

PS 191H: Political Science Honors Thesis Seminar

Instructor: Marika Csapo, mcsapo@ucla.edu
Class Meetings: Tu/Th, 11:00a - 12:15p, Royce 152
Office Hours: by appointment

Fall, 2018

Course Description

This course serves as one of the requirements for eligibility to participate in the Political Science Honors Thesis Program. The goal of the course will be to guide you through the process of producing a detailed research proposal that may turn into your thesis project should you apply and be accepted to the Program. Each week short research design assignments will be due on paper. Ultimately, you will assemble the pieces into a longer proposal including a puzzle, a research question, a literature review highlighting the relevance of your contribution, a preliminary argument, and a research design for answering the question and assessing your argument. You will also produce a summer reading list during this course and will find an adviser if you have not already.

Homework and Grades

Course grades will be informed by the following components: a series of five short research design assignments, a 15-page research proposal, a 5-7 minute presentation on your research, and a peer review discussion assignment.

Research Design Assignments: These are weekly assignments that I will collect on Thursdays in class (paper copies, please), including:

1. a preliminary puzzle and research question,
2. a preliminary list of sources that identifies the five MOST relevant academic sources you have found for your project,
3. a detailed summary of your preliminary argument (1-3 paragraphs),
4. an annotated bibliography based on your careful reading of the most relevant 5 sources, and a paragraph on what you think your contribution will be, and
5. a summer reading list.

Homework and Quiz Dates

Assignment	Contribution to Grade	Due
Puzzle and Research Question	5%	4/12
List of Sources	5%	4/19
Preliminary Argument	5%	4/26
Annotated Bibliography	5%	5/3
Summer Reading List	5%	5/10
Research Proposal	50%	5/24
Research Presentation	5%	Varies
Peer Review	20%	Varies

Research Proposal: This will be a 15-page proposal which should include a puzzle, a research question, a literature review highlighting the relevance of your contribution, a preliminary argument, and a proposed research design for answering the question and assessing your argument. It should use standard margins and font and should be double-spaced. It should also include a “Works Cited” page. You will submit two printed copies (one for me and one for a peer reviewer) in class on Thursday of Week 8 (May 24).

Research Presentation: During Week 2 students will sign up for a time slot to present your research to the class during either Week 9 or Week 10 classes. The presentations will last 5-7 minutes and will be followed by a brief discussion. I recommend that you use slides or some form of visual aid, but I will leave that to your discretion. The presentation should summarize your research proposal including your question, your argument, and your research design.

Peer Review: You will be assigned one paper to peer review. You will receive the paper that you will peer review in class on Thursday of Week 8. On the day that student presents (during Week 9 or 10), you will bring two copies of your written comments on the paper (one for me and one for the student) in which you will review the scope of the research question, the plausibility of the argument (and suggest possible counterarguments they should consider), and provide any suggestions on the research design. You will serve as a discussant at the end of the presentation (please restrict your comments to no more than 3 minutes).

Course Policies

Academic Dishonesty: Students that do not turn in their own work will receive an “F” on the assignment or quiz, and depending on the severity of the infraction, possibly in the class. Cheating on exams must also be reported to the university.

Reading Materials: There are no assigned textbooks for this class. Instead, we will read mostly articles that are available online (when you are connected to UCLA wifi or VPN). I will post 1-2 articles per week on the course website.

Assignments Submission: Papers should have one-inch margins and may be double- or one-and-a-half-spaced, with a standard font no larger than 12 pts. Late papers will be docked one point per day they are late. Papers must be original writing and should cite any readings or online materials that are referenced.

Lecture and Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Political Research

Lecture 1 Honors Thesis Program Requirements.

Lecture 2 What makes a good research paper?

Reading:

- Kasara, K. 2007. "Tax me if you can: ethnic geography, democracy, and the taxation of agriculture in Africa." *American Political Science Review*.

Week 2: Choosing A Question

Lecture 1 How to choose a question.

Lecture 2 Workshop on questions.

Reading:

- Geddes, B. 2003. "Big questions, little answers: how the questions you choose affect the answers you get." In *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory-Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*.

Week 3: The Literature Review

Lecture 1 How to write a literature review.

Lecture 2 Guest lecture.

Reading:

- Pautasso, M. 2013. "Ten simple rules for writing a literature review." *PLOS Computational Biology*.
- <http://www.duluth.umn.edu/hrallis/guides/researching/litreview.html>

Week 4: Constructing and Operationalizing an Argument

Lecture 1 How to construct and operationalize an argument.

Lecture 2 Workshop on constructing and operationalizing arguments.

Reading:

- Hedström, P., and Ylikoski, P. “Causal mechanisms in the social sciences” (Working Paper).

Week 5: Counterfactuals and Case Selection

Lecture 1 Counterfactuals and case selection.

Lecture 2 Workshop on contributions.

Reading:

- Przeworski, A. “Is the science of comparative politics possible?” In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*.
- Geddes, B. 2003. “How the cases you choose affect the answers you get: selection bias and related issues.” In *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*.

Week 6: Research Methods in Political Science

Lecture 1 A taxonomy of methods (positivist vs. normative; quantitative vs. qualitative).

Lecture 2 Guest lecture.

Reading:

- Brady, H., Collier, D., and Box-Steffensmeier, J. 2011. “Overview of political methodology: post-behavioral movements and trends.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*.
- **Optional for purchase:** Leopold, D., and Stears, M. 2008. *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*.

Week 7: One-on-one Appointments

Lecture 1 No class.

Lecture 2 No class.

Week 8: Miscellaneous

Lecture 1 Memorial Day.

Lecture 2 Guest lecture.

Weeks 9 and 10: Student Presentations

Lecture 1 Student presentations.

Lecture 2 Student presentations.