. Therefore, students will spell out numbers under ten, avoid contractions, and make sure all sentences are complete.

c) Any tables, charts, or figures reproduced in the paper must include information about the original source within the table/chart/figure. Similarly, if the student produces tables, charts, or figures on their own, any data source used to create these items must be cited as part of the table/chart/figure.

d) Unless otherwise specified by the student's committee, the citation style in the thesis must conform to the APSA author-date system, as specified in *The Political Science Student Writer's Manual* by Gregory M. Scott and Stephen M. Garrison (6th Edition).

7. GENERAL RESEARCH GUIDELINES

a) Because the purpose of the literature review is to portray the state of research on the topic, it will consist primarily of academic sources. An academic source is a book or article whose primary audience is academics, rather than the general public. (This typically means articles that appear in peer-reviewed journals and books published in academic or other scholarly presses). Magazines, newspapers, and books written by non-academics are not considered academic sources. A dataset is not an academic source, in that it contains no theory or analysis. Datasets must be cited in the references according to the preferences of their copyright holders.

b) Students should know the identity and qualifications of all persons cited in their thesis. Further, persons cited in the thesis should possess the appropriate qualifications for whatever claim they are making. While using the internet is an acceptable strategy for conducting research, students must adhere to the same rules for other sources when using the internet. This means that websites hosted by unknown individuals will not be cited, or used, in a thesis.

c) Students will avoid using Wikipedia for the reasons discussed above. Authors are not clearly identified by Wikipedia, nor will the student, in most cases, be able to ascertain the qualifications of any Wikipedia contributor.

d) It is not appropriate to use the works of one author to summarize the work of another author.

Rather than relying on Eric Smith's characterization of Philip Converse's research, for example, the student should read Converse and cite the original work. Thesis chairs may consider exceptions if the work is obscure and unavailable, not in English, or otherwise unobtainable by the student.

[1] "Original contributions to the discipline" could include (but are not limited to): testing an existing theory using new data, measures, or cases; synthesizing existing theories to create a new theoretical framework and then testing hypotheses drawn from this new framework; examining a fresh interpretation of a specific text, concept or principle