

**Honours Thesis
Political Science 492
2010-2011**

Instructors

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Course aims

This course is a chance to take a question which intrigues you and design your own in-depth research project to answer that question. As such, it aims to:

- integrate your knowledge from other political science courses, allowing you to identify where you can make a contribution to the academic literature;
- give you experience in designing, conducting and writing up original research;
- develop your presentational skills;
- give you experience in evaluating and giving feedback about other people's research.

All of these skills will prepare you for graduate programmes where you will be conducting and presenting your own research. If you are planning a career in the government, NGO or private sector, you may often have to make decisions or advocate positions using research from government agencies, academia and think-tanks – your experience in this course will help you to be an intelligent consumer of this research.

Assessment

Thesis (40%)
Presentations (15%) and Participation (15%)
Writing Assignments and Research Blog (30%)

Seminar Schedule: *Wednesdays, 2pm, IBLC 158, unless otherwise stated.*

Course Overview	T1	Wk 1:	Sept 8
Individual Meetings with Instructors*	T1	Wks 2-3:	Sept 13-24
Prospectus and Progress Report (I) Presentations	T1	Wks 4-6:	Sept 29, Oct 6/13
'Around the Table' Discussion (I)	T1	Wks 7-9:	Oct 20/27, Nov 3
Progress Report Presentations (II)	T1	Wks 10-12:	Nov 10/17/24
'Around the Table' Discussion (II)	T1/T2	Wks 13, 1-2:	Dec 1, Jan 5/12
Progress Report Presentations (III)	T2	Wks 3-5:	Jan 19/26, Feb 2
'Around the Table' Discussion (III)	T2	Wks 6-8:	Feb 9/23, Mar 2
Workshops	T2	Wks 9-12:	Mar 9/16/23/30
Final Presentations**	T2	Wk 13	April 8

* Individual Meetings generally occur in Buchanan C322.

**Final Presentations will occur all day Friday, April 8th, tentatively in Buch C403.

Deadlines

Prospectus & Progress Report I:	T1W6	October 13
Literature Review & Progress Report II:	T1W10	November 10
Progress Report III:	T1W14	December 8
Thesis Draft Section I:	T2W2	January 12
Progress Report IV:	T2W3	January 19
Thesis Draft Section II:	T2W5	February 2
Progress Report V:	T2W6	February 9
Thesis Draft Section III:	T2W8	February 23
Progress Report VI:	T2W9	March 9
Thesis Full Draft:	T2W11	March 23
Thesis Presentation Supporting Materials	T2W12(Fri)	April 1
Thesis Final Presentation	T2W13(Fri)	April 8
Final Version of Thesis Submission	T2W14	April 13

n.b. In addition to the above deadlines, supporting materials for in-class presentations must be posted by noon Tuesday, the day before the presentation.

The Honours Thesis

Description: An Honours thesis is a capstone research paper written by Honours students over the course of a full year. The final thesis should generally not exceed 50 pages (18,000 words), and should be double-spaced, with at least one inch margins and in a 12 point, reader-friendly, font. The mark on the final version of the thesis is worth 40% of the final course mark.

Submission: Drafts of sections of the thesis are due at various points in time in Term 2 (see p.1). **A full draft of the thesis must be submitted by Week 11 of Term 2.** Three hard copies and an electronic copy of the **final version** must be submitted to either Buchanan C322 or C425 by **noon on Wednesday, April 13th**. One copy must be unbound and unstapled, as it will be bound with the other essays and displayed in the reading room. The other two copies are for the instructors and the outside reader.

Outside Reader: Each student will identify an outside reader in consultation with the instructor and with the agreement of the outside reader. The outside reader should normally be a regular faculty member of the political science department. The outside reader will advise on the research project at its various stages of its development and also assess the submitted Honours thesis, providing feedback to the instructors, who determine the final mark. Ideally, the outside reader will be agreed upon before, or at latest, shortly after, the submission of the prospectus (Week 6 of Term 1).

Seminar Participation and Presentations

The success of a research seminar depends primarily on the extent to which students actively engage in discussion of their fellow students' research and provide each other constructive advice and support. Students should come to class having read any materials circulated prior to the class and prepared to discuss each other's work. Students' participation marks (15% of the final course mark) are based on the quality of feedback and support they provide their fellow students, both in and outside of seminar, (for example by commenting on other students' research blogs – see below).

Seminars will have a variety of different structures across the term. Some seminars will involve formal presentations by students followed by feedback from the class. Other seminars will involve informal presentation and discussion, as we go 'around the room' with each person talking about their research progress. At the end of Term 2, we will 'workshop' draft theses and presentations in small groups.

Students will make in-class presentations three times across the two terms. The first 'prospectus' presentations will be in Weeks 4, 5 and 6 of Term 1, and students will also present progress reports in Weeks 10, 11 and 12 of Term 1 as well as Weeks 3, 4 and 5 of Term 2. There will generally be three or four presentations in each of these classes.

The purpose of these presentations is so that students can present their projects to each other and use the discussion in class to help develop and refine the project. The first presentation should provide a brief introduction to a student's topic and present, as possible, the material for the prospectus: research question, summary of the relevant academic literature, proposed answer/argument, and research plan.

The second and third presentations will focus on research progress. Students will discuss refinements made to their thesis and research design since their first presentation, discuss their reading and research to date, and present the preliminary results or conclusions that they have reached.

Each time a student is to present or participate in a workshop, the student **must post supporting documentation to their blog (see below) by noon Tuesday** before the class, and other students are expected to have read the material before coming to class Wednesday afternoon. For presentations, this is ideally in the form of presentation slides and/or notes that the students will use as the basis of their presentation. For workshops, students should post specific draft thesis sections or draft public presentations that they would like feedback on.

On **Friday, April 8th**, in lieu of a final seminar in Week 13, we will have a full day of public thesis presentations. These are public presentations in the style of an academic conference: a wide range of people will be invited to attend, students will be grouped into panels and present their work, and expert discussants will be recruited to give comments and feedback on the research projects. Students will need to provide **supporting materials for this presentation that can be circulated to the discussants and their colleagues by April 1st**.

Research Blog

A good Honours thesis requires a great deal of hard work and thought over the course of the year. In order to help students stay motivated and engaged in their research, ensure that students have opportunities for get regular feedback from the instructors and each other, and promote dialogue about the research projects beyond the confines of the classroom, students will maintain a research blog which they regularly update with notes regarding their research activities, ideas that occur to them, and any questions or problems that occur.

The instructors will provide logistical support for students to create a blog through UBC, although students may use another blog provider as appropriate if they prefer. Students may have a fully public or a restricted blog at their discretion, the only requirement is that at a minimum they must provide access to the instructors and their fellow students, who are expected to keep up with, and provide support and comments on their fellow students' (and the instructors') blogs.

The instructors' blogs are: <http://blogs.ubc.ca/mcgov/> and <http://blogs.ubc.ca/nyblade492/>, and as students' blogs go online, the instructors' blogs will post and maintain links to every student blog.

Interim Written Assignments

In addition to the submission of the final thesis and the expectation of regular blog updates, students also must submit additional written assignments over the course the term: **a prospectus (initial submission: T1 Week 6), a literature review (initial submission: T1 Week 10), and progress reports (T1 Wks 6,10,14; T2 Wks 3,6,9)**. Note that the prospectus and literature reviews are 'living documents', substantial portions of which will eventually be incorporated into the thesis, so students will resubmit updated versions of their prospectus and literature review as subsequent progress reports come due.

A prospectus should be no more than 7-10 double-spaced pages in length and provide:

- An overview of the question/puzzle you are addressing.
- A clearly stated thesis. This is your proposed answer to the question you pose.
- A brief overview of relevant academic literature and scholarly debates.
- A research design. This is your plan of attack; how you will go about supporting your thesis vis-à-vis reasonable alternative answers to your question.

The literature review should be 7-10 double-spaced pages in length and provide a synthetic review of relevant scholarly and any other written work that is central to your thesis. The central point of this literature review document is to not to show off that you've read lots of things on your topic, but to *situate* your research question and central argument. A literature review is the opportunity to explain where you think your work will fit in and contribute to existing scholarly dialogue and debate. It is particularly helpful to contrast your answer to your research question with other answers you have come across.

This is not the only important thing that reviewing academic literature can do for your project. Academic literature can also be used to, amongst other things, justify the

importance of a topic/research question, justify a theoretic approach, provide evidence for or against your central argument, and so on. However, the central role of this literature review assignment is none of these, it is to situate your work in scholarly discourse.

Progress reports are generally 3-4 double-spaced pages in length and provide:

- An overview of the development of the project since the last progress report, in particular noting anything that suggests substantial changes to the structure of the project, research design, or central argument.
- A discussion of the current challenges you face.
- A plan and timetable with particular focus for the time period until the next progress report (generally 3~4 weeks), but also updating your overall plan.

Note: progress reports are meant to be efficient, to the point and informative. Use bullet points, don't use flowery language or worry too much about appearances. Just let us know what you've done, what changes you've made to your project, and what your plan for future work is.

Draft Thesis Sections Students are expected to submit drafts of portions of their thesis to the instructors over the course of Term 2. The specific sections to be submitted will be agreed upon between the instructors and each individual student, as they will vary from individual to individual. However, every student **must submit draft sections of their thesis in Weeks 2, 5 and 8 of Term 2, and a completed draft in Week 11** of Term 2. Roughly, students are expected to submit roughly 25%, 50%, 75% and 100% of the initial draft of their theses on these successive deadlines.

Background Reading

The instructors will use their blogs to post advice and also various articles which give advice on selecting a research question, formulating theories and designing research. This reading is not compulsory but is intended as a resource for students to use when writing their prospectus and throughout the research process. Students are also encouraged to use their own blogs to recommend material that they have found helpful.

Research Ethics

Research which collects primary data about individual people, (e.g. by questioning or observing them), needs to be approved by the University Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). Using data collected by other researchers (e.g. datasets from existing surveys) or which is in the public domain (e.g. media reports or speeches made in a public forum) will generally not require BREB approval. Interviews with experts such as academics are also exempt – as long as the interviewee is not the *subject* of your research. If your research question is about the behaviour or opinions of your interviewee, or a group that she belongs to, then they are your research subject. If, however, the interviewee is sharing her specialised knowledge of how others think or act then she is an expert interviewee. The instructors will discuss whether your research requires BREB approval with you, and, if so, will guide you through the process. Most political science research involves minimal risks to the participants and can be approved quickly. However, if you wish to collect this kind of data, you will have to ensure that you have enough time built into your research plans to familiarise yourself with research ethics and to wait for project approval before beginning data collection.

Academic Integrity

The usual standards of academic honesty apply – students should be scrupulous in ensuring that they do not plagiarise (see <http://www.arts.ubc.ca/arts-students/plagiarism-avoided.html> for details on how to avoid this). While UBC policy restricts the extent to which students can re-use previous work for course assignments at UBC, students are permitted to use their work in other courses as a springboard for their thesis research. For example, students may wish to design empirical research to test a theoretical argument that they made in an earlier term paper. If you wish to use work from other courses in any way for your thesis you should discuss this with the instructors in the individual meetings at the beginning of Term 1.

Assignment Submission

Written assignments must be submitted in hard copy and electronically (via email to both instructors). On days that class meets, written assignments are due at the beginning of class (2pm). For all other deadlines, assignments are due at noon. Most unexcused late assignments will face a ten percentage point deduction if they are late but submitted within a week of the deadline, however we can not accept unexcused late submissions of the final thesis.

Accommodation

The University accommodates students who have registered with the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) and/or students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance or submitting assignments. Please let the instructors know if you will require any accommodation on these grounds.

Students who plan to be absent or who have difficulty meeting deadlines for other reasons cannot assume they will be accommodated and should discuss their commitments early on with the instructors. In particular, attendance at the final thesis presentation on Friday April 8th is crucial, so students should ensure their schedule is free that day.

Final Note

Writing a thesis can be both exhausting and exhilarating. As your instructors, our job is to both challenge you to write as good a thesis as you can and to support you through the experience. Our ultimate goal is helping you complete a thesis that you will be proud of. At various points during the year we will solicit your feedback on how everything is going, and at any time if there is anything more you think we can do to assist you individually or as a group, please don't hesitate to talk to us.