

POLITICAL SCIENCE HONORS THESIS GUIDELINES

To complete an honors thesis in political science, you must register for a two-semester sequence of courses. In the first semester, you enroll in [POLS 3700 Honors Research](#) under the supervision of your topic advisor (who must be a full-time faculty member in the department). In the second semester, you register for [POLS 4700 Honors Thesis](#), once again under the supervision of your topic advisor.

First semester: POLS 3700 Honors Research

Full draft of proposal: Due to advisor and readers by mid-November/mid-April (specific date TBD)

- The proposal should state the research question, justify its importance, review key literature, present core hypotheses, and explain the research design.
- Prior to submitting your draft, you should identify additional committee members in consultation with your advisor and request that they serve as readers.

Final materials: Due to advisor and readers by end November/April (specific date TBD each semester)

- Proposal (approx. 10-12 pages): The final version of your proposal serves as the basis for your grade in POLS 3700.
- Layperson summary (max. 500 words): This should include a statement of the research question, explanation of methodology, and summary of the project in non-specialist terms. [Guidelines](#) can be found on the Honors College site.
- [Application to Candidacy Part One](#): This form must be completed online following the Honors College instructions. The process requires you to upload final copies of your proposal and layperson summary. You must list official NinerNet email addresses for all committee members so that the form can circulate for their signatures using DocuSign. The entire process must be completed by Reading Day, so be sure to upload your materials several days in advance.

Second semester: POLS 4700 Honors Thesis

Full draft of thesis: Due to committee members by end October/March (specific date TBD each semester)

- This draft should include all of the necessary sections (see reverse) and should be as polished as possible. The topic advisor and readers will review it and provide feedback to make final revisions before the oral presentation and submission of the final thesis.

Oral presentation: Scheduled for mid-November/mid-April (specific date TBD each semester)

- The Political Science Honors Program Director will work with you and your committee members to schedule a time for your oral presentation. Using PowerPoint slides, you should present the results of your research in 15 minutes, followed by time for questions.

Final materials: Due to committee members by end November/April (specific date TBD each semester)

- Final Thesis: This is the final version that will be shared with the Honors College, so make sure it is clearly written and does not have any grammar or spelling errors! Your thesis must earn a grade of "A" from your Honors Committee for you to graduate with honors.
- Abstract (max. 200 words): This should provide a succinct summary of your research, its importance, your methodology, and key findings in terms that non-specialists can understand.
- [Application to Candidacy Part Two](#): This form must be completed online following the Honors College instructions. The process requires you to upload final copies of your thesis and abstract. You must list official NinerNet email addresses for all committee members so that the form can circulate for their signatures using DocuSign. The entire process must be completed by Reading Day, so be sure to upload your materials several days in advance.

Suggested outline for POLS Honors Thesis

Note: Consult with your topic advisor on how best to organize your thesis. If you are writing an honors thesis in the area of political theory, for example, your outline will probably look somewhat different. This is only a suggested outline.

I. Introduction: This section introduces the topic and explains why it is important to study. It may also include an overview of the subsequent sections of the paper.

II. Literature review: This section provides an overview of existing academic research about your topic. Focus on how other authors have answered your research question and avoid discussing specific cases. It helps to divide the literature into categories based on articles/books that offer similar explanations, and the goal is to synthesize the key findings (not to just discuss each work in turn).

III. Theory and hypotheses: In this section, you should lay out the logic for the hypotheses that you plan to test and present them clearly and succinctly. Your hypotheses may flow from some of the literature findings that you presented in the previous section, but you may also develop your own hypotheses that have not been examined previously (which is a sign of doing unique research).

IV. Research design (methodology): In this section, you should explain how you plan to answer the research question. This involves, most importantly, operationalizing (explaining how you will measure or assess) the dependent and independent variables (for a quantitative analysis) or justifying your selection of cases (for a comparative case analysis). You should also explain where you are getting your data.

V. Analysis: This is the heart of your paper. In this section, you will systematically examine the various possible explanations for the outcome that you are trying to explain. If you are using comparative case analysis, this means examining in detail each factor (independent variable) in each of the cases. If you are using quantitative methods, this means presenting your main findings in table form and discussing the results in detail. Be sure to be systematic in your approach; in other words, don't just discuss data that support the findings you want.

VI. Conclusion: In this section, you will summarize your findings and discuss their implications. These could include policy implications and/or suggestions for further research. You can also use this section to look toward the future for a particular case or issue that arose in your paper.

VII. Bibliography: This should include all of the sources that you have cited in the paper, and it should be formatted consistently throughout with items listed in alphabetical order by the first author's last name. Please note that URLs are not full references.

For formatting of your paper and references, please follow the [APSA style manual](#).