

CLASS OF 2013 SENIOR THESIS TIMELINE

August, September

Goal: Identify topic & advisor

1. Start with a topic, then define a few **specific, researchable questions**
 - Drawing on past coursework, independent work, or maybe just curiosity, decide on a topic that interests you personally. What problem puzzles you? What aspect of politics would you like to understand in depth?
 - The secret at this stage is to identify an interesting area to do research in without narrowing your mind so much that you won't benefit from other people's advice—most importantly, the Politics faculty.
 - Begin exploratory reading on your topic. Note specific questions that you might want to answer. It helps to come up with several specific questions in case one turns out to be impractical.
 - A good thesis topic is one that excites and motivates you; a good research question is one that can be answered by an advanced undergraduate in six months!
2. Find an advisor

Available advisors in Politics are listed here:

<http://www.princeton.edu/politics/undergraduate/independent-work/senior-thesis/senior-thesis-advisors/>

- Use this list to identify available faculty members in your topic area. Write to them with a short description of your topic idea and request a brief meeting. It usually makes sense to ask several faculty members at the same time.
 - Meet with your potential advisor in person. Substance matters in finding the right advisor, but so does style. Find someone with matching expectations about frequency of meeting schedule, amount of guidance, and forms of communication. Be prepared to bring up these considerations in your meeting.
 - In almost all cases, Politics seniors are advised by Politics Department faculty members. The reason is simple: You're writing a Politics thesis; you're getting a degree in Politics; your thesis will be evaluated by a second reader who is a Politics professor.
 - If there is a compelling case that an advisor from another academic unit is more appropriate, you may request written permission from Professor Markus Prior to choose an advisor not in Politics. But you must first do your homework: Be prepared to show that no one in Politics can cover your topic, that your topic is actually a Politics topic, and that your potential advisor elsewhere would in fact agree to advise you.
3. Apply for funding
 - Senior thesis funding this fall is available exclusively through the Office of the Dean of the College. The application will be available online at: <http://www.princeton.edu/odoc/> beginning at 12:00 PM on Friday, September 28.
 - We strongly encourage you to apply because conducting your own research with your own money is fun. But you need a plan, and you must work with your advisor in developing the plan.

October

Goal: Work out your specific topic with your advisor; make a detailed plan

Deadlines:

Thursday, October 4: Name of Senior Thesis Advisor Due

Monday, October 8: Thesis-research funding application due online by 10:00 AM

1. Write a tentative, working thesis statement that spells out your research question, why it matters, and how you intend to answer it.
2. Create a working list of important secondary sources to read, and locate them. Consult the bibliographies of the most useful secondary sources (check your syllabi). Although searching article databases can yield useful sources that you might otherwise miss, you should not attempt a random or exhaustive survey of the literature. Your goal is to identify 5-10 most important sources, not to read them cover-to-cover (yet) or to come up with dozens of vaguely relevant readings.
3. Turn in a short thesis proposal and your bibliography to your advisor for feedback.
4. Schedule time to discuss your research plan with the Politics librarian, the Survey Research Center, or other relevant entities that will assist with primary evidence collection.
5. Find out whether you have to get approval for your interviews or survey from the University's IRB for Human Subjects (at ORPA). **If you collect data and your data collection falls under the IRB's jurisdiction, you cannot start without formal IRB approval, and the IRB process may take one to two months.**

November

Goal: Thesis proposal

1. Turn in a full thesis proposal (5 pages or so) to your advisor. A good proposal
 - lays out the problem
 - justifies the topic as a significant one for understanding politics
 - clearly states the thesis or argument you will make
 - tells the reader how your argument builds on other scholarship
 - lays out the specific research plan for gathering evidence
 - concludes with the theoretical implications of the argument.
2. Turn in an annotated bibliography to your advisor for feedback. Explain how the readings will inform your own argument. Will a given book help you elaborate your argument? Will it help you to locate primary sources? Will it offer an alternative argument to your own, one you will refute with evidence?
3. Consider your advisor's feedback. Work with him or her to get ready for collection of original data, interviews, archival work, or whatever evidence you will use in your research.

December

Goal: A draft of one chapter

The best way to make progress and get help from your advisor is to share your work. Have at least one chapter drafted and submit it to your advisor for feedback before the holiday break.

Holiday Break

Goal: Examine your evidence, start answering your research question

You should use this time for evidence gathering and writing. Write a rough draft of one evidence chapter.

January

Goal: A draft of your evidence chapter

Turn in a draft of one evidence chapter immediately after break. Also provide a short outline of the thesis, chapter by chapter (one paragraph each). Write a rough draft of the remaining evidence chapters.

Make a realistic plan for the next two months; time management helps you complete to your thesis.

February

Goal: A full draft of your thesis

Deadline: March 4: Turn in a full draft to your advisor

February is writing time! Complete the main analyses, revise earlier chapters in light of new developments and advisor suggestions.

Faculty need time management, too. That's why we have a draft deadline. If you turn in your draft by the deadline, your advisor will have sufficient time to read it—and more importantly, you will have sufficient time to implement changes. Drafts turned in past the deadline may not receive full comments and feedback.

March - April 3

Goal: Finish the job

Revise thesis based on advisor feedback.

Allow several days to print, copy and bind because you are one of many students converging on the printers and copy shops, and there are often unexpected last-minute delays.

CELEBRATE RESPONSIBLY

Senior Thesis Guidelines

Every thesis is different, but here is a general outline of how you may choose to organize your thesis.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter I: Introduction

The introductory chapter should state your thesis or argument and explain why you are arguing it. It should develop the question that gave rise to your thesis statement. Explain why your question is a useful one for our understanding of politics. Also, explain the alternative arguments to yours, and justify why you are arguing for your idea and against the others.

Chapter II: Theory (and history)

This chapter should develop your argument and ground it in secondary sources. In detail, explain your idea, and justify its validity with as many good reasons as you can. For many theses, this requires a historical component that sets the argument in the context of a sequence of events in the real world of politics. Your core chapters (see below) may also be historical, but by contrast they will contain lots of detailed evidence. This chapter is the place to define concepts and explain how your idea relates to and draws on the writings of other people. A short thesis may fold this chapter into the introductory chapter.

Chapters III, IV (and V): Evidence (The Core)

Here you methodically lay out the evidence that supports the argument you have developed in the early chapters. Be sure to explain where the evidence came from and why it is valid. If you executed a study of your own (interviews, experiment, survey) then you may need a separate chapter that contains the research design and provides details on how you collected the data. If you rely on data collected by someone else, give a brief description of how it was collected, so that readers can judge its validity. Be sure you know the potential sources of error or bias in the data, so that you can explain why it is valid. Always note the sample size and the process of sample selection, and detail the characteristics of the sample. If you are using a historical case (e.g., a city, or an organization, or a leader), then justify the reason for selecting that case and not others. It is often useful to include tables or figures. If you do so, explain in the text what the reader is to learn from each table or figure. Each table should be self-explanatory, but the text should highlight what is important about it.

Chapter V(or VI): Conclusion

Remind readers of your argument and summarize the evidence you presented. Show how you have established the argument with the evidence. Draw implications for the general topic from the details of what you have found and argued. Remind readers again of the reasons your question is important for understanding politics. Knowing what we now know about your topic, what can we conclude about politics?