

Political Science Distinction Seminar

PSC 495—Fall 2015

Department of Political Science
Syracuse University

Professor: Seth Jolly

Contact Information

Office: 540 Eggers Hall

Phone: 315.443.2113

Email: skjolly@maxwell.syr.edu

Office Hours

Tuesday 10–11am,

Friday 2–3pm,

or by appointment

Fall Semester: Wed 3:45–6:30 pm in Tolley 204

Seminar Overview

The primary goal of this year-long seminar is to help all students produce a quality political distinction thesis. As the Program Guidelines state:

The program requires the student to produce a senior thesis that reflects an understanding of the contemporary literature relevant to the thesis topic, advances an original argument, and presents evidence appropriate to the underlying inquiry. The thesis should generally be modeled after a typical academic journal article in the field of Political Science. The thesis will be read and evaluated by a committee of three, consisting of the main advisor and two additional readers. Two of the readers must be members of the Political Science department. One of the readers may be a graduate student in Political Science. An oral defense will determine if the thesis meets the departmental requirements for Distinction.

While the majority of the work will be completed by you, with supervision by your adviser, the seminar is designed to assist you in this process in the following ways:

1. Provide some basic guidance on common thesis issues, including research design, preparing a proposal, research strategies, etc. The guidelines for the program state that “the thesis should generally be modeled after a typical academic journal article in the field of Political Science.” Thus, we will discuss how scholars get from a basic idea for a topic to a research question to a thesis/hypothesis and eventually to a completed article.
2. Monitor progress toward meeting the deadlines outlined in the guidelines (and below). There are a series of benchmarks throughout the fall and spring semesters. We will use the seminar to help you make progress towards these benchmarks by preparing drafts, reading sample proposals, talking through common problems you might encounter, etc.
3. Develop a sense of a research community going through the thesis process together. This will help you in many ways. For example, you will present and critique each other’s draft proposals and theses in the seminar. Also, the seminar will serve as a forum for discussing common challenges and solutions.

Distinction Program Deadlines

- **First week of fall semester:** A two page research statement discussing your overall research interest, the specific question you want to ask, and how you plan to go about answering that question (research strategy) should be submitted during the first week of senior year.
- **October 15:** A draft thesis proposal (5–10 pages) is due to your adviser and second reader (a faculty member who will also be part of the oral defense committee) by October 16.
- **October 30:** A thesis proposal (5–10 pages) is due by October 30. The proposal must be approved by at least two faculty members who will also be part of the oral defense committee. A copy of the proposal, with faculty signatures, should be submitted to the Department. After the first semester, the student or advisor have the right to terminate the thesis process.
- **December 2:** A draft (15–20 pages) is due by December 2 to me, your adviser, and your other readers. The draft should include your research question, hypotheses, and research design. This draft does not have to be a complete rough draft of your thesis. Rather, you should do the part of the research that is most valuable to you at this stage. Some possible forms that this might take include a literature review, preliminary analysis of partial data, completion of one of 2 planned case studies, or development of a theoretical framework.
- **End of spring break:** A full draft of the thesis is due by the first business day following spring break.
- **Third week in April:** The thesis must be completed, defended, and approved no later than the third week in April. The committee will determine at the completion of the defense if the thesis is “satisfactory” in meeting the Department’s standards for Distinction.

Course evaluation

Your grade for the seminar is assigned by your thesis supervisor. Note that attendance and participation in the seminar is a requirement for the distinction program, and I will consult with each adviser about seminar performance. Your grade for the fall term will be based on your assignments and work in the fall term, especially your final research proposal and draft.

Readings

Readings available via blackboard.syr.edu.

Supplementary Books

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lipson, Charles. 2005. *How to Write a BA Thesis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Turabian, Kate L. 2007. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 7th edition. Revised by Wayne C. Booth et al. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Proper and careful citations are key to a successful thesis. The particular style (Chicago, Harvard, APSA, MLA, etc.) is between you and your adviser, but be consistent in your style. I encourage you to have a guidebook handy for reference, such as Turabian, MLA, Lipson, or the APSA Committee on Publications's 2006 pamphlet "Style Manual for Political Science" [Blackboard].

Seminar Schedule

This seminar is designed to be a flexible and useful forum to help you in the thesis process. While I have a tentative schedule of topics and meeting dates, the schedule is flexible. Feel free to offer ideas for other topics, and we can either add seminar dates or revise the current schedule. This seminar is one of your primary outlets to ask questions, get feedback and advice, and get help from other people in the same process, so take advantage.

Fall Term

1. Introduction & Overview (Wednesday, 2 September)

Required reading

- Lipson, Ch. 16 (pp. 275–281). [Blackboard]

Agenda

- Introductions
- Brief presentations of projects

Assignment: A two page research statement discussing your overall research interest, the specific question you want to ask, and how you plan to go about answering that question (research strategy).

2. Basics of Research Design (Wednesday, 16 September)

Required reading

- King, Keohane and Verba, part of Ch. 1 (pp. 7–23). [Blackboard]
- Van Evera, parts of Ch. 1 (pp. 17–30) and Ch. 3 (pp. 89–95). [Blackboard]
- Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz. 2006. “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research.” *Political Analysis* 14: 227–249.
- Choose one of the following previous Distinction theses
 - Feitel, Jesse M. 2013. “A New Vision for our Constitutional Amendment Process.” Maxwell School—Political Science Distinction Theses (Undergraduate).
 - Legasey, Brittany R. 2013. “Congressional Media Strategy: House Members, Rhetorical Strategies and Press Releases.” Maxwell School—Political Science Distinction Theses (Undergraduate).

Agenda

- Why do we care about theory?
- How do I develop an argument?
- How do I know if I’m wrong?

Assignment: Can you describe your project in the terms KKV and Van Evera use? Which methods are you using? What type of project are you doing?

3. Writing a Thesis Proposal (Wednesday, 7 October)

Required reading

- Van Evera, Chs. 4–5 (pp. 97–116) and Appendix (pp. 123–128). [Blackboard]
- Przeworski, Adam and Salomon, Frank. 1998. “The Art of Writing Proposals.” Social Science Research Council. [Blackboard]
- Choose one of the following previous Distinction theses
 - Schneider, Meghan. 2014. “Addressing Modern Slavery in Haiti and the Dominican Republic: The Evolving Role of Nongovernmental Organizations.” Maxwell School—Political Science Distinction Theses (Undergraduate).
 - Stewart, Bo. 2015. “Legislator Wealth and Voting Ideology in the 112th Congress.” Maxwell School—Political Science Distinction Theses (Undergraduate).
 - Hardcopies of all previous distinction theses are available for review in Eggers 100.

Agenda

- How should I structure my proposal?
- What should I include? Just as important, what should I leave out?
- What makes a proposal compelling?
- Visit from Michael Pasqualoni, SU Research Librarian for Political Science

Assignment: Begin preparing a proposal that meets the guidelines set out by Van Evera and Przeworski/Salomon.

Draft thesis proposal due to adviser and second reader.
(Friday, 16 October)

4. Proposal Writing (Wednesday, 21 and 28 October)

Optional individual meetings, by appointment

***Thesis proposal, approved by at least two faculty members, must be submitted to the Department of Political Science. Also, email a copy of your proposal to the class.
(Friday, 30 October)***

5. Proposal Presentations (Wednesdays, 4 November and 11 November)

Assignment: Each of you will present your proposal to the class. Presentations should be about 10 minutes, with another 10 minutes for questions. Everyone should read all the proposals beforehand.

6. From Proposals to Theses (Wednesday, 2 December)

Required reading

- Turabian, Ch. 6 (pp. 62–70). [Blackboard]
- Krupnikov, Yanna and Spencer Piston. 2015. “Accentuating the Negative: Candidate Race and Campaign Strategy.” *Political Communication* 32:1: 152-173. [Blackboard]

Agenda

- Analyze the structure of the article, and then outline it. Why was the article organized in this way?
- How did Piston and his co-author situate their article relative to existing literature on the topic?
- Evaluate the research design, considering alternative ways to test the argument as well as the effectiveness of their approach.
- Come with questions, both substantive (about the content) and methodological (about the research process).

Assignment: With your defended proposal in hand, prepare a new draft that matches the proposal and research strategy.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If I suspect academic dishonesty or plagiarism, I will submit formal reports to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Also, <http://www.plagiarism.org> is a useful website for tips on citations and other writing resources.

Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located at 804 University Avenue, room 309, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Accommodation Authorization Letters,” as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Religious Observances Policy

SU’s religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

Last updated: August 24, 2015.