

Senior Honors Thesis

The Senior Honors Thesis is a year-long project that requires students to follow a carefully sequenced period of reading, writing, and revision culminating 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 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 and have a GPA above 3.5 in all PL courses.

Guidelines for Completion of a Senior Honors Thesis

1) Students interested in writing a senior honors thesis must fill out the Department of Political Science Senior Honors Thesis Questionnaire during the spring semester of their junior year (all questionnaires must be submitted to the Political Science Department no later than June 15 of the summer prior to the beginning of the senior year).¹ For the questionnaire, students must formulate a specific research question, compile a preliminary bibliography, and be able to provide evidence that they have done the course and preparatory work necessary to complete their proposed thesis.

Students must also get the agreement of an appropriate Political Science department faculty member to act as their thesis director, also before June 15 of the summer prior to the beginning of the thesis.

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.

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.

2) Students enroll in "PL 374: Senior Thesis Prep" for the fall semester of their senior year. Students consult with their thesis director during the first week of classes to establish a reading list and to set a schedule of meetings. A student's grade for PL 374 and eligibility to continue thesis work in the spring semester will be based on their response to the assigned readings, the quality of their written work, their preparation for the meetings with their thesis director, and their performance on the following required work:

- a) A 5-7 page thesis prospectus that presents the thesis and the research design.
- b) An annotated bibliography that includes both primary and secondary sources.

¹ 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.

- 3) Students must meet with their thesis director 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.
- 4) Students must receive a final grade of at least "B" in PL 374 and the permission of the department to enroll in "PL 375: Senior Thesis" during the spring semester.
- 5) Students begin drafting their senior thesis during Winter Break at the latest.
- 6) Students enroll in "PL 375: Senior Thesis" for the spring semester of their senior year. During the first week of classes, students meet with their director to identify a second reader. Students are encouraged to choose a second reader from among the Political Science department faculty. Students can, however, select a reader from another department on campus, provided that both the thesis director and the second reader endorse this decision.
- 7) Students who wish to have their thesis considered for department honors or for a Periclean Award must submit the final version of their work to their thesis director by April 10.

Senior Honors Thesis Defense

1. Students will defend their thesis sometime between April 12 and April 22. The thesis panel will include the following:

- a) The thesis director
- b) The second reader
- c) A third reader from outside the college who is selected by the thesis director

If in any given year it is impossible to recruit a third reader from outside the college, then the thesis director may choose a third reader from another Skidmore department.

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

- a) Provide a summary of their research question, thesis, 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 performance during the thesis defense

4) The members of the panel will then meet with the student to convey 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 department secretary by May 1.

Schedule for Completion of a Senior Honors Thesis²

Fall of Junior Year

1) 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

1) Develop thesis topic and fill out 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

Fall of Senior Year

1) Apprise thesis director of intention to proceed with thesis work

2) Enroll in "PL 374: Senior Thesis Prep"

3) Establish in consultation with thesis director a reading list and set a schedule for meetings

4) Complete thesis prospectus and annotated bibliography

5) Establish a research and writing schedule in consultation with thesis director

Winter Break of Senior Year 1) Begin drafting thesis

Spring of Senior year

1) Apprise thesis director of intention to proceed with thesis work

2) Enroll in "PL 375: Senior Thesis"

3) Select second reader by the end of the first week of classes

4) Submit completed thesis to thesis director by April 10

5) Defend thesis during sometime between April 12 and April 22

6) Submit a clean (i.e., without either marginal or summary comments), graded, bound copy of the thesis to the department secretary by May 1.

² 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 honors thesis, including the senior honors 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).