

## Department of Political Science Senior Thesis Guidelines

### Description of the Senior Thesis

The Senior Thesis is a year-long project that requires students to follow a carefully sequenced period of reading, writing, and revision that culminates in a paper of at least 40 pages (10,000 words) that utilizes both primary and secondary sources to defend a clearly stated thesis.

The faculty expects that students undertaking thesis work will be both well-prepared to address their chosen topic and conscientious about meeting all deadlines and fulfilling all requirements for completion of the thesis.

In order to receive honors, a student must receive an A- or above on the Senior Thesis, have a GPA above 3.5 in all of his or her Political Science courses, and have a 3.0 cumulative GPA.

### Guidelines for Completion of a Senior Thesis

#### *Spring Semester of the Student's Junior Year*

1) Students must by the end of spring classes secure the agreement of an appropriate Political Science Department faculty member to serve as their thesis director. Students who plan to study off-campus (e.g., in a Study Abroad Program or in the Washington Semester Program at American University) during the spring semester of their junior year must seek an appropriate thesis advisor during the fall semester of their junior year.

**Note: Political Science faculty are not obligated to direct a senior thesis.** A faculty member will decide whether to accept or reject a student's invitation to direct a thesis on the following bases:

- a) The fit between the faculty member's specialization and interests and the student's topic
- b) An assessment of the student's ability, commitment, and preparation for undertaking the proposed project
- c) The faculty member's workload for the next academic year (e.g., faculty are prohibited from directing more than two senior theses each year)

2) **Students must complete the "Department of Political Science Senior Thesis Questionnaire" by June 15.**<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire requires students to

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<sup>1</sup> Students planning to graduate in January or August should see the "Schedule for the Completion of a Senior Honors Thesis" at the end of this document.

formulate a specific research question, compile a preliminary bibliography, and provide evidence that they have done the course and preparatory work necessary to complete their proposed thesis.

#### *Fall Semester of the Student's Senior Year*

- 1) Students enroll in PL 374: Senior Thesis Prep for the fall semester of their senior year.
- 2) Students consult with their thesis directors during the first week of classes to establish a reading list and to set a schedule of meetings. A student's grade for GO 374 and eligibility to continue thesis work in the spring semester will be based on their completion of the assigned readings, the quality of their written work, and their preparation for the meetings with their thesis director.
- 3) **Students must participate in the Senior Thesis Workshop on the third Friday in November** (see "Senior Thesis Workshop Guidelines," which can be found on the Political Science Department's web page). **Note: students must, in consultation with their thesis director, choose the second reader for their thesis prior to the Senior Thesis Workshop.** This second reader should be a member of the Skidmore Political Science faculty.
- 4) Students must meet with their thesis directors prior to the conclusion of the fall semester to establish a schedule for the completion of different stages of the research and for the submission of various drafts of the thesis during the spring semester.
- 5) Students must receive a final grade of at least "B" in PL 374 and the permission of their thesis directors to enroll in PL 375: Senior Thesis during the spring semester.

#### *Spring Semester of the Student's Senior Year*

- 1) Students enroll in PL 375: Senior Thesis for the spring semester of their senior year.
- 2) Thesis directors meet with their students during the first week of classes to identify a third or outside reader. Thesis directors are encouraged to choose a third reader from outside the college. Thesis directors can, however, select a reader from another department on campus if they cannot identify an appropriate third reader from outside of the college.

#### **Senior Honors Thesis Defense**

- 1) **Students will defend their theses some time between April 12 and April 22.** The thesis panel will consist of the thesis director, the second reader, and the
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third reader.

2) Students will be expected during the thesis defense to perform successfully the following:

- a) Provide a summary of their research question, argument, methodology, and findings
- b) Provide cogent responses to questions posed by the members of the thesis panel

3) At the conclusion of the thesis defense, the members of the panel will convene to decide on the grade for the thesis. The final grade for the thesis will be determined by the panel's evaluation of the following:

- a) The persuasiveness of the written argument
- b) The quality of the writing
- c) The student's performance during the thesis defense

4) The members of the panel will then meet with the student to convey to him or her the final grade for the thesis.

5) All students who complete a senior thesis must submit a clean (i.e., without either marginal or summary comments), graded, bound copy of their thesis to the Barbara McDonough, the Political Science Department's administrative assistant, by **May 1**.

### **Schedule for Completion of a Senior Honors Thesis<sup>2</sup>**

#### *Fall of Junior Year*

Students who plan to study off-campus during the spring seek the approval of an appropriate Political Science Department faculty member to direct their thesis.

#### *Spring of Junior Year*

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<sup>2</sup> Students planning to graduate in January or August must seek the approval of an appropriate Political Science Department faculty member to direct their thesis and must also fill out the Senior Honors Thesis Questionnaire no later than two semesters (or two summer sessions, in the case of August graduation) prior to graduation. PL 374 must be completed in the penultimate semester (or summer session) before graduation and PL 375 must be completed the final semester (or summer session) before graduation. All aspects of the senior thesis, including the senior thesis defense and the submission of clean copy of the thesis to the Department, must be completed before January 31 (in the case of January graduation), or August 31 (in the case of August graduation).

- 1) Students develop their thesis topics and complete the "Department of Political Science Senior Honors Thesis Questionnaire."
- 2) Students in residence at the college seek the approval of an appropriate Political Science Department faculty member to direct their thesis.
- 3) Students enroll in PL 374: Senior Thesis Prep.

#### *Fall of Senior Year*

- 1) Students apprise their thesis directors of their intention to proceed with thesis work.
- 2) Students establish, in consultation with their thesis directors, a reading list and set a schedule for meetings.
- 3) Students establish a research and writing schedule in consultation with their thesis directors.
- 4) Students, in consultation with their thesis directors, choose their second readers.
- 5) Students participate in the Senior Thesis Workshop on the second Friday in November.
- 6) Students enroll in PL 375: Senior Thesis for the spring semester.

#### *Winter Break of Senior Year*

Students begin drafting their theses.

#### *Spring of Senior year*

- 1) Students apprise their thesis directors of their intention to proceed with thesis work.
- 2) Thesis directors select their students' third readers by the end of the first week of classes .
- 3) Students submit their completed theses by April 11.
- 4) Students defend their theses some time between April 12 and April 22.
- 5) Students submit a clean (i.e., without either marginal or summary comments), graded, bound copy of the thesis to Barbara McDonough, the Political science Department's administrative assistant, by May 1.