

A Guide to Writing a Thesis in  
Political Science or International Relations at  
Simmons College

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing a thesis is a challenging process, which can also be very rewarding! In the Political Science and International Relations Department, you must write a Senior Thesis to receive departmental honors. The Senior Thesis is a process that begins in your junior year. In the spring semester of your junior year, you apply to write a thesis (see instructions below). If your proposal is approved, you register for POLS 350 or INRL 350 (independent study) during the fall semester of your senior year. If you are approved to continue during the Spring Semester, you register for POLS 355 or INRL 355 (Thesis). You may receive departmental recognition without writing a Senior Thesis, so be sure that you're ready to commit over a year and a lot of hard work to this process! In the pages that follow, we explain what a thesis is, how to apply to write a thesis, how to proceed if your proposal is accepted, and give some guidelines about how to write a thesis in Political Science and International Relations.

### What is a Senior Thesis in Political Science or International Relations?

A thesis is an original research project that will contribute to existing research in Political Science and/or International Relations. Your thesis should be approximately 50-70 pages in length. Original research may include: document analysis, interviews, surveys, data analysis, public opinion analysis, etc. There are many types of original research, any of which would be acceptable for your senior thesis. What is not acceptable, however, is reliance solely on secondary materials. For example, if you are writing a senior thesis about a particular policy battle in Congress, you may choose to analyze hearing testimony, speeches in the congressional record, etc. You should not, however, only rely on books that other scholars have written about the policy battle.

Any thesis in Political Science or International Relations must be formatted according to the requirements laid out in either the Chicago Manual of Style or the MLA Manual of Style. Your advisor will let you know which Manual is appropriate for your research. Both Manuals are available at the library, and in electronic form through the library's website.

### How do I know if I should apply to write a thesis?

If you meet the eligibility requirements explained below, you should write a thesis if there's a topic that you're particularly in researching further. We strongly discourage choosing to write a senior thesis *only* because you want to receive departmental honors. Remember, you may receive departmental recognition without writing a senior thesis.

### Who is eligible to apply to write a thesis?

You must be a Political Science or International Relations major. You must have a minimum grade point average of 3.67 in your major.

## TIMEFRAME AND REQUIREMENTS

### Steps for Applying to Write a Senior Thesis

#### *Spring Semester, Junior Year*

1. Choose and meet with your intended thesis advisor. Explain your topic to him or her, and get feedback about whether this is a fruitful topic to pursue in a thesis.
2. Submit a 3-5 page thesis proposal. This proposal should include a description of the topic, the questions you seek to answer, how you will answer these questions (your methodology), what answers you expect to find, and an annotated bibliography with at least 10 books or scholarly articles (*not* web-based articles, unless you have special permission from your advisor).
3. The thesis proposal is due to the department by 3 pm on the last day of classes of the spring semester of your junior year. This deadline is non-negotiable. The entire department must read and vote on your proposal by the end of exam period.
4. You will be notified by your advisor by the end of the spring semester exam period as to whether the department has approved your proposal.

### After Your Proposal is Accepted

#### *Fall Semester, Senior Year*

1. Register for POLS 350 or INRL 350 (Independent Study) for the fall of your senior year. Your thesis advisor will direct your Independent Study.
2. Meet with your thesis advisor during the first week of classes to discuss your topic and research, and to mutually agree on expectations for the rest of the semester.
3. You should work with your thesis advisor to fill out the “Responsibilities and Terms of Arrangement” contract. This contract specifies expectations of how often you will meet/have contact with your advisor, when drafts will be due, and the requirements for being approved to continue with the thesis process during the spring semester.
4. The “Responsibilities and Terms of Arrangement” contract is due to your advisor by the end of the second week of classes, fall semester.
5. A thesis outline and bibliography is due to your advisor by the end of the second week in October. You may consult with your advisor to determine what form this outline takes, and what will fulfill this requirement. These requirements should be included on your “Responsibilities and Terms of Arrangement” contract.
6. The first chapter, or some other comparable piece of work, is due to your advisor by the last day of classes, fall semester. You may consult with your advisor to determine what form this work takes, and what will fulfill this requirement. These requirements should be included on your “Responsibilities and Terms of Arrangement” contract.
7. Your advisor will review your work and progress during the fall semester. S/he will let you know if you may continue your thesis project during the spring semester by the last day of exams, fall semester. Students who do not meet the fall requirements, or whose progress is judged unsatisfactory in the first term, will not be allowed to register for POLS/INRL 355 in the spring.

*Spring Semester, Senior Year*

1. Register for POLS 355 or INRL 355 (thesis). Your thesis advisor will direct your thesis credits.
2. Meet with your thesis advisor during the first week of classes to discuss goals and expectations for the spring semester.
3. A complete rough draft of your senior thesis is due by the last week of March.
4. Schedule your thesis defense, which will occur during exam period, by the end of the third week of April.
5. Your complete thesis is due by 3pm on the last day of classes, spring semester. Turn in three copies to the departmental office. This deadline is non-negotiable. A departmental committee must read your thesis to prepare for your thesis defense.
6. An oral examination will be scheduled during the spring exam period. Normally, three members of the department will examine the student on the thesis. You should prepare a brief 10 minute statement of your questions, methodology, and major findings.
7. Your grade will be based on the thesis and oral defense. Merely completing an acceptable thesis does not ensure an honors grade. The work must be judged worthy of honors by the department acting as a group.

Important Dates (summarized from above)

*Spring Semester, Junior Year*

- Last day of classes: thesis proposal due to the department by 3 pm.
- Last day of exam period: department sends notification of accepted theses.

*Fall Semester, Senior Year*

- End of second week of classes: “Responsibilities and Terms of Arrangement” contract due to your advisor.
- End of second week of October: thesis outline and bibliography is due to your advisor.
- Last day of classes, fall semester: chapter or substantial writing due to your advisor.
- Last day of exams, fall semester: your advisor will notify you as to whether you may continue your thesis during the spring semester.

*Spring Semester, Senior Year*

- Last week of March: complete rough draft due to your advisor.
- Third week of April: schedule your thesis defense, which will happen during exam period.
- Last day of classes: your complete thesis is due by 3 pm.
- Exam period: oral examination on thesis.

## SECTIONS OF YOUR THESIS

The sections of your thesis will vary based on your topic, methodology, research questions, etc. However, the following are sections that are standard in most social science theses.

### I. Introduction

- Introduce your topic. Why is it interesting? How did you arrive at this topic?
- State your research questions
- State your central findings in your thesis statement.

### II. Literature review

- What is the relevant literature to your topic?
- How have other scholars answered your research questions?
- Why is your work contributing new and/or important ideas to this literature?
- Based on your review of the existing literature, what do you expect to find? These are your hypotheses. Your

### III. Methodology

- How will you answer your questions?
- Depending on your method, this section will take different forms. Are you analyzing documents? Which documents? Where are they housed? Theses in Political Theory and some areas of International Relations may not require a methodology section.
- This section should be very detailed, especially in your first draft. It's better to include too much explanation of how you've conducted your original research, and then cut it later.

### IV. Findings

- What did your research reveal?

### V. Discussion of your research findings

- How do your findings compare with your expectations?
- How do your findings answer your research questions?

### VI. Conclusions

- What contributions does this research make to the research in Political Science and/or International Relations?
- Based on your findings, what future research do you think would shed more light on your research questions?

### VII. Bibliography

- You must include a bibliography whether you use footnotes or endnotes in your text.
- All of your formatting, including your bibliography, must be based on a manual of style. Your advisor will let you know which Manual to use (either Chicago or MLA). Both the Chicago and MLA guides are available at the library, and in electronic form through the library's website.

## VIII. Appendices

- You should include a copy of any survey or questionnaire you distributed in an appendix. An appendix might also include tables of raw data analysis, which you did not include in the text of your thesis.

**SIMMONS COLLEGE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**HONORS THESIS RESPONSIBILITIES & TERMS OF ARRANGEMENT**

**Purpose**

In the Political Science and International Relations Department, a student must write a Senior Thesis to receive departmental honors. A thesis is an original research project that will contribute to existing research in Political Science and/or International Relations. Writing a thesis will give students the opportunity to conduct original research in their field, and to gain first hand research experience.

The purpose of this contract is to outline the responsibilities of thesis students and their advisors during the exciting, yet difficult, research and writing process.

**Responsibilities**

To help insure the interests and promote the benefits of a working arrangement for all parties involved, the following lists of rights and responsibilities have been developed.

***Thesis Advisor***

1. Encourage and support a student's research and writing goals.
2. Read and respond to inquiries concerning thesis work in a timely manner.
3. Read and return student outlines and drafts in a timely manner.
4. Communicate research and writing expectations and standards to the student.
5. Notify the student if her completion of her thesis is in jeopardy.

***Student***

1. Develop clear research goals.
2. Demonstrate commitment to the thesis process through time devoted to research and writing each week.
3. Abide by the timelines and due dates established in this contract.
4. Communicate research/writing difficulties with her advisor *before* due dates.

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor's E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Terms of Arrangement:

1. How often will student/advisor meeting to discuss thesis progress?
2. When will these meetings occur?
3. What date is the outline and bibliography due (approximately the second week in October)? Are there particular requirements/expectations for the outline and bibliography?
4. What piece of the thesis is due by the last day of classes, fall semester (i.e. first chapter; summaries of multiple chapters; evidence of research progress)?
5. How much progress on the thesis is required to approve a student for continuation into the spring semester?
6. What are the expectations for successful completion of the thesis rough draft, due the last week of March, spring semester?

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_