

Political Science W3998-W3999Y  
Senior Honors Seminar  
**2015-2016 Academic Year**

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Office Hours: F, 9-11 am

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Office hours: TBD.

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Class meets: Formally Tuesday 10.10 am – 12:00 pm in 711 IAB. In practice we mix it up a lot.

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## 1 OVERVIEW

The Senior Honors Seminar is a yearlong course designed to help seniors in the major complete a publishable scholarly paper on the topic of their choice. Honors theses are typically 80-120 pages, although there is no set page minimum or maximum. At the beginning of the academic year, we will meet as a group to discuss basic principles of research and thesis design. Beginning in mid-October, however, much of your work will be conducted independently. To make sure that you stay on track, it is critical for you to keep in touch with your faculty advisor as well as the seminar advisor and preceptor. Meetings will resume in January; spring semester meetings will be conducted as writing workshops, where students' work is circulated, presented, and critiqued.

Three people are crucially involved in guiding and advising you throughout the year and together they constitute an informal "**thesis committee**." The most important of these is your faculty advisor. He or she is the person whose individual research is most related to your own topic and, as such, is able to provide you the most specialized and in-depth feedback. Second, the seminar leader (this year, Macartan Humphreys) will read and review all thesis assignments. The role of the seminar leader is to provide a structure for writing the thesis and a sounding board for outlines and chapters. Finally, the seminar preceptor serves as an additional resource for students in the course who can support you in thinking through arguments and evidence, providing technical support, and as well point you to resources at Columbia and beyond.

## 2 REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

The final grade for the seminar is dependent primarily (95%) on the quality of your final thesis, which will be due on Friday **April 1, 2016**. That is a strict, unalterable, and final deadline. In addition, you will be required to produce a 3 minute video or multimedia presentation summarizing your research findings. This will be due on Monday **April 11** and also counts towards your final grade (5%). Because the thesis will not be completed until March, you will receive a grade of YC ("Year Course") for the fall. Your final thesis grade is the average of the grades (for both the thesis and media presentation) from your faculty advisor and the seminar advisor. The final grade is then applied retroactively to the fall semester. You will present your thesis to faculty and peers in a public seminar on Friday **April 15**.

In order for a student to receive departmental honors, her/his thesis must receive a grade of A- or higher. The bar for attaining honors is very high, but everyone in the seminar has been accepted because they are capable of producing a thesis that meets that bar.

### Collaboration and Support

Theses must be individually written and no joint projects are allowed, although with the agreement of the advisor, students can collaborate to produce data for use in separate theses. Peer support is a critical part of leading research and we strongly encourage all students to put time into reading each other's work and providing feedback and criticism. There should be no competitive component here and no curve will be employed to determine grades, rather grades will be based on the quality of the research.

Criticism should be frank and constructive. You should say when an argument makes no sense to you, but you should also try to think about how to improve other people's arguments that you are dissatisfied with.

### 3 RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Many have found the resources below useful.

- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Lipson, Charles. *How to Write a B.A. Thesis: A Practical Guide From Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

**Writing.** People quibble but there is a lot of wisdom in this little book:

- Strunk, William. *The elements of style*. Penguin, 2007.

### 4 TOOLS

For anyone doing theses that requires mathematical writing you should learn to use LATEX. We can give pointers but see here to get started <http://www.latex-project.org/>

For statistical work we can give support especially in R or in Stata. Jasper will do a crash course in getting going on original statistical analysis. R is available free from <http://cran.r-project.org/> Note even if you are not doing statistics you might find R useful for generating graphs or running simulations to illustrate your arguments in an abstract way.

**Open science:** if you are working with data we ask you to store your data and code in dropbox so that we and others can examine your analysis at any time.

Though not required we recommend that you work on your drafts in dropbox so that at any moment the instructors can check progress and give feedback. We recommend that you keep in your dropbox a file that lists any problems you are facing.

**September 8: First meeting**

1. General orientation
2. 5 minute presentation of research questions to the whole group – if you have a half page hand out for the class so much the better; it will organize your thoughts and keep others focused; may be (but need not be) based on your application to the class. In short presentations like this you want to communicate what you find exciting about your topic; but you also want to give a sense of where you will need support. You should listen out to see which other projects you might have synergies with.
3. Discussion topic: what's a cause? **Read:** <http://e-gap.org/resources/guides/causality/>

**☒ Monday, September 14:** 1:30 – 5:30 PM. Sign in for short 1:1 meetings with Professor Humphreys and Jasper Cooper. **See doodle form here:** <http://doodle.com/9uee3zxs8tmqth8h>. Come prepared to give a 5 minute overview of your question and describe what you see as the major challenges you think you will face.

**September 15: Topic 1:** Causal inference and experiments, field and natural

You should read the below. This class will not be a teach-in; it will be a discussion of the implications of these readings for your work. We will unpack and explain any tricky concepts but you should plan to come prepared to discuss the potentials and the worries you see --- eg are you concerned that some of the arguments in these readings threaten your analysis plan? Do you see pointers for strategies you had not thought about before?

1. King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton University Press, 1994. Chapters 1-3.
2. Dunning, Thad. 2008. Improving causal inference: Strengths and limitations of natural experiments. *Political Research Quarterly*. 61: 2, 282- 293.
3. Green and Gerber. Experiments Chapters 1 and 2.

**September 22: Topic 2: Qualitative Inference & Case Selection**

As above. Many of you will likely want to mix qualitative and quantitative methods and many of you will want to use cases and to justify the cases you use. Can you justify your approach? Do you have a strategy for learning from multiple methods? Can you justify your cases? On what grounds?

1. Humphreys, Macartan, and Alan Jacobs. "Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Unification of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches."
2. Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz. "A tale of two cultures: Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research." *Political Analysis* 14.3 (2006): 227-249.
3. King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton University Press, 1994. Chs 4 and 5

**September 29: Analysis of Past Theses I**

Learn from the best.

1. Discussion of three past outstanding honors theses.
2. Three teams of 3 or 4 students are each required to complete a “research profile” form.

**Thesis outlines** will be due on **Friday, October 2** at midnight. Please place outlines in the **Dropbox** folder and provide a copy to your faculty advisor. Theses outlines should be around 5-7 pages and should address, as appropriate, the rubrics in the **Research Profile document** [see end of this syllabus].

### **October 6: Analysis of Past Theses II**

Learn from the best.

1. Discussion of three past outstanding honors theses.
2. Three teams of 3 or 4 students are each required to complete a “research profile” form.

### **October 13: Class discussion of outlines**

One third of the group’s outlines will be discussed on 10/7 the rest of the proposals will be discussed during the subsequent two meetings. Be prepared with a presentation and be sure to identify in advance what you see as the points of weakness.

**October 20:** Outline workshop part 2 of 3.

**October 27:** Outline workshop part 3 of 3.

### **November 3: Topic 3: Human Subjects Crash Course: Brought to you by Columbia IRB.**

We will discuss rules and procedures for gaining permissions to engage in human subjects research at Columbia.

**November 3** post revised **outlines to dropbox**

### **November 10: Topic 4: Data gathering strategies: A selection of original work from Columbia grads.**

We will discuss strategies for original data collection (some original data will greatly enhance the quality of your theses; though not essential it often lets you do more targeted testing that you would otherwise, but also gets you much closer to your topic).

**Nov 10 – Nov 24: Design Defenses with Advisers.** Please fill out any and all availabilities at the **doodle poll here: <http://doodle.com/g2usm7f9i2fmsbyg>**. We will have 30 minute design defenses with you, your core adviser, the instructor and the preceptor. You should provide a detailed design with chapter outlines at least 48 hours before this meeting. You will receive written feedback on this design document.

**Friday 27 November.** Post revised design document to dropbox.

**Friday December 11** Deadline to turn in the first draft of your **introduction** and **first main chapter**: this should normally be the heart of your dissertation.

**January 15** Deadline to turn in the first draft of your **third chapter**. Normally this is a chapter that provides an extended discussion of results or explores alternative explanations.

## SPRING 2015

### Small Group Feedback

For sessions from January 26 to February 23 the class will be divided into 3 groups. Each group will meet for intense work shopping every three weeks with Macartan and Jasper. There will be no formal presentations, as it will be expected that all group members have read the chapters for all the other group members in advance.

**Material for each session should be provided at least 48 hours in advance of the session.**

**January 26 – February 2:** We will have 3 three hour small group (4-5 students) meetings to provide feedback on your main chapter or the main analysis (you can identify the one that you feel most needs feedback, but this meeting should focus on the heart of the thesis. You will be assigned to one of these sessions and we will devote 30-40 mins to discuss this work).

**February 16 – February 23:** Second round small group meetings to provide feedback on entire thesis.

**Friday 4 March.** Turn in draft of entire thesis to all advisers.

### Mini-Defenses

**8 - 22 March :** Mini-defense of thesis. Book a **45-minute slot**; coordinate your booking with your faculty advisor. Prepare a fifteen-minute presentation to be followed by 30 minute discussion. You are allowed to invite other classmates to your defense if you want to. **Please sign up for as many times slots as you have availabilities in this doodle poll:** <http://doodle.com/ai6f9dxvfbuvzt2y>

### Submission

- April 1:** Thesis due by midnight.
- April 11:** Multimedia / dissemination projects due.
- April 15:** Presentation.

If you need to make any minor corrections to the thesis of record this can be done after 1 April and submitted by April 22. Grading however will be based on the 1 April thesis.

## 6 WRITING SCHEDULE: ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

October 2	Thesis outlines due
November 3	Post revised <b>outlines to dropbox</b> following class discussions
November 27	Post revised design document to dropbox, following design defense.
December 11	Turn in the first draft of your <b>introduction</b> and <b>first main chapter</b> : this should normally be the heart of your dissertation.
January 15	Deadline to turn in the first draft of your <b>third chapter</b> .
March 4	Turn in draft of entire thesis to all advisers.
April 1	Final draft of thesis due.
April 11	Multimedia / Dissemination project due
April 15	Presentation
April 22	Theses of record deposited

## 7 NOTES

- It is your responsibility to complete tasks on time. Failure to submit chapters or drafts of your thesis in a timely manner may preclude you from being granted honors. If you submit assignments late, be advised that comments and feedback may be substantially delayed, which will make it difficult to make progress on your thesis.
- **Distribution:** All assignments are due by midnight on the stated due date. All assignments should be distributed electronically via the Dropbox folder. If advisers are not on dropbox you should be sure to keep them up to date with all major submissions.
- **Feedback:** you can expect written feedback on your design document after your design defense and additional written feedback after your mock defense. You can expect short written feedback on the overall thesis after submission from your main adviser. Individual chapters will be read by the instructor and the main adviser sometimes in multiple drafts; feedback will normally be given on these orally or in focus sessions. Depending on need, instructors may mark up copies of chapters or suggest text or code edits.
- Please cc me, your advisor, and your preceptor on emails about your thesis.
- Do not sign up for a course that conflicts with the Honors Seminar. You are expected to attend every session listed on this syllabus.
- Continue to study for your other courses. Columbia College requires that you maintain at least a 3.6 GPA in your major in order to qualify for honors.
- April 1 is a hard deadline for theses. Theses submitted after this date cannot be considered for honors. Theses submitted after this date also will be marked down one-third of a grade for every day they are late.
- Be prepared to be wrong; be prepared to be disappointed. It is extremely common to find once you go deep into a topic that things are not as you thought at first. In a way that's the point.
- Tell us when things are going wrong. This is an intense year and people often run into troubles of one form or another. If you face particular unexpected challenges let us know.
- Have fun – this is an extraordinary opportunity to go deeply into questions you care about. Challenge yourself, stretch your mind and your skills, let go of your prejudices, try things you thought you never could.

## RESEARCH DESIGN FORM

Section 1: Introduction	
1. <b>Researcher Name:</b>	Your Name/ The name of authors of research that you are reading
2. <b>Research Project Title:</b>	Short title
3. <b>One sentence summary of research question:</b>	Jargon free
4. <b>Substantive motivation:</b> [half page]	Why should anyone care about the results of this research?
5. <b>Theoretical motivation</b> [half page]	What broader theoretical questions can this research shed light on?
6. <b>Key literatures/debates to which this will contribute:</b> [half page]	Identify 3 or 4 readings that this work will speak to
7. <b>Primary Hypothesis</b> [half page]	This is a more specific form of the research question; provide no more than three hypotheses. If the topic does not lend itself to hypothesis construction, then indicate the <i>specific</i> research questions the research can answer
Section 2: Identification Strategy	
8. <b>X</b>	What are the independent variables? What are your treatments? (single or multiple treatment arms?)
9. <b>Y</b>	What are you dependent variables? What is your primary outputs and outcome of interest (what data is needed)?
10. <b>Units</b>	What are the units for your Xs and Ys? (Politicians? Bills? Individuals? Communities? Schools?)
11. <b>Identification</b>	How can you make the case that you are identifying causal effects?
Section 3: Sample, Data, & Implementation Strategies	
12. <b>Sample</b> [half page]	How many units (of X, Y, and relevant clusters) will you study? What is your sampling frame? How will you select your sample?
13. <b>Measurement strategy:</b> [half page]	Describe measurement of Y,X, and auxiliary data. Be clear about units of analysis, methods (admin data, surveys, games, other), # of data collection rounds.
14. <b>Heterogeneity</b> [3-5 sentences]	Do you expect the treatment to work differently for certain individuals / groups / communities? Which ones? How do you take this into account in your design?

<b>15. Implementation Strategy [half page]</b>	[If relevant] How are you implementing your treatment? Implementing partners involved? Are there ethical concerns? Logistical challenges?
<b>Section 4: Analysis &amp; Threats</b>	
<b>16. Analysis strategy [half page]</b>	How will you draw conclusions from your evidence? How will you know if your theory is wrong?
<b>17. Interpretation strategy [3-5 sentences]</b>	Summarize the substantive conclusions you will draw from your analysis. Describe the conclusions both for the case where you do find and where you do not find what you expect to find.
<b>18. Threats to internal validity</b>	Note especially any key assumptions in identification of measurement strategies (think about attrition, spillovers and its channels, Hawthorn effects, John Henry effects)
<b>19. Threats to external validity</b>	Note especially any key scope conditions (think about representativeness of sample, using mixed methods, cost effectiveness).
<b>20. Writing strategy</b>	Provide a table of contents.
<b>Section 5: Packaging</b>	
<b>21. Marketing strategy</b>	How will you present your results to general readers. Describe any creative dissemination strategies.