POLITICAL SCIENCE 683: SENIOR HONORS THESIS SEMINAR

Fall 2015

Prof. Amy Gangl (agangl@wisc.edu)

Office Hours:

Purpose of the Course:

This semester, you will settle on a topic for your senior thesis, learn the basics of research design, develop a research design, a working bibliography, a timeline for the second semester, write a thesis proposal, collect all necessary data for your thesis, and begin writing the middle section of your thesis. The intent is to do all preparation necessary to complete your thesis during the spring semester.

The point of writing a thesis in conjunction with this seminar is to reap the benefits of going through the process with your peers with the structure that the course schedule provides. I will insist that you dedicate yourself to your project, but I also expect that this will be an enjoyable and rewarding experience for you.

You will each be required to find a faculty member to serve as your thesis advisor who specializes in your area of interest. If you have already made a connection with a faculty member who has agreed to advise your thesis—fantastic. If not, you should immediately begin seeking out a faculty member who does work in your area of interest. You will each turn in a thesis advising agreement form during the fifth week of class that will serve as a contract between you, your substantive advisor, and myself. My role in your thesis adventure is to guide you through the process of designing a research project, conducting the research, and writing the thesis. (This is slightly different than the “second reader” role described in the Lipson book.)

Requirements: The main requirement of this seminar is an approximately 75 page senior thesis that you will turn in in the last day of class in May 2015. (You will agree upon a length with your substantive advisor.) During spring semester, you will also be required to participate in either the L&S Honors Program Senior Honors Thesis Symposium or the Undergraduate Symposium. For this semester, you will complete a thesis proposal, a pre-writing of your results, and a timeline for the second semester. In addition, you will provide constructive critiques of the work of other seminar participants. See the calendar below for more details.

You should plan on completing all necessary data collection by the beginning of the second semester. In the past, many students have used winter break to conduct interviews, archival research or fieldwork in the United States or abroad, and other data-gathering activities.

The timeline that you turn in at the end of this semester will serve as your schedule of due dates for the second semester. You will define how many chapters your thesis will have, and you will decide when you will turn in drafts of these chapters to me and your other faculty advisor. Throughout next semester, you will be exchanging chapters with classmates to provide feedback to each other.
Since this is a small class, it is essential that you each pull your own weight. Much of our semester will involve giving feedback to each other during class sessions. Therefore, you must attend each session of our seminar. In order to reap the benefits of the class, you must do all assigned reading ahead of class and be prepared to discuss it together. Although the class is scheduled for 2 hours, we may not always use that entire time.

There is little assigned reading in this course, and the assignments are heaviest at the beginning of the Fall semester. I expect that you will be doing a large amount of reading on your own related to your topic. I will very likely assign additional readings to you based on your topic and preferred methodology(s). The readings on this syllabus are designed to give you basic training in social science inquiry and research design.

On days labeled “workshop,” we will meet together as a group, to collectively discuss the obstacles you are facing and your discoveries about what is working for you as you progress on your thesis, as well as to give each other one-on-one feedback. The idea is to develop camaraderie as a group and take advantage of your ability to give advice to one another, and also to identify common problems.

All writing assignments should be submitted in typed, double-spaced, 10-12 point type, reasonable margins format, via email to me.

Grading: The first semester, your final grade will be a P (assuming that you complete all required work) denoting satisfactory progress. At the end of the second semester, I will assign your final grade based on the quality of your drafts turned in to me, participation in and attendance at seminar, compliance with deadlines, and the quality of your final thesis. Your substantive advisor and I will jointly decide on your final thesis grade. This grade will apply to the Spring semester and will retroactively apply to the Fall semester.

COURSE MATERIALS: The following book is required for the course and is available at the University Book Store. This book is also available in the reserve room at College Library. Lipson, Charles. 2005. How to Write a B.A. Thesis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

GRANTS AND AWARDS The honors program offers grants to conduct your research! Deadlines for the Trewartha and the Mensink Grants are in late October. See http://www.honors.ls.wisc.edu/SiteContent.aspx?prev=1&id=46 for more info. Excellent senior theses can win a University Book Store Award ($1000). Deadlines for those are in late March. See http://www.provost.wisc.edu/university-bookstore.htm for more details. Also, our department gives out an award for the best undergraduate term paper or thesis each year, the William Jennings Bryan Award. See http://www.polisci.wisc.edu/undergrad/awards.aspx for more details.

SEMESTER CALENDAR

**Week 1:** What am I getting into? Embarking on the great adventure of writing a thesis; Identifying a research topic, becoming familiar with social science inquiry. Read: Lipson chaps 1-2, 15-17. We will look at example theses, discuss what you should expect from the experience, and what we will expect from each other.
**Week 2:** Clarifying a research question; Moving from questions to hypotheses and measurement.

Read: Lipson chapters 4 and 5.

By today, you should have started to seek out a faculty member who has expertise in your area of interest, if you have not already done so. Talking about your potential topic is a great way to focus your project, and you should have a thesis advisor who specializes in your area of interest.

Due: Description of 3 potential research topics (2 pages).

**Week 3:** Online discussion and analysis – present at least 1000 words on your preferred reach topic using at least three peer-reviewed resources. What questions are interesting to you in this research? Where do you think there might be opportunities to address a unique and interesting research question.

**Week 4:** Sampling and case studies. Read: Lipson chapter 6.

**Week 5:** Workshop.

Read: Lipson chapter 7. Due:

- Draft research topic and working bibliography (use 2-3 pages to discuss your topic, then as many as necessary for your bibliography). You will continually revise this bibliography across the fall and spring semesters as you continue to read research relevant to your topic. We will call it a “working bibliography” until you turn in your final thesis. In the 2-3 pages, I want you to answer the following questions: What is your central research question? Why is it important? What contributions will studying this topic make to the field of political science and the broader world? What literatures will you draw upon to answer it?

- Thesis advising agreement. Turn in this agreement form, which will be distributed in class, signed by you and your substantive advisor.

**Week 6:** Strategies and suggestions on writing.

Guest: Brad Hughes, Director of UW Writing Center This session will extend beyond 3:30.

**Week 7:** Brief presentations and feedback.

Due: Brief presentations (5 minutes) to class on your research topics. Due: Draft thesis proposal. This proposal should be a 5-page paper that addresses what your central research question is and why it is important and also outlines your research design.

**Week 8:** NO CLASS. Research and Writing Day.

**Week 9:** To be decided on the basis of your needs and progress.

Due: Revised research proposal (8 to 10 pages). This paper will form the basis of your introductory and methods chapters and will serve as your guide for the remainder of your research.

**Week 10:** Data gathering techniques. Read: Lipson chapters 8 and 9.
**Week 11:** NO CLASS. Research and Writing Day.

Due: Draft of first chapter.

**Week 12:** To be decided on the basis of your needs and progress.

Due: Annotated bibliography.

**Week 13:** THANKSGIVING RECESS (no seminar)

**Week 14:** To be decided on the basis of your needs and progress.

Due: Prewriting of results, timeline for second semester, and working bibliography. (For more info on Prewriting, review Lipson Chap.8, pp. 256-7, 278-9,

**Week 15:** Semester wrap-up. Due: Five-minute oral presentations