

Political Science 490: Senior Thesis

Dickinson College, Spring 2021

Friday 3:00-4:30

Zoom Link for Class and Office Hours: [REDACTED]

Denny Hall – Room 212

Professor Sarah Niebler (she/her/hers)

Office: Denny Hall, Room 302

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Student Office Hours: Wednesday 10:00-11:00, Friday 1:00-2:00, and by appointment



Course Description and Learning Outcomes

This course provides space for students to pursue research on a topic of their own choosing. In addition to writing a thesis no longer than 50 pages (not inclusive of notes, appendices, or bibliography) students will engage with one another in a scholarly research community providing regular feedback to one another. They will also discuss issues relating to writing and research processes.

Within the context of the thesis itself, students should:

- Articulate their own research question/puzzle/problem
- Engage with scholarly literature on their chosen topic
- Address and answer their question/puzzle/problem using a reasonable and well-articulated methodology
- Build and sustain a logical and coherent argument
- Situate their findings in the ongoing scholarly conversation about their topic

Course Materials

There are no required texts for the course. Students might find it necessary to print a significant amount in this class, however, especially if they prefer to read articles and book chapters relevant to their own research in hard copy.

Requirements and Grading

While the bulk of the grade in the course will be based on the final thesis, there are other graded elements in the class. We will engage in weekly goal-setting and accountability sessions. Additionally, students will be expected to submit regular drafts for peer review and to provide substantial written comments on their peers' work. Finally, I would like everyone to present their work in some capacity. (Given the unique circumstances of this semester, we will discuss several options for this throughout the semester.) Due dates and percentages of the final grade can be found in the table below and details each component of the grade can be found below the table.

Goal-Setting, Accountability Check-ins, and Engagement	15%	
Peer Review Drafts and Comments	25% (5 @ 5% each)	February 12 (pages) February 19 (peer review) February 26 (pages) March 5 (peer review) March 26 (pages) April 2 (peer review) April 9 (pages) April 16 (peer review) April 30 (pages) May 7 (peer review)
Presentation	10%	April 23 or Date TBD
Final Draft	50%	May 14 @ 12:00 noon

Goal-setting, accountability check-ins, and attendance and participation:

Since we only meet once per week and the class is small, your engagement. My hope is that you find each other sources of expertise, support, and camaraderie, so please plan to attend every course meeting. If you are sick, however, use your best judgment so as not to expose the rest of us to germs. As always, but especially this semester, it is important that you sleep, eat well, drink water, go outside, exercise, and do all the other things that keep you healthy!

Peer Review Drafts and Comments:

These are benchmarks to help ensure you are moving forward at a reasonable pace given the total amount of writing you are expected to do throughout the semester. At each draft deadline, you should expect to submit between 10-15 pages of writing. The exact nature of each of those pieces, however, is up to you. (In other words, the pages due on February 12 do not necessarily need to be (and probably should not be) the introduction to your thesis). Peer review comments will make up the bulk of the grade for this portion of the class; we will discuss peer reviewing in-depth during the early part of the course.

Presentation:

As stated earlier, there are a couple options for this component, given the strange circumstances we find ourselves in. One is to present virtually at the Pennsylvania Political Science Association Conference (PPSA). The benefit to this is you would appear on a panel with other undergraduates from across the state who are working on their own independent research projects. This year, the conference will be held on Friday, April 23.

Final Draft:

This is the whole point! Your final draft should be no more than 50 pages (not inclusive of notes, appendices, and bibliography). The very best theses will be forwarded to all political science faculty members to be considered for departmental honors.

If, at any point throughout the semester you want to change your goal from writing an honors-eligible paper to writing a “regular” independent study paper, you may do so with no negative consequences on your overall grade in the class. In other words, it is entirely possible to get an A in the course and NOT write a 50-page paper. The length of an independent study paper is approximately 35 pages.

Academic Integrity

From Dickinson College’s Community Standards... “Respect for ideas – our own and others’ – is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another’s words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work” (https://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2).

We will do quite a bit of collaborative work in this class, especially reading and responding to others’ drafts. That said, your work must be your own. When you use others’ ideas, you must cite them. If something is common knowledge it does not need to be cited, but it is always better to over-cite than to under-cite. Please do not hesitate to ask questions about this at any point throughout the semester.

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations.

To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ADS or email access@dickinson.edu.

If you’ve already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan for disclosing the accommodations for which you are eligible and scheduling a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your accommodations and finalize your Access Plan. If test proctoring will be needed from ADS, remember that we will need to complete your Access Plan in time to give them at least one week’s advance notice.

Outline of the Course

- Week #1 (January 29)
 - Introductions and Discussion of Community Ideals
 - Share Proposals
 - Read Together (“Shitty First Drafts,” Bird by Bird)
 - Discuss Syllabus and Work Plan Document
 - IRB, Other Questions/Issues
 - Goals for next week

- Week #2 (February 5)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Talk about Example Theses
 - Read Together (“Using Sources,” Craft of Research)
 - **Skim 1-2 POSC Honors Theses. Available online from Dickinson Scholar: https://scholar.dickinson.edu/posc_honors/**
 - **Work Plan (first half of semester) Due**

- Week #3 (February 12)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (Strategies for and Examples of Peer Review)
 - Read Together (Selections on the Fifteen Minute Rule)
 - **Pages Due**

- Week #4 (February 19)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (“The IMRD Paper” and “Applying Theories to Cases,” Writing in Political Science)
 - Discuss Peer Review
 - **Peer Review Due**

- Week #5 (February 26)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (“The Idea of the Paragraph,” Writing Analytically)
 - **Pages Due**

- Week #6 (March 5)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Discuss Peer Review
 - Writing Workshop
 - **Peer Review Due**

- Week #7 (March 12)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (“Style is Meaning,” Writing in Political Science)
 - Writing Workshop
 - **Work Plan (second half of semester) Due**

- Spring Break!
- Week #9 (March 26)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Talk about Citations (Excerpts from “Selecting and Citing Sources,” Writing in Political Science)
 - **Pages Due**
- Week #10 (April 2)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Discuss Peer Review
 - Writing Workshop
 - **Peer Review Due**
- Week #11 (April 9)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (“Introductions and Conclusions Across the Curriculum,” Writing Analytically)
 - Read Together (Selections on Presentations)
 - **Pages Due**
- Week #12 (April 16)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Discuss Peer Review
 - Questions about PPSA Conference
 - Writing Workshop
 - **Peer Review Due**
- Week #13 (April 23)
 - PA Political Science Association Virtual Conference
- Week #14 (April 30)
 - Student Evaluations
 - Accountability Check-In
 - **Pages Due**
- Week #15 (May 7)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Discuss Peer Review
 - Last-Minute Questions
 - **Peer Review Due**

Final Drafts Due on Friday, May 14 at 12:00 p.m. via Moodle