

# Political Science 495S: Honors Seminar

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**Class Room:** Social Sciences 109

**Class Time:** Tue/Thu 1:25-2:40pm

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 11am-noon  
Thursday 3-4pm

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## COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed for political science majors who intend to write a senior honors thesis. Over the course of the semester, you will develop a thesis topic and a research plan that will allow you to make immediate progress towards a successful thesis next fall. To accomplish this, we will examine the individual components that comprise a successful thesis (including thesis topic/question, literature review, theory, research design, data/evidence), and you will begin to sketch these components for your own thesis through a series of written assignments. You will revise these assignments based on peer and instructor feedback, culminating in a thesis proposal (15-20 pages) that will serve as the blueprint for your thesis project. On the basis of this proposal, you will also be matched with a faculty advisor at the end of the semester.

It is important to note that this is *not* a substantive course in political science, nor is it a course designed to equip you with all relevant research skills. Writing a successful thesis requires a good question, relevant substantive knowledge, and appropriate research skills. You should make sure that your other course work has provided you with the skills and knowledge that your thesis topic will require. If you are unsure about this, please discuss this with me. Finally, completion of this course does not obligate you to write an honors thesis in the fall. Your grade and credit for this course is independent of your thesis project, and completing the course will teach you research and writing skills that will be valuable in themselves.

## REQUIRED READINGS

Required readings are available through the **Sakai page** for this course, as well as through the electronic resources available through Duke Library. See the semester schedule below for details.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Over the course of the semester, you will complete three written assignments that are the building blocks for your thesis proposal. For each assignment, we will hold an in-class peer review session, designed to allow you to engage with the projects of other students, and to receive feedback on your own work. Importantly, these peer review sessions will take place *before* your assignment

is due, providing you with the opportunity to revise your assignment based on the feedback you receive. To make these sessions as productive as possible, you must upload a complete draft of your assignment to the Sakai Digital Dropbox by 6pm on the day *before* the review session.

If for some reason you will be absent for the peer review session, contact me with sufficient lead time so we can make alternative arrangements. Unless you have made other arrangements with me, you must still upload your draft to the Dropbox by the deadline, or your grade will be penalized. You will be also required to contact another student in the class and provide them with written feedback on their assignment before the due date of the assignment. However, no other student is obligated to provide you with feedback on your assignment.

## GRADES AND EVALUATION

Grades will be based on participation, written assignments, and your final thesis proposal.

- Participation (including peer-review sessions): 20%
- Assignment 1: Research Question: 15%
- Assignment 2: Literature Review: 15%
- Assignment 3: Research Design: 15%
- Final Thesis Proposal: 35%

Unless you have made prior arrangements with me, assignments or proposals that are turned in after they are due will incur a 10 point (out of 100) penalty for each (part of) an hour they are late.

Course grades will be determined according to the following grading scale: **A:** 93-100 **A-:** 90-92 **B+:** 88-89 **B:** 83-87 **B-:** 80-82 **C+:** 78-79 **C:** 73-77 **C-:** 70-72 **D+:** 68-69 **D:** 63-67 **D-:** 60-62 **F:** 0-59

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students and faculty at Duke are governed by the **Duke Community Standard**, and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If I suspect that a student has attempted to represent someone else's work as their own, or to cheat in any other manner on an exam or a written assignment, I will refer the case to the Office of Student Conduct in accordance with university policy. If a violation of the academic integrity policy is found to have occurred, the minimum penalty will be a zero (0) on the assignment/exam in question. If you have any questions about plagiarism and proper citation methods, please consult the **Duke Tutorial on Plagiarism**.

## STUDENTS WITH CHALLENGES

Students with challenges who require individualized testing or other accommodations should identify themselves and express their needs during the first week of the semester. Where the challenge is not immediately apparent, verification will be required.

## APPROXIMATE SEMESTER SCHEDULE

### Week 1 (1/14):

- Introduction

### Week 2 (1/19 & 1/21): Posing a Research Question

#### Assignment:

- Before Thursday's class, go to the *American Political Science Review* website. Find three recent articles, and identify the research question the article seeks to answer. (Write no more than a few sentences for each article.)
- Do the same thing for the three example honors theses in the Sakai Resource Folder for week 2.

### Week 3 (1/26 & 1/28): What's Social Science?

#### Assignment:

- Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. "The Science in Social Science." Chapter 1 in Designing Social Inquiry. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- For Thursday's class, formulate three potential thesis topics/research questions you are interested in. (Write no more than a paragraph for each.)

### Week 4 (2/2 & 2/4 - no class on 2/4):

#### Assignment:

- Schedule an individual meeting with me to discuss your potential thesis topics.

### Week 5 (2/9 & 2/11): Theory and Explanation

#### Assignment:

- Jon Elster. 2007. Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Think about how Elster's discussion of explanations and mechanisms applies to the thesis topics you are considering.

Week 6 (2/16 & 2/18 - no class on 2/18):

Assignment:

- Draft of Assignment 1 must be uploaded to Sakai by 6pm on 2/15
- Tuesday: Peer review session for Assignment 1

Week 7 (2/23 & 2/25): Data/Evidence

Assignment:

- Tuesday: Assignment 1 due in class
- Tuesday: Field trip to Perkins
- Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten. 2009. The Fundamentals of Political Science Research. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3.

Week 8 (3/1 & 3/3):

Assignment:

- Christopher Browning. 1998. Ordinary Men. New York: Harper Perennial. "Afterword"
- Claudio Lopez Guerra. 2005. "Should Expatriates Vote?" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13: 216-234.

Week 9 (3/8 & 3/10):

Assignment:

- Brian Moraski and Chuck Shipan. 1999. "The Politics of Supreme Court Nominations." *American Journal of Political Science*. 43: 1069-95.
- Draft of Assignment 2 must be uploaded to Sakai by 6pm on 3/9
- Peer review session for Assignment 2 on 3/10

Week 10 (3/15 & 3/17) - No classes/spring break:

Week 11 (3/22 & 3/24):

Assignment:

- Tuesday: Assignment 2 due in class

- Choose two of the honors theses in the Sakai Resource Folder for Week 11, and read them in their entirety.

Week 12 (3/29 & 3/31 - no class 3/31):

Assignment:

- Assignment 3 due on 3/29: Research Design
- Peer review session for Assignment 3 on 3/31

Week 13 (4/5 & 4/7):

Assignment:

- Tuesday: Assignment 3 due in class
- Schedule an individual meeting with me to discuss your thesis proposal.

Week 14 (4/12 & 4/14):

Assignment:

- Proposal draft due on Monday, 4/11 at noon
- Tuesday: Peer review sessions for thesis proposal
- Thursday: Student presentations of proposals

Week 15 (4/19 & 4/21):

- Student presentations of proposals

Week 16 (4/26):

- Student presentations of proposals

**Final Proposal Due Wednesday, May 4 at noon.**