

POL499 – Senior Thesis & Thesis Seminar

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Office hours: By appointment
Course website: Quercus

Course Description:

This course is designed to help you write a Senior Thesis that can make a meaningful contribution to public knowledge. It is divided into two main sections. In the fall semester, we will focus on developing essential research design and analytical skills, such as translating a research interest into a well-defined and practical research question, formulating hypotheses, and putting into practice a series of research methods to help you investigate these hypotheses. The methods we will focus on are those that are most commonly used in thesis work, including interviews and surveys, discourse analysis, building a quantitative dataset, and conducting a comparative case study. We will learn about these methods by reviewing peer-reviewed articles on a variety of Political Science topics that may serve as models for your own thesis.

In the winter semester, we will focus on moving efficiently through the research, writing and editing process. Each class will be divided into two parts. In the first part we will have a group discussion about various challenges faced, such as handling critical feedback from a supervisor, addressing and overcoming burnout, and presenting complex ideas in an easy-to-understand manner. In the second part of each class, you will have an opportunity to work on a specific thesis-related task and receive personalized assistance from your instructor and colleagues.

Course Objectives:

This course has the following three main objectives:

1. To guide and assist you through the process of writing a senior thesis
2. To provide you with an opportunity to learn how to design a large research project and to see it through to completion with discipline and enthusiasm
3. To offer you an opportunity to learn about a variety of research techniques that might be useful not only for your thesis project but also for your future career

Marking Scheme & Course Requirements

Evaluation for this course will be based on the following two components.

Assignment Name	Value	Deadline
Course engagement (graded by course instructor)	25%	Throughout the semester
Final thesis (graded by supervisor)	75%	Monday April 6 th , 2026

Course Engagement (25%)

This course-long assignment is based on your demonstrated in-class commitment to learning and engaging with the course material. It is a holistic assessment that includes the following three (3) components:

1. In-class participation during class-wide discussions
2. Reaching out to the course instructor to ask questions about course content and thesis-related issues
3. Quality of the first-term presentation (in Weeks 10, 11 or 12) in which you outline the basics of your thesis project, including central question asked, research methods used, challenges faced, and your plan to get it all done by early April.

Final Thesis (75%)

This assignment consists of a 40-60 page (double-spaced) thesis on a topic developed by you, in consultation with your supervisor. The thesis should include properly formatted citations, such as footnotes and a bibliography, using an accepted scholarly style (please make sure to consult your supervisor to see what style they prefer). As you work on your thesis throughout the academic year, it will be your responsibility to check-in and arrange meetings with your supervisor.

Course Readings:

There are no readings or textbooks that need to be purchased. All readings can be accessed on the Quercus course page, under the “Pages” menu. The readings for this course have been selected to show you how scholars have used a particular method in order to answer their research question(s)..

If you are interested in reading about research methods from methods-focused books, there are many to choose from. I’d suggest the following:

- David McNabb, *Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
- Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- Christopher Howard, *Thinking Like a Political Scientist: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
- Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).
- Lisa Baglione, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2020).

Thesis Submission & Plagiarism Detection:

Your thesis must be submitted on time via Quercus. Students are strongly advised to keep draft work and hard copies of their thesis until it has been returned and graded.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

On the Use of Generative AI (i.e ChatGPT)

In this course, the use of ChatGPT and other related tools for all assignments is prohibited. If its use is detected in any form, its use may constitute an academic offense.

Office Hours

Office hours will be done through appointment and held in-person, over Zoom or the phone. If you would like to speak, please email me and we can set up a convenient time to connect.

Email Policy:

You can contact me anytime via email and I will get back to you within 24 hours from Monday to Friday. I will not be checking email on the weekend. While I am happy to correspond via email, please note that discussions with me are often a more productive use of time.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

The University and this course treat cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

Potential offences in papers and assignments include:

- using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor;
- making up sources or facts;
- obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.

On tests and exams cheating includes:

- using or possessing unauthorized aids;
- looking at someone else's answers;
- misrepresenting your identity, or falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.

If you have concerns about plagiarism, please come speak to me directly. As you prepare your analytical essays, please make sure to review this link for useful guidance:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

Accessibility:

I am committed to creating a course environment that is accessible for all students. If you require accommodation for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please feel free to discuss this with me and get in touch with Accessibility Services as soon as possible:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services/>

Harassment & Discrimination

The University of Toronto is a diverse community and as such is committed to providing an environment free of any form of harassment, misconduct, or discrimination. In this course, I seek to foster a civil, respectful, and open-minded climate in which we can all work together to develop a better understanding of key questions and debates through meaningful dialogue. As such, I expect all involved with this course to refrain from actions or behaviours that intimidate, humiliate, or demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem based on traits related to race, religion, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability, receipt of public assistance or record of offences.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Mental health is a growing concern among students. If you are in need of some assistance, please feel free to come speak to me. The University has also a number of services available to help you with your emotional wellbeing. Visit Health & Wellness for more information:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/>

Educational Supports

If you require any assistance with the course material and assignments, please come speak with me and I will do my best to help you. For additional support, you may want to visit one of U of T's writing centres (<https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/>) as well as U of T's Academic Success Centre (<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/academic-success/>).

Course Schedule & Readings

Fall Semester

Week #1 (September 5, 2025) – Course Introduction and an Introduction to Research Design

****For this week's readings, focus on trying to determine the question each article asks and the way in which the author(s) try to answer that question...

- Jonathan Coley, "Theorizing Issue Selection in Advocacy Organizations: An Analysis of Human Rights Activism Around Darfur and The Congo, 1998-2010," *Sociological Perspectives* Vol. 56 No. 2 (2013), pp. 191-212.
- Paul Avey & Michael Desch, "What Do Policymakers Want From Us? Results of a Survey of Current and Former Senior National Security Decision Makers," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 58 (2014), pp. 227-246.

- Jacqueline McAllister, “Deterring Wartime Atrocities: Hard Lessons from the Yugoslav Tribunal,” *International Security* Vol. 44 No. 3 (2019/2020), pp. 84-128.

Week #2 (September 12, 2025) – Turning a Research *Interest* into a Research *Question* Using a Literature Review

- Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), chapter 6.
- Lisa Baglione, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure & Methods* (London: Sage, 2020), chapter 2.
- Nilay Saiya & Stuti Manchanda, “Monks Behaving Badly: Explaining Buddhist Violence in Asia,” *International Security* Vol. 49 No. 4 (Spring 2025), pp. 119-159 (focus on pp 119-126).
- Erin Baines & Emily Paddon, “‘This is How We Survived’: Civilian Agency and Humanitarian Protection,” *Security Dialogue* Vol 43 No. 3 (2012), pp. 231-247 (focus on pp. 231-234).

Week #3 (September 19th, 2025) – How to Use Library Resources: A Visit to Robarts Library

*****This class will take place in 4th Floor E-Classroom, Robarts Library

Week #4 (September 26th, 2025) – Research Question Workshop & Hypothesis Formulation

*****In this week, come prepared to work on turning your research interest into a research question and to develop some tentative answers (hypotheses) to that question.

- Ideah Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch & David Cunningham, “Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups,” *International Organization* Vol. 65 (Fall 2011), pp. 709-720.
- Howard Ramos, James Ron & Oskar Thoms, “Shaping the Northern Media’s Human Rights Coverage, 1986-2000,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 44 No. 4 (2007), pp. 385-390.
- Alan Kuperman, “Darfur: Strategic Victimhood Strikes Again?” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* Vol. 4 No. 3 (December 2009), pp. 281-284.

Week #5 (October 3rd, 2025) – Developing Answers Using Questionnaires (Surveys and Interviews)

- James Ron & David Crow, “Who Trusts Local Human Rights Organizations? Evidence from Three World Regions,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 37 No. 1 (February 2015), pp. 188-239.
- Jacqueline McAllister, “Deterring Wartime Atrocities: Hard Lessons from the Yugoslav Tribunal,” *International Security* Vol. 44 No. 3 (2019/2020), pp. 84-128.
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Week #6 (October 10th, 2025) – Developing Answers Using Discourse Analysis

- Henry Hale & Adam Lenton, “Do Autocrats Need a Foreign Enemy?” *International Security* Vol. 49 No. 1 (Summer 2024), pp. 9-50 (focus on pages 9-24).

- Danny Hayes & Matt Guardino, “Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq,” *Political Communication* Vol. 27 No. 1 (2010), pp. 59-87.

Week #7 (October 17th, 2025) – Developing Answers Using Quantitative Datasets

- Ideah Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch & David Cunningham, “Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups,” *International Organization* Vol. 65 (Fall 2011), pp. 709-744.
- Howard Ramos, James Ron & Oskar Thoms, “Shaping the Northern Media’s Human Rights Coverage, 1986-2000,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 44 No. 4 (2007), pp. 385-406.

Week #8 (October 24th, 2025) – Developing Answers Using Process Tracing

- Alexander Downes, “Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: The Causes of Civilian Victimization in War,” *International Security* Vol. 30 No. 4 (Spring 2006), pp. 152-195.
- Kristin Bakke, “Copying and Learning From Outsiders? Assessing Diffusion From Transnational Insurgents in the Chechen Wars,” in Jeffrey Checkel (ed.), *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 31-62.

READING WEEK (October 27th-31st, 2025) – NO CLASS

Week #9 (November 7th 2025) – Developing Answers Using a Comparative Case Study

- Jonathan Coley, “Theorizing Issue Selection in Advocacy Organizations: An Analysis of Human Rights Activism Around Darfur and The Congo, 1998-2010,” *Sociological Perspectives* Vol. 56 No. 2 (2013), pp. 191-212.
- Stefan Lindemann, “Explaining Divergent Responses to Ethnic Exclusion: Evidence from Two Paired Comparisons,” *Conflict, Security & Development* Vol. 14 No. 2 (2014), pp. 181-211.

Week #10 (November 14th 2025) – Student Research Conference Day #1

Week #11 (November 21st, 2025) – Student Research Conference Day #2

Week #12 (November 28th, 2025)– Student Research Conference Day #3

Winter Semester

Week #13 (January 9th, 2026) – Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #14 (January 16th, 2026) – Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #15 (January 23rd, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #16 (January 30th, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #17 (February 6th, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #18 (February 13th, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

READING WEEK (February 16th-20th, 2026) – NO CLASS

Week #19 (February 27th, 2026) – Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #20 (March 6th, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #21 (March 13th, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #22 (March 20th, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

Week #23 (March 27th, 2026) - Thesis problem-solving workshop and in-class thesis work

*******Friday April 3rd – Good Friday, No Class.**

Week #24 (April 6th, 2026) – Final Thesis Presentation Conference