

Dear Politics seniors,

Welcome to your final year at Princeton. As you begin your fall semester, the senior thesis may seem like a distant, yet daunting, challenge. Many of you have never had so much ownership of a scholarly piece, particularly of a piece of such length. Your previous work at Princeton has come with more guidance and definition, and you have had to make fewer decisions to produce it. The senior thesis tasks you with significantly more responsibility, and the final product of this endeavor will be extremely rewarding. However, the thesis-writing process may become confusing and stressful at times. Throughout the year, and particularly in difficult instances, the help of your faculty adviser will be invaluable. We would like to encourage you to keep a few things in mind to maintain a truly productive relationship with your adviser.

**Open and early communication with your thesis adviser is key to a successful advising relationship.** The work styles of faculty members vary widely, as do the work styles of students. While some seniors write their theses at a consistent pace throughout the year, others do the majority of their writing in the months preceding the final deadline. Likewise, some professors expect to advise theses closely throughout the year, while others expect to only provide comments on one full draft in March. No work style is inherently good or bad, but lack of clarity regarding expectations can produce unnecessary and unexpected stress. To make sure that you and your adviser each understand the other's approach, *explicitly* discuss the following issues early in the year:

- **Deliverables:** Will you submit individual chapters or full drafts for review? Will you submit an outline? Will you submit a second draft?
- **Timeline:** When do you expect to submit your deliverables? How long will your adviser take to respond with comments? How close to the final deadline will your adviser continue to review material?
- **Specificity of feedback:** Will you only receive general guidance for your argument, or will your adviser provide detailed comments on your writing?
- **Meetings:** Will you meet on a regular basis or only to discuss deliverables when you submit them? Do you expect meetings to include detailed discussions or only brief check-ins?
- **Email:** Does your adviser regularly communicate through email? How long will each of you take to reply to emails? Can you email about minor issues and expect fast responses?

Discuss these factors early in the fall to clarify your expectations and those of your adviser. Both of you likely maintain busy schedules, and early communication will help you to avoid scheduling conflicts, particularly during crunch time in the spring. Moreover, open discussion of your work styles early in the year will mitigate the likelihood of unpleasant surprises down the road. Seniors frequently find that their advisers have more hands-on or hands-off approaches than expected, but they often do not reach this realization until the spring. Advisers are similarly surprised to receive dozens of pages to review in late March from panicked seniors who unrealistically expect instantaneous feedback. To facilitate a smooth revision process, construct a submissions timeline in advance, and check whether your adviser's schedule will allow for a prompt turnaround of your work at the necessary times. If you hope to receive thorough comments on your writing, also communicate this at the beginning of the year and specify the type of feedback that would be most helpful. Honest and early discussion of your expectations will save you much stress in the final push.

Best of luck with your theses! Senior year can be your most rewarding and memorable time at Princeton. Make sure to enjoy it.

Yours,

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