

College of the Holy Cross
Political Science Departmental Honors Thesis Program
Guidelines

The honors program of the political science department is designed to offer students of demonstrated superior capacity and motivation the opportunity to devote a substantial block of time during their senior year to an extensive study of a significant problem or issue in political science, culminating in the completion of a thesis on the research topic. Students accepted into the program will receive the equivalent of one full course credit for each semester of their senior year to enable them to work on the thesis. Both course credits may be applied toward the minimum 32 course credits necessary for graduation, but only one course credit may be applied toward the minimum ten required courses in the Political Science major.

Students participating in the program should expect to devote a significant amount of time to background reading for the thesis during the summer preceding their senior year. Students may also need to continue working on the thesis during Christmas and spring recesses. These requirements are not intended to deter students who need to do income-earning work during their vacations from participating in the program, but participants will obviously need to budget their time appropriately.

Procedures and Timeline for Applying for the Department Honors Program

- ❖ *Spring of Sophomore Year:* All majors with at least a 3.15 department GPA will be contacted by the department chair and invited to an information meeting about the department honors program. The students will be encouraged to consider the honors program and to begin selecting courses that will provide a background for developing an appropriate research project.
- ❖ *Fall of Junior Year:* All majors with at least a 3.15 department GPA will be invited to attend a workshop on developing appropriate research questions for the honors thesis. They will also receive guidance on contacting potential advisors for their thesis. Between the end of the Fall semester and the beginning of the Spring semester, interested students should discuss possible proposals with one or more members of the department into whose teaching or research subfield(s) the proposal topic falls. The faculty member(s) should be able to help refine the proposal and suggest relevant readings.
- ❖ *February of the Junior Year:* Students with at least a 3.3 department GPA after the Fall semester will be officially notified of their eligibility for the department honors program. Prospective honors applicants will be expected to attend a two part workshop on developing a thesis prospectus during February.¹ The workshops will focus on finalizing research questions, generating hypotheses, choosing an appropriate research methodology, conducting a literature review, and reviewing resources for research. The workshops are intended to provide the student with the basic tools necessary to write a high-quality prospectus and the foundation to produce a good thesis. The thesis prospectus submitted with the application form should include an outline, a description of the proposed methodology, and a one- or two-page bibliography (see the sample prospectus available on

¹ Students who are abroad or in Washington during the spring of their junior year should make contact with potential faculty advisors prior to leaving campus. Because these students are unable to attend the thesis workshops, it is imperative that they maintain contact with a faculty member and provide early drafts of the thesis prospectus. These students should expect to submit multiple drafts for comment followed by revision before the prospectus can be submitted for review. Students studying away from campus will be held to the deadlines outlined in this document unless otherwise noted.

the department's website). The student should work with a potential faculty advisor to develop the prospectus.

- ❖ March of the Junior Year: The student will submit the thesis prospectus and honors program application form to the department chair by the end of March. A panel of three faculty members chosen by the department chair will review the prospectus and the student's academic record. At that point the panel may accept the proposal and schedule an oral defense, or the panel may return the prospectus with comments and ask the student to revise and resubmit the prospectus. The student will be permitted up to two weeks to make revisions. Following the second review of the prospectus, the panel may either schedule an oral defense of the proposal or reject the application.²
- ❖ April of the Junior Year: The applicant will defend his/her proposal before a panel of Political Science faculty members in April. The panel will review the student's preparation, interest, and ability to successfully pursue the proposed research project. The department's decision on whether to accept the thesis proposal will be communicated to the student shortly after the interview. The student will also be assigned an advisor and reader to form an honors committee. The student may request an advisor and reader, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the department to determine the most appropriate members of the faculty to work with the student. In rare cases, it is possible that a deserving applicant may be turned down because an appropriate advisor is unavailable.
- ❖ May of the Junior Year: Successful applicants should meet with the members of their committee before leaving campus for the summer. The student and committee members should agree upon a course of reading for the summer to prepare for the Fall semester.

Criteria of Evaluation

Although the methodology of an honors thesis will vary with the specific interests of the student and the nature of the subfield in which he or she is working, all theses are expected to meet certain common criteria in order to be eligible for honors. First, the thesis must concern a *significant question* in political science – such that its findings can be seen to have relevance to an important theoretical issue in the discipline. Second, wherever possible the thesis should employ *primary sources* as the basis for its empirical content. Moreover, to the extent that the thesis draws on secondary sources, it should present a *new perspective* on the material in those sources, not just a summary of their conclusions. Third, the thesis must include a sufficient *survey* of the relevant literature on the topic both to indicate that the author has acquired the relevant background knowledge and to show the relation of the author's conclusions to the existing literature. Finally, the thesis must be *well written*, conforming to standard rules of English usage, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and documentation, and carefully *organized* so that the argument progresses in a logical and systematic fashion.

While the appropriate length of an honors thesis will vary with the nature of the subject, it is expected that a thesis will ordinarily run from 60 to 110 pages, including bibliography. It is expected that the student will spend an average of 10 to 15 hours per week on thesis research and writing, in addition to preliminary preparation during the preceding spring and summer.

² Final acceptance of the thesis proposals for students studying away from campus is contingent upon the completion of the proposal defense either in the spring when students return to campus or in the first week of the Fall semester for students who are unable to return to campus before the end of the spring semester.

Role of the Thesis Committee and Deadlines for Completing the Thesis

- ❖ September of Senior Year: Upon returning to campus in the fall, the student should arrange a meeting with his or her committee during the first week of the semester. At that time, the committee will work out a schedule for the completion of the thesis with the student, specifying the dates by which various readings or research should be completed and drafts of successive chapters submitted.
- ❖ December of the Senior Year: By the end of the fall semester, it is expected that the student will have completed the bulk of the relevant reading and research for the thesis and will have submitted a draft of one-third to one-half of the final work. Students who have not made satisfactory progress in the judgement of the committee may be dropped from the honors program at that time. The student may also choose to not continue in the honors program. In either case the honors course credit will be converted to a tutorial credit, and the student's committee will review the work completed during the fall semester and assign a grade for the semester.
- ❖ April of the Senior Year: The student should plan to submit a draft of the entire thesis to the committee no later than April 1, so that the members of the committee can return it to the student in time for it to be revised in light of recommendations and questions provided by the committee.

The final draft of the thesis is due to the advisor and the reader by the third week of April. The committee will schedule a defense of the thesis during the final week of April or first week of May. The thesis examination committee will be composed of the thesis advisor and second reader plus a third faculty member chosen by the department chair. The defense is intended to be an opportunity for the student and members of the faculty to engage in an in-depth discussion of the student's research.

The student will also present an oral summary of the thesis as part of the College's spring academic conference. The student should prepare a twenty-minute overview of his or her research and conclusions, which will be followed by a period of questions from members of the department and others attending the presentation.

The Determination of Honors

The examination committee will decide upon a grade for the thesis and will determine whether the student will receive an 'honors' designation for the thesis. The completion of the thesis does not guarantee an 'honors' designation. To receive 'honors', the thesis must receive a grade of 'B' or higher.