



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY
MADRID

POLS 4991: Political Science Honours Thesis

Procedures and Instructions
Saint Louis University – Madrid Campus
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This manual is subject to change. Any changes will be emailed to students enrolled in
POLS 4991 and faculty thesis supervisors.

For corrections or updates, please email Simona Rentea (simona.rentea@slu.edu)

Introduction:

The Political Science Honors Thesis is a one-semester project that results in a research thesis with citations and a bibliography of work used in the project. It offers seniors the opportunity and challenge of completing a significant, extended study that is the culmination of their baccalaureate work. Drawing on and providing evidence of the background and skills acquired during the previous three years, it allows students to devote themselves wholeheartedly in their final year to learning a topic they themselves have defined and developed.

The honors project needs to contain an element of original research so it goes beyond a summary of what has been done in the field of political science. The thesis will contain an explicit articulation of the theory and the approach used to compose the project.

The research project is guided by the Thesis Director who must be a Political Science Faculty Member. The Thesis Director is the primary advisor. It is suggested that the student select the Director from among the faculty from whom they have taken courses and who have some area of expertise to contribute to the project.

The responsibility for selecting and organizing a senior thesis project rests largely with the student. The process of independent thinking and carrying a project through from initial idea to final realization is emphasized. The Director serves as advisor and evaluator, and meets regularly with the student throughout the semester to assess progress and provide guidance.

This manual is designed to state thesis requirements and deadlines, to provide guidance, and to assist the student in undertaking and completing the thesis. It outlines college-wide requirements and general guidelines for the thesis. However, because each thesis is an individual project with particular challenges, more stringent requirements may apply. These may be stipulated by the thesis advisor. Questions that are not covered in this manual should be addressed to the student's thesis advisor.

The purpose of the Political Science Honors Thesis is to synthesize the knowledge and insight that the student has acquired after three years of studying. An interdisciplinary approach to the thesis is welcome, as the knowledge acquired from courses taken in other disciplines (Communications, Sociology, Economics, Business Administration, Philosophy, etc.) will invariably enhance the student's ability to analyze and assess the issues posed by the chosen research topic.

It is of the utmost importance that the student chooses a field of study that he or she finds interesting, and a research topic that can be treated in depth within the limitations of an Honors Thesis. The honors thesis is a semester project, and so requires motivation, dedication and commitment on the part of the student. Although it is intended to be a challenging exercise, the Honors Thesis should also provide a satisfying intellectual

experience, as the student discovers that he or she has mastered a series of important skills and techniques acquired in the course of studying Political Students.

Admission:

Students who have done exceptional work in courses and who are interested in developing research skills and/or in attending graduate school are encouraged to consider this option. To be admitted to the Political Science Honors Thesis, students must have a minimum GPA of 3.4 overall, and 3.5 for political science courses, as well as have taken POLS 200 *Methods in Political Science*, which offers basic preparation for this project.

To enroll in the honors thesis, students will sign up for POLS 4991, the semester of their project. **To enroll, students must have written permission from the Director of the Political Science Program, and must fill out and submit the application form to him/her. Deadline: May 15 for projects that begin in the fall or by November 1 for projects that begin in the Spring.**

Students who have any questions are to contact the Honors Thesis Director of the Department of Political Science.

Objectives of the Thesis:

The faculty's objectives are to provide the student with an intellectual project of substance that will develop and demonstrate the ability to:

- undertake and complete independent work at an advanced level in the major;
- think critically: to analyze, synthesize, and reason with the degree of sophistication that is to be expected of a graduate of the college program;
- work creatively and with discipline, as well as to respond productively to criticism;
- understand the assumptions and approaches that underlie the disciplines relevant to the thesis;
- express ideas in writing with clarity and precision;
- put forward a hypothesis; and
- include a theoretical component backed up by findings and evidence.

Thesis Director Selection:

In consultation with the Honors Thesis Director, the honors thesis candidate will select a Thesis Director from among the Political Science Department Faculty. **The research topic and the name of the faculty who will supervise the project should be submitted to the Honors Thesis Director by May 15 for projects that begin in the fall or by November 1 for projects that begin in the spring.**

The Thesis Director will guide students through this process, but in order for this to happen effectively, it is very important that students meet with faculty regularly. Students should be ready to meet at least once a week with the Thesis Director. Students will take the responsibility for organizing these meetings, as well as meetings with the other faculty who form the Committee.

The responsibilities of the Thesis Director are:

- to consult with the student about interests and possible topics;
- to help the student select an appropriate thesis topic, one that is suitably challenging yet feasible;
- to advise the student on selection of a thesis committee; to call for meetings of the committee, beyond those specified in the college-wide schedule of deadlines, when advisable;
- to meet with the student regularly throughout the thesis semester, to encourage and guide the student in research, in formulating ideas, and in finding effective structures for formal expression;
- to respond critically and constructively to early thesis drafts, to work with the student on refining, clarifying and polishing, and to suggest when response from the rest of the committee should be solicited;
- to evaluate the student's final thesis draft in term of standards of scholarship, creativity, form, and documentation established by the major, and to stipulate necessary revisions; to help the student satisfy demands for revision from the other members of the committee;
- to chair the final thesis committee meeting and to submit the grade of the thesis.

Each faculty member can only direct a limited number of theses and will assess whether his or her knowledge and capabilities match the student's needs in deciding whether to agree to serve as thesis advisor. In cases where the student fails to meet thesis deadlines or to work conscientiously on the thesis, the faculty member may resign as thesis advisor. In this case, the Program Director may withdraw the student immediately from POLS 491.

Thesis Committee:

Well in advance of the thesis semester, the student sets up the thesis committee, composes the thesis proposal, and plans out the work of the semester.

Together with the Director, the students will select one other member of faculty to serve as a Thesis Committee. He/she could be from outside the Political Science Department.

The Thesis Committee will meet with the student at least twice. **The thesis proposal will be submitted to the Committee by November 1 for Spring 491 projects and by May 15 for Fall projects.**

Student Responsibilities:

The Committee will meet at least one time during the semester to assess the research project. The Committee members may also meet individually with the student to offer assistance on the project. Students are encouraged to stay in touch with their Thesis Director and to consult with Committee members.

Projects which do not succeed are often those in which the student and the Thesis advisor have not stayed in regular contact. **It is the student's responsibility to contact the Director because this is an independent project, and so the student is to take primary responsibility for staying in contact with the Thesis Director.**

Regular meetings are important because they permit problems to be addressed. A good project is not problem-free, but is one whose problems have been solved in consultation. Students need to take the initiative of staying in touch with the Thesis Director and all members of the committee to gain their assistance. This is especially important when the student encounters problems. Students who fail to meet deadlines may be asked to withdraw from the Honors Thesis Program and may receive directed study credit in place of the honors thesis credit.

Course Credit

POLS 4991 is a 3-credit course that counts as one of the POLS electives.

Thesis Approval:

For the final thesis to be accepted, all members of the Thesis Committee must agree that the project deserves at least a grade of B. Any grade below B means that the student will not get credit for POLS 4991.

A student writing an Honors Thesis should expect to produce a highly polished, professional piece of work. Multiple revisions, including a final revision after the thesis defense, should be anticipated. Students need to allow time for these revisions to allow the project to develop in the proper way. It is thus important to observe all deadlines. Missing deadlines can result in a lower grade on the thesis or the thesis may revert to an independent study and thesis credit will not be given.

Thesis Grades:

At the end of the semester, the thesis is awarded a final grade. A student may receive a grade of *Incomplete* of the thesis if, in the judgment of the committee, the work remaining

is not substantial and can reasonably be completed by the deadline for incomplete grades. The thesis must be completed, approved, and turned in time, or the grade will become *No Credit* and the student will be required to register for an additional three credits. In such a case, the student will not graduate until the subsequent year.

In either case, the thesis is signed by all members of the committee. The signature of the Thesis Director certifies that the committee has met and judged the thesis acceptable in the quality of its writing, thinking, scholarship or creativity, form and documentation to fulfill the thesis requirement for the B.A. degree.

Thesis length requirements:

Theses length is expected to be around 50 double spaced pages (about 10,000-12,000 words). The quality of the thesis is the critical factor. While 9,000 words (40pp) would be shorter than the average, it is certainly conceivable that it could be a high-quality thesis.

Timetable:

Semester Before the Research Project Begins Admission to the Thesis Program

Students who seek admission must apply before they sign up for POLS 4991. To apply, interested students should contact the Honors Thesis Coordinator of the Department of Political Science to officially sign up for this course.

May 1 for projects beginning in the Fall; November 1 for Projects in Spring

Summer before POLS 4991:

Preliminary work should begin on the project in the summer before POLS 491 or the break before a spring term of POLS 4991. This work will begin in the semester before POLS 491 and will unfold as a plan between the student and the Thesis Director in which the student and Thesis Director are in regular communication.

Guidelines for the Thesis Proposal:

The Thesis Proposal is intended to assist students, the thesis adviser and members of your thesis committee in planning for the thesis semester ahead. In writing this proposal, we

hope you take this opportunity to reflect on what led you to this topic and/or project, and where you would like to go with it in the coming year. In writing this, you might want to ask yourself:

- What drives me toward this topic?
- What is it that I hope to accomplish in this thesis?

It could be that in pursuing this project you would like to delve deeply into a certain topic, or to explore particular methodologies. You might also have goals related to demonstrating your ability in a variety of areas, not just in writing and scholarship. You may want to improve on a particular set of creative abilities or talents, to improve on your writing or research skills, or to explore an area that is somewhat new to you.

In the process of writing this proposal, you should:

- (1) consider the basic idea for your thesis,
- (2) outline a plan for the coming year,
- (3) assess if you have the necessary preparation to successfully complete the thesis as proposed, and
- (4) consider how your thesis idea or topic is situated in one or more academic disciplines.

Of course, there is much that you, the thesis student, have yet to learn about your thesis topic; however, in the proposal you should think about how you came to this topic and what you already bring to it. In writing the Thesis Proposal, you might also keep in mind the objectives of the Honors Thesis, as outlined in this manual. To address the objectives and goals stated above, you should consider the questions listed below when writing your thesis proposal.

Ideally, the proposal should **not** be written in a manner that lists the questions and then answers them, e.g., “In answer to question (a)...” Rather, you should read through these questions, write your proposal using your own words, and then go back and make sure you’ve addressed all or most of these questions. Some of the questions may be more or less relevant for your thesis; however, most will be relevant to all theses. If you find very few of these questions are relevant for your thesis, you should meet with your Thesis Director to discuss your thesis topic in greater detail before you submit your proposal.

(a) Think of your thesis as a semester-long project. What do you propose to do in completing this project? What do you hope to accomplish? What topic(s) will you explore? What will you examine, write about, or create – and how does this connect to your thesis topic?

(b) How did you get interested in this topic? Where did you get the idea for this thesis? What existing work, ideas, readings, techniques, approaches and/or theories

did you draw on in thinking about this project? What is the general approach (methodology) you will be using?

(c) Your thesis topic and goals should draw on your coursework here at SLU-Madrid. What courses have prepared you for this project? What courses will you be taking in the current or coming semester that will also contribute to your thesis? How?

(d) What other experiences (e.g., internships, living or studying abroad, research or personal contacts, or other experiences) have led you to choose this thesis topic?

(e) As part of this proposal, you will be asked to submit a preliminary reading plan (the preliminary bibliography). Give some background to your reading plan. How did you decide what you want or need to read?

(f) To what political science field(s) or area(s) is your thesis connected? In what traditions will you be following? What contribution do you hope this project will make to these fields/discipline(s)? What is the interdisciplinary component of your thesis (e.g., how will it draw from multiple disciplines)? [Note: you will most likely have a primary discipline, area or technique in which you are working, but what other disciplines may also be relevant and how might you integrate these into your thesis?]

(g) What do you see as your own strengths in undertaking this project? And what are some areas or skills that you may need to improve on or that may need some special attention?

Additional information to enable students to develop a clearer structure and form of the proposal can be found in the compulsory course reading. **Lisa A. Baglione, Writing a research paper in Political Science – A practical guide to inquiry, structure, and methods, Belmont CA: Thomson Higher Education, 2007** is the instruction manual for POLS-491 Research Thesis.

Format for the Thesis Proposal:

Sequence of Pages

1. Title/Cover Page. Note: The Title/Cover Page has no page number.
2. Proposal Narrative: This is the written portion of the Thesis Proposal. It should be no less than 2 and no more than 5 pages in length.
3. Preliminary Bibliography This includes a list of resources, research and/or readings, including the books you plan to consult, preliminary ideas for readings in areas you need to research more, as well as other sources.
4. Proposed Timeline: This is your opportunity to think about what kinds of deadlines are most helpful to you in accomplishing a major project over a significant period of time. You might want to think about what you hope to accomplish each week, and what parts of the project you hope to have accomplished at certain points in the coming semester and in the following semester. What other significant dates or deadlines might there be?
In terms of the writing, what is your plan? How will you document or report on your progress?

Page Format

All Thesis Proposals must be double spaced on 8-1/2" x 11" paper. The text must be double-spaced. Margins must be 1-1/2" on the left and 1" on the right, top, and bottom. Pages of the written portion of the proposal should be numbered consecutively, starting with the first page of text (all pages, including Proposal Narrative, Bibliography and Proposed Timeline, but excluding the Title Page), using Arabic numerals. Page numbers should be centered at the top or bottom of the page and placed consistently throughout. Two-sided copies are not permitted.

Guidelines for Thesis Self-evaluation:

Step 1: Summarizing the process thus far.

- Re-read your Thesis Proposal, but don't assume your committee will.
- Briefly restate or summarize the goals and intention of your thesis as stated in the Thesis Proposal;
- Describe and discuss about what modifications, new directions and insights you have had during this semester. How has your thesis topic/focus changed and/or stayed the same. Why?
- Where is your thinking on your topic at now?

Step 2: Discussing relevant/useful sources.

- Discuss in detail the most important works (texts, artwork, music, other sources) and their impact on your thinking about your thesis during this past semester. (We recommend referencing at least three such sources.)

Step 3: Describe what you have accomplished thus far.

- Reflect on your process. Did your reading, writing, and work progress as you had expected? What went differently?
- Are you where you had hoped or expected to be at this point? What has helped you progress, what has hindered your progress?
- Write a timeline of what you've done thus far, referencing the schedule that you had planned for yourself for the first semester and how well you have been able to follow it.

Step 4: Planning for next steps.

- In light of what you've learned about your topic and your own work habits on a major project, write a plan for your next steps.
- Think about what type of work schedule has worked (or failed to work) for you this past semester, and how you plan to accomplish your thesis work in the coming semester.

Develop a schedule (e.g., time commitments) for the coming semester.

- Include required dates/deadlines from the Thesis Manual
- Include own dates/deadlines

Requirement for the Thesis:

Table of Contents

The table of contents should clearly illustrate how the thesis is organized. It may be brief or elaborate, but it must correspond exactly to the headings and the subheadings included in the text. A list of tables and figures may be included on a separate page following the table of contents.

Tables and Figures

Style manuals often do not give clear instructions on the preparation of figures and tables. The thesis advisor can answer questions concerning these matters. Some general guidelines are as follows:

Tables and figures may appear on separate pages or within the body of the text. A description of a figure should appear below it or, if there is insufficient space, on a facing page. The description of a table normally appears above it. Tables and figures should be numbered independently.

A table that is oversized may be divided so that portions of it appear on two pages facing each other. The entire title and any footnotes must appear on the left-hand side of such over-sized tables.

Thesis Abstract:

The Thesis Abstract is a 150-200-word statement of the essence of the thesis. It should give a clear sense of the central argument, rationale for, and/or concerns of the thesis, as well as the major areas of discussion, examples, creative experiments, etc. and their outcome. The thesis abstract should be submitted to the committee with the final draft of the thesis and will be discussed at the final meeting.

The Form of the Thesis

All theses must be double spaced on A4 paper. Margins must be 1-1/2" on the left and 1" on the right, top, and bottom. Pages should be numbered consecutively, starting with the first page of text, using Arabic numerals. Page numbers should be centered at the top or bottom of the page. Two-sided copies are not permitted.

If a thesis includes non-print material--CDs, slides, films, music scores, oversized manuscripts, etc.--one copy of such material should be submitted with the copy of the written component of the thesis intended for professional binding.

All theses must follow an accepted manual of style and consistent form of documentation, since preferred style manuals and forms of documentation vary by major and discipline. The student should check with the thesis advisor to determine the style and form of documentation that should be followed.

The appropriate style manual should answer any questions of form that the student may have. The following information is provided as a brief overview of some major points of organization and presentation.

Sequence of Pages

The following sequence of pages is recommended:

Preliminary pages (numbered with small Roman Numerals)

Title Page

Acknowledgments and/or Dedication

Table of Contents
List of Tables
List of Figures
Abstract
Body (numbered with Arabic numerals)
Body of Text
Figures and Tables (if not included in text)
Bibliography
Appendices

Application for Honors Thesis in Political Science / IR focus
Please also submit a copy of your transcript with this form.

Name: _____ Expected date of graduation _____

Student major(s): _____ Semester for POLS 4991 _____

Student signature: _____ Topic for Honors
Project:

Approval from the Honors Thesis Coordinator of Political Science for signing up for
POLS 490:

_____ date _____

Thesis Director _____ (signature: _____ Date _____)

(By May 15 or November 1 of the semester before beginning POLS 4991)

Thesis Committee Member: _____ date _____

Thesis Title:
