

Political Science 490: Senior Thesis

Dickinson College, Spring 2022

Wednesday 12:00-1:30

Denny Hall

Professor Sarah Niebler (she/her/hers)

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Student Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00-11:30, Wednesday 2:00-3:30, 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. 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	20%	
Peer Review Drafts and Comments	20% (4 @ 5% each)	February 9 (pages) February 16 (peer review) February 23 (pages) March 2 (peer review) March 23 (pages) March 30 (peer review) April 6 (pages) April 13 (peer review) April 27 (pages)
Presentation	10%	April 1 or Date TBD
Final Draft	50%	May 11 @ 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 is crucial. 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. We can always move a course meeting onto zoom if folks aren't feeling 100 percent healthy. 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 pages, however, is up to you. (In other words, the pages due in Week #3 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:

Given the strange circumstances we continue to find ourselves in we have a couple options for presentations this semester. One is to present at the Pennsylvania Political Science Association Conference (PPSA). As of now, this conference is slated to take place in person at Kutztown University (about 90 minutes from Carlisle) on Friday, April 1; however, if circumstances dictate, I suspect the conference will move to a virtual setting. The benefit to presenting at PPSA (whether in person or virtual) is you would appear on a panel with other undergraduates from

across the state who are working on their own independent research projects. Another option is for us to host our own colloquium on campus. We will discuss this as a group.

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 26)
 - 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 2)
 - **Skim 1-2 POSC Honors Theses. Available online from Dickinson Scholar:**
https://scholar.dickinson.edu/posc_honors/
 - **Work Plan (first half of semester) Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Talk about Example Theses
 - Read Together (“Using Sources,” Craft of Research)
 - **Sometime this Week = Meet with faculty expert and/or Prof. Niebler (Individual times TBD)**

- Week #3 (February 9)
 - **Pages Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (Strategies for and Examples of Peer Review)
 - Read Together (Selections on the Fifteen Minute Rule)

- Week #4 (February 16)
 - **Peer Review Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (“The IMRD Paper” and “Applying Theories to Cases,” Writing in Political Science)
 - Discuss Peer Review

- Week #5 (February 23)
 - **Pages Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (“The Idea of the Paragraph,” Writing Analytically)
 - **Sometime this Week = Meet with faculty expert and/or Prof. Niebler (Individual times TBD)**

- Week #6 (March 2)
 - **Peer Review Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Discuss Peer Review

- Week #7 (March 9)
 - **Work Plan (second half of semester) Due**
 - Accountability Check-in

- Read Together (“Style is Meaning,” Writing in Political Science)
- Week #8 (March 16) – Spring Break!
- Week #9 (March 23)
 - **Pages Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (Selections on Presentations)
 - Questions about PPSA Conference
- Week #10 (March 30)
 - **Peer Review Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Talk about Citations (Excerpts from “Selecting and Citing Sources,” Writing in Political Science)
 - Discuss Peer Review
 - **PPSA Conference on Friday, April 1**
 - **Sometime this Week = Meet with faculty expert and/or Prof. Niebler (Individual times TBD)**
- Week #11 (April 6)
 - **Pages Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Read Together (“Introductions and Conclusions Across the Curriculum,” Writing Analytically)
- Week #12 (April 13)
 - **Peer Review Due**
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Discuss Peer Review
 - **Sometime this Week = Meet with Prof. Niebler (Individual times TBD)**
- Week #13 (April 20)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Possible Campus Symposium Presentations (TBD by Class)
- Week #14 (April 27)
 - **Pages Due**
 - Student Evaluations
 - Accountability Check-In
- Week #15 (May 4)
 - Accountability Check-in
 - Last-Minute Questions
 - **Sometime this Week = Meet with Prof. Niebler (Individual times TBD)**

Final Drafts Due on Wednesday, May 11 at 12:00 p.m. via Moodle