

# The Senior Thesis

## Department of Political Science

### Class of 2020

What is a senior thesis? It is your chance to pursue your passion for politics on an independent basis. A way to build on and then go beyond what you've learned in your classes. A time to challenge yourself. The senior thesis should be your crowning achievement, the highpoint of the time you have spent studying politics at Union College.

What type of senior thesis project can you undertake? The political science faculty encourages you to think broadly and imaginatively in crafting a senior thesis. Keep in mind that senior theses can take a variety of forms. Most political science seniors research and write a multi-chapter thesis, which combines review of existing research with original research. Thesis topics vary tremendously across and within all of the subfields of political science.

Each year, a few political science seniors opt for a different type of research project to fulfill their senior thesis requirement. Some examples include:

- **Applied Political Research:** draft a report for a local, state, or national organization. Working with an organization, identify a research project then conduct the research and present your findings in the form of a report.
- **Political Action Project:** organize a political movement; form an interest group to fight for a cause; help run a political campaign for a local office-seeker; start a blog or a website devoted to a cause.
- **Creative Work:** write a political screenplay or novel; organize an exhibition of original political photography; make a documentary movie.

These are only examples. The possibilities are endless. We want you to develop an idea that will be meaningful to you and that you can be passionate about. This is, after all, a project that you will spend at least six months of your life working on. Choose something you care deeply about.

As you are deciding what type of senior thesis project to complete and what your topic will be, you should keep the following in mind. First, do not assume that completing a non-traditional thesis (creative work, action project, etc.) will be easier. In fact, most of the time the opposite is true. Second, if you do wish to work on a non-traditional project, you will need to do some preliminary work now in order to convince potential advisors that this project is feasible. If you want to work with an organization on a research project, for example, you will need to contact that organization and have assurances from the group that such a joint effort is possible. Perhaps you want to write a novel or complete some other creative work. If this is the case, you will need to demonstrate that you have the skills and experience necessary to produce a creative work. Finally, regardless of which type of project you will undertake, your final product will contain at least 25 pages of writing. Most theses and projects are significantly longer, of course. If one component of your final product involves non-written work (e.g., photographs, film), your written output need not be as long as that of your peers. A written portion is required of all projects, though.

The senior thesis offers you a wonderful opportunity for intellectual and personal growth; in return it puts considerable responsibility on your shoulders. Your responsibility begins with the search for an appropriate senior thesis advisor. The following pages describe this and other practical details of the senior thesis experience.

### **Finding a Senior Thesis Advisor**

In thinking about who you would like to work with, you should be guided first and foremost by your interests and those of the political science faculty. We encourage you speak with many of us in trying to determine who would be appropriate advisors for your thesis. Once you have identified potential advisors, submit a one page, roughly 250-word, typed senior thesis proposal to each one. Faculty who are willing to serve as your thesis advisor need to sign your Senior Thesis Advisor Form. You will need to collect at least two signatures, but *we strongly encourage you to collect three*. After collecting faculty signatures, you will have the option to indicate a preference ranking between or among the faculty. Printed email confirmations from faculty members, stapled to your form, can be substituted for signatures.

**You must submit your senior thesis proposal and completed Senior Thesis Advisor Form to the Departmental Administrative Assistant, Ms. Fortsch, in the Political Science department office, by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, April 19.**

Please do not procrastinate with this process. Remember that you may not necessarily find the faculty members you are looking for in their offices at the last minute. Also, faculty members are not obliged to respond to last-minute emails. This is an important process – invest in it so that the best possible matches can be made.

If you will be off campus during the spring trimester, we strongly encourage you to submit your materials before you depart. The logistics are simply much easier this way. If you do not, it is your responsibility to put together all the materials you need and get them to Ms. Fortsch.

In the ensuing weeks, the Political Science faculty will consult and make final senior thesis advisor assignments. You will then be notified who your advisor is. Once assignments are made, there can be no changes.

If you fail to meet this April 19<sup>th</sup> deadline, you still need to submit a senior thesis proposal and (unsigned) Senior Thesis Advisor Form to Professor Oxley. She will then assign you to an advisor. Be warned: if you do not submit your form by April 19, or, if you submit an incomplete form that is missing the requested information and/or signatures, it is unlikely that you will be assigned your preferred advisor(s). Students who miss the April 19<sup>th</sup> deadline or whose forms are incomplete will be assigned advisors after everyone who met the deadline with a fully completed form has been assigned an advisor.

### **Interdepartmental and Double Majors**

If you are an interdepartmental major, in most cases you will have two advisors for your senior thesis – one from each department. It will be your responsibility to navigate between the two scholars and their respective disciplines and expectations. The prudent advisee will learn promptly what each advisor expects. Encourage dialogue between your advisors. Keep in mind that ID majors must choose a topic that incorporates elements of both disciplines. In cases where an ID major has only one advisor (from Political Science), s/he will be expected to seek out appropriate guidance from non-Political Science faculty regarding the contributions of the second discipline to the project.

Double majors can either write two separate theses or, if advisors from both departments agree, write a joint two- or three-term thesis that combines both disciplines. If you write a joint thesis, you will have two advisors. If you wish to write a joint thesis, the form requires you to specify whether you wish to write a two-term or three-term joint thesis. When you speak with potential advisors, you must discuss this aspect with

them, as they will need to sign the form a second time (on its reverse side), indicating their agreement with the time frame of the joint thesis. In your 250-word thesis description, you should indicate what time frame you wish to pursue, and justify why that time frame is sufficient and appropriate for the research you wish to undertake. Understand that the time frame is not only up to you: all potential PSC advisors and the advisor (or chair) from the second department must be in agreement as to the plan, and must sign the reverse side of the form to that effect.

### **Deadlines and Grading**

The matter of deadlines is one left largely to the student and advisor, save in two respects.

- (1) The advisor will not allow any advisee to receive the grade of P (Pass) at the end of the first term of thesis work unless a significant amount of work (at least one chapter) has been completed. The deadline for fulfillment of this departmental requirement is the last day of classes of the term.
- (2) The deadline for completion of the senior thesis is departmentally set, and approval for an exception can only be granted by the department chair. Failure to meet this deadline – the next to last day of classes of the second term of your thesis – results in a lower grade.

Grades are based principally upon the quality of the final product, but advisors are free to factor in students' responsiveness to suggestions, demonstration of initiative and independence, and ability to meet deadlines. Be certain to ascertain from your advisor how heavily such factors will be weighted.

We would ask you to be very clear on one point concerning grading: "working hard" does not entitle anyone to a high grade.

### **Registering for the Senior Thesis**

In order to register for your thesis courses, you will need to fill out and have your advisor sign (two advisors if you will be doing a joint thesis) the "Independent Study, Independent Research, Thesis and Scholar's Honors Project Practicum" form, available on the Registrar's website (under "Forms and Guidelines"). Once the form is complete, submit it to the Registrar's office in Silliman Hall. A form needs to be submitted each term that you will be enrolled in a thesis course.

The courses you will register for depend upon whether you are Political Science major, an ID major, or a double major, as noted here:

- Political Science major: PSC 498 (first term), PSC 499 (second term)
- ID major: IDM 498 (first term), IDM 499 (second term)
- Double major: IDM 487 (first term), IDM 488 (second term), IDM 489 (third term, if relevant)

***It is \*your\* responsibility to double-check Webadvising at the start of each thesis term to make sure you are indeed correctly registered.***

## Senior Thesis Advisors for 2019-2020

**Prof. Saladdin Ahmed** (contact him via email: saladdin.ahmed@gmail.com)

- Generally: Political Theory, International Politics
- Specifically: critical theory, politics of space, Marxian thought, totalitarianism, neofascism, movements of dissent, social ecology, minorities, Middle East studies

**Prof. Cliff Brown**

- Generally: U.S. politics and International Politics
- Specifically: US presidency, campaign finance, US presidential elections, US defense policy and military relations, IR theory

**Prof. Mark Dallas**

- Generally: Comparative and International Politics
- Specifically: political economy, China, East Asia, developing countries, technologies and politics

**Prof. Bradley Hays**

- Generally: U.S. Politics
- Specifically: law and courts; constitutional and political development; constitutional theory

**Prof. Robert Hislope**

- Generally: Comparative and International Politics, Political Theory
- Specifically: music and politics, ethnic and racial politics, transnational organized crime, political corruption, European politics, comparative Left politics (Marxism), hegemony

**Prof. Lori Marso**

- Generally: Political Theory and Philosophy
- Specifically: feminist theory; African American political thought; the politics of feminist film and literature; literature and politics generally; race/gender/class analyses; history of state repression in the United States

**Prof. Zoe Oxley (Winter-Spring theses only)**

- Generally: U.S. Politics
- Specifically: elections, women and politics, public opinion, mass media, political psychology

**Prof. Guillermina Seri**

- Generally: Comparative Politics and Political Theory
- Specifically: Latin American politics, democratization, policing, human security, critical security studies, state crime, extralegal state action, human rights violations, political theory

**Prof. David Siegel**

- Generally: Comparative and International Politics
- Specifically: state power and state-society relations, democracy and dictatorship, post-Soviet states, post-communist transitions, privatization

**Visiting U.S. Politics Professor**

- Generally: U.S. Politics, Public Policy
- Specifically: TBA

Complete this form and staple it to your 250-word, typed, senior thesis proposal. Submit to Ms. Fortsch in the Political Science department office (Lippman 117) by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, April 19.

**SENIOR THESIS ADVISOR FORM**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID# \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Box # \_\_\_\_\_

Senior thesis topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the 2 terms will you work on you your thesis:    Fall 2019      Winter 2020      Spring 2020

Are you an ID major?      Yes    No    If yes, what is 2<sup>nd</sup> department? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a double major?      Yes    No    If yes, what is 2<sup>nd</sup> department? \_\_\_\_\_  
[If yes, reverse side of form must be completed.]

*I affirm that I have checked Webadvising, and that my officially declared major matches what I have indicated above. If it does not, I understand that it is my responsibility to turn in appropriate paperwork to the registrar's office immediately, or else I risk jeopardizing my ability to graduate on time.*



(Student must initial in this box)

**Faculty Signatures:** Political Science professors who have read your senior thesis proposal and would be willing to serve as your thesis advisor will sign below. **Collect at least two and preferably three signatures.** Email messages from faculty members can be submitted in lieu of signatures, *but they must be printed out and stapled to this sheet.*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Preference Ranking of Political Science Faculty:** If you have a preference among the faculty who signed above, please list them in order of preference. Otherwise, leave this section blank.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**(OVER for DOUBLE MAJORS)**

Double majors only (circle one):

Will you write:      2 separate theses      1 joint thesis      Only 1 thesis (in Political Science)

If you plan to write 1 joint thesis (circle one):

Will you write:      1 two-term thesis      1 three-term thesis

For joint double-major theses, both your potential PSC advisors **and** the advisor or chair from the 2<sup>nd</sup> department must sign below, signaling that they agree to advise the thesis over the time frame you have circled above.

PSC faculty \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Department Advisor/Chair signature:

PSC faculty \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

PSC faculty \_\_\_\_\_