

2019-2020 Gov 99: Senior Thesis Seminar

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1 Course Goals

Gov 99 is designed to supplement—not replace—the advice and support you will receive from your primary thesis advisor, and it runs from now until the end of the writing process in March 2019. All senior thesis writers are required to successfully complete both semesters of Gov 99 in order to submit a thesis to the Government Department for honors consideration.

The seminar is designed to accomplish four objectives critical to the development of a strong senior thesis:

1. **Guide the convincing development and presentation of a strong research question and research design:** Though your thesis is likely inspired by passion for and questions about a topic or a case study. Excellent research, however, requires that you formulate a question that engages the scholarly community of political scientists and that you present this question and your proposed findings using the conventions of the discipline. Your primary thesis advisor, who is more of the content and convention expert for your specific area of interest, is your main resource for advice on how to develop and present a strong research question and research design and engage with the existing scholarship. Gov 99, however, is designed to offer additional support and supplemental suggestions for implementing the strategies that you develop with your advisor.
2. **Structure the writing process:** Completing a year-long research project is a daunting task that truly starts with a series of small steps. Gov 99 deadlines and course meetings provide a basic structure to ensure that students are progressing through the thesis process at an appropriate pace. There is nothing like a deadline to help you commit to completing research and dedicating time to writing!
3. **Generate opportunities to receive regular and implementable feedback:** Research projects can be lonely endeavors; the small group model of Gov 99 counters this by providing thesis writers with peers that can offer feedback. Feeling stuck and frustrated with research is a normal part of the process; seeking help from peers is one of the most effective ways to keep moving forward. Students will have the opportunity to receive and provide feedback on the other projects in the class.
4. **Provide academic (and emotional) support:** Writing a senior thesis can easily be one of the most challenging *and* rewarding experiences of your undergraduate career. Your Gov 99 cohort can both celebrate your successes and encourage you when you feel totally lost in the thesis process. Completing an assignment of this nature requires substantial perseverance and motivation, and you should use this course as a resource to help you complete your work to the best of your ability.

2 Course requirements

There are 4 core requirements for satisfactorily completing Gov 99.

1. **Attendance:** Participation in and attendance of Gov 99 seminar meetings is a *mandatory* component of writing a thesis. Because we only meet 8 times during the fall semester, missing a single session amounts to a substantial amount of missed class time. Medical and family emergencies will be excused with proper documentation. Any other anticipated absences should be discussed with Sarah well in advance to determine whether or not it will be excused.
2. **Thoughtful engagement:** As with most courses, Gov 99 works best with students prepare thoroughly by completing readings and assignments by our class meeting. In addition to this basic expectation, Gov 99's peer feedback structures provide additional opportunities to demonstrate

intellectual engagement with the course. The quality of feedback that you provide for your peers influences the quality of feedback that you will, in turn, receive. I encourage each of you to take feedback for one another seriously to set a strong culture of engage, support, and constructive criticism.

3. **Course readings:** One of the best ways to improve your writing, or learn a new style, is to read. Several sessions will include reading assignments, either to explain how to structure a particular section of your thesis or to provide an exemplar of political science writing. Completing the readings is mandatory and will contribute to your ability to be thoughtfully engaged.
4. **Assignments:** In addition to the final submission of your thesis, Gov 99 includes 7 additional interim writing deadlines. Assignments #1, 2, 3 and 6 should be submitted **at least 48 hours before the start of your seminar or individual conference.**

3 Grading

Gov 99 is graded SAT/UNSAT for both the fall and spring semesters. Students who complete each of the four core components listed above will have satisfied the expectations for the course. Failure to complete any one of the components, or persistent tardiness or absences will result in an UNSAT. If I anticipate that you are on track for an UNSAT, I will reach out early and often to help you stay on track. Please reach out if you have questions about where you stand regarding your grade. Note that the spring Gov 99 grade does not influence either the grading of your thesis or your honors determination, which is a separate process.

4 Collaboration

The exchange of ideas is essential to your work in Gov 99, where peer-review is an integral component of class. You may therefore find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers both in and out of the classroom, but any work you submit for evaluation must be your own. Absolutely no collaborative research or writing is permitted. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in the discipline.

5 Accommodations for students with disabilities

In compliance with Harvard University's policy and equal access laws, the ADUS (Dr. George Soroka) is available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students needing accommodations because of a documented disability must present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and consult the Department no later than the second week of the fall term. All discussions will be strictly confidential, although AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

6 Course schedule

Readings and peer evaluations should be completed *prior* to the session for which they are assigned.

6.1 Fall 2019

Session 0, September 3: Mandatory Thesis-Writers' Orientation and Reception (run by the Gov Department)

Session 1, September 10: Introductions, qualities of a good research question, and backwards planning

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Articulate the expectations for Gov 99 and identify ways in which Gov 99 can be helpful for your thesis experience.

- Describe the qualities of a strong research question
- Differentiate between a topic and a research question
- Describe and implement backwards planning to structure the senior thesis process

Pre-work:

- Van Evera, S. (1997). *Guide to methods for students of political science*. Cornell University Press., Ch. 3
- Powner, L.C. (2014) *Empirical research and writing: A political science student's practical guide*. CQ Press, Ch.1: From research topic to research question
- Tsai, L. L. (2007). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, 101(2), pg 355 only (you may read more if you like)
- Weaver, V. M. (2007). Frontlash: Race and the development of punitive crime policy. *Studies in American political development*, 21(2), 230-232.
- Hertel-Fernandez, A., Skocpol, T., & Lynch, D. (2016). Business associations, conservative networks, and the ongoing republican war over Medicaid expansion. *Journal of health politics, policy and law*, 41(2), 239-243

****Assignment 1 due 9/15 by 11pm via email to Sarah and your peers****

Session 2, September 17: Finding and organizing sources effectively and efficiently & strategies for making the most of your time with your primary thesis advisor

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Identify an efficient structure to organize sources and notetaking for your literature review
- Develop an effective strategy for naming and storing data and literature files
- Implement effective keyword searches using Google Scholar and Hollis
- Describe ways in which new research can expand on existing findings; ie., how to describe potential contributions
- Describe and implement strategies for making the most of your meetings with your primary thesis advisors

Pre-work:

- “7 Habits for Highly Effective Meetings,” <http://projectmanagementhacks.com/meeting-tips/>
- Bryant, Adam. “How to run a more effective meeting.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/business/how-to-run-an-effective-meeting>

****Assignment 2 due 9/29 by 11pm via email to Sarah and your peers. Final draft due to the Government Undergrad Office by 10/5 at 5pm.****

Session 3, October 1: Developing a literature review & using writing conventions in political science

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Describe the purpose and ideal structure for a literature review
- Describe and implement conventions in political science writing
- Provide and receive peer feedback on your thesis proposal

Pre-work:

- Exemplar theses
- Belcher, W. L. (2009). *Writing your journal article in twelve weeks: A guide to academic publishing success*. Sage, pg 5-10
- Rowley, J., & Slack, F. (2004). Conducting a literature review. *Management research news*, 27(6), 31-39.
- Tsai, L. L. (2007). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, 101(2), 356-357 (*A Model of Informal Governmental Accountability* only)
- Weaver, V. M. (2007). Frontlash: Race and the development of punitive crime policy. *Studies in American political development*, 21(2), 232-236.
- Hertel-Fernandez, A., Skocpol, T., & Lynch, D. (2016). Business associations, conservative networks, and the ongoing republican war over Medicaid expansion. *Journal of health politics, policy and law*, 41(2), 243-244

****Assignment 3 due by 5pm on 10/13 via email to Sarah and your peers****

Session 4, October 15: Operationalizing variables and best practices for data collection and organization

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Develop and implement an efficient and effective strategy for organizing data collection
- Describe the meaning of “operationalizing variables” and, if applicable, develop your plan for operationalizing the variables in your thesis
- Articulate the importance of keeping detailed records of your methods for collecting and analyzing data

Pre-work

- Powner, L.C. (2014) *Empirical research and writing: A political science student’s practical guide*. CQ Press, Ch.6: Quantitative data collection and management, pgs 11-15
- Adcock, R. (2001). Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research. *American political science review*, 95(3), 529-546.
- Tsai, L. L. (2007). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, 101(2), 357-363
- Weaver, V. M. (2007). Frontlash: Race and the development of punitive crime policy. *Studies in American political development*, 21(2), 239-242; 244-247—*Focusing Events: Riots and Crime* section only
- Hertel-Fernandez, A., Skocpol, T., & Lynch, D. (2016). Business associations, conservative networks, and the ongoing republican war over Medicaid expansion. *Journal of health politics, policy and law*, 41(2), 244-250

Session 5, October 29: Peer review first academic engagement chapter & methods overview (TBD based on specific students’ interests and plans for thesis research)

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Provide and receive feedback on the academic engagement chapter
- Identify the various options for collecting data in political science, and describe the pros and cons of each in the context of your thesis project

- Feel equipped to finalize your data collection plan and methods

Pre-work:

- Read and provide feedback for your assigned partner; email feedback to both Sarah and your partner.

Assignment 4 due by 11pm on 11/9 via email to Sarah and your peers

Session 6, November 12: Structure, content, and purpose of empirical/analytical chapters

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Describe effective ways to structure empirical/analytical chapters in political science
- Describe the purpose of the empirical chapter in the context of the broader thesis
- Brainstorm the appropriate structure for your first empirical/analytical chapter

Pre-work:

- Tsai, L. L. (2007). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, 101(2), 363-370
- Weaver, V. M. (2007). Frontlash: Race and the development of punitive crime policy. *Studies in American political development*, 21(2), 242-262.
- Hertel-Fernandez, A., Skocpol, T., & Lynch, D. (2016). Business associations, conservative networks, and the ongoing republican war over Medicaid expansion. *Journal of health politics, policy and law*, 41(2), 250-271 (feel free to skim).
- *Note: I may add an additional short reading or two based on student interests if it feels helpful and appropriate.*

Session 7, November 19: Peer review of first empirical/analytical chapter

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Provide and receive feedback on the first empirical/analytical chapter
- Share any roadblocks to completing Assignment 5 and brainstorm, with the class, possible solutions
- TBD additional objectives based on student needs

Pre-work:

- Read and provide feedback for your assigned partner; email feedback to both Sarah and your partner.

Assignment 5 due to your **primary thesis advisor** by 12/3 at 5pm.

6.2 Spring 2019

Assignment 6 due 2/1 by 11pm to Sarah and peers via email

Session 8, February 4: Reflection on current status; peer review of 2nd empirical/analytical chapter; backwards plan the spring semester

- Compare your accomplishments over winter break to your established goals

- Develop a revised backwards plan for spring semester to ensure the timely completion of a high-quality thesis
- Provide and receive feedback on 2nd empirical/analytical chapter

Session 9, February 11: TBD based on student needs

Session 10, February 25: Depending on student preferences and my evaluation, we may opt for individual conferences instead of a final session.

Assignments 7 (a physical copy of the completed thesis) due 3/11 by 5pm in the Government Undergraduate Office. You must also submit an electronic copy by midnight.

7 Overview of deadlines

September 15th, 11pm

Assignment 1, Preliminary statement of question and research methods: 1-2 paragraphs introducing your proposed research question (and, yes it should end in a question mark!), along with a brief outline of how you intend to gather and analyze data to answer the question. You should also identify how you plan to operationalize the variables in your research question.

September 29th, 11pm

Assignment 2, Draft thesis proposal: This 1500-word proposal should cover the questions listed below:

- What is your research question? You should be able to state it clearly in 1-2 questions, and yes, it should end in a question mark.
- Why is this question significant for political science/theory?
- What kinds of sources or data will help you answer this question? What research methods will you use to analyze these sources or data and why are they appropriate? Be specific about the particular aspects of the sources that make it appropriate for your question.
- What have you accomplished so far in researching your question? How has your thinking on the topic and question developed over time?
- What do you expect to argue (ie., what is your current hypothesis)? Have you developed any new hypotheses that you have yet to test?

While your proposal is due to your Gov 99 peers and instructor by **September 30th at 5pm**, you must submit a **final hard-copy to the Government Department Undergraduate Office by 5pm on October 6th**. You should submit the proposal with the Gov Department Thesis Proposal Cover sheet, available on the Department's website.

October 13th, 11pm

Assignment 3, First draft of the academic engagement chapter: This preliminary chapter may take several forms, though a traditional literature review designed to situate your project in the debates of the discipline is most common. You may also consider, depending on the nature of your project, to draft a discussion of your research design and methodology. You should make the decision regarding what format to follow in conjunction with your primary thesis advisor. This chapter should be 10-15 pages.

November 9th, 11pm

Assignment 4, First draft of a substantive empirical or analytical chapter: This is the first assignment that requires you to go beyond building the foundation for your research and summarizing what others have said about your topic and research question. This chapter should consist of original hypothesis testing or other forms of textual or data analysis. It should demonstrate how you are going about generating results and findings. This chapter should be 15-20 pages, and should be submitted via email to Sarah and your peers.

December 3th, 5pm

Assignment 5, 7500 words (approximately 30 pages) of thesis: This is the final assignment for the semester and is intended to force you to have a substantial foundation for your thesis going into the winter break. This assignment usually takes the form of an expanded version of Assignments 3 & 4, though you should discuss what makes the most sense with your primary advisor. This assignment should be **submitted to your primary thesis advisor**. This assignment will play a substantial role in determining whether you have satisfactorily completed the Fall Gov 99 requirements.

February 1st, 5pm

Assignment 6, Draft of a second empirical or analytical chapter: This should be new original analysis, rather than a reworking of the chapter submitted for Assignment 4. This chapter should also be 15-20 pages.

March 11th, 5pm

Assignment 7, Final thesis: You must submit a physical copy of your completed thesis to the Undergraduate Program Office. Please do not forget you are also required to upload an electronic copy to the Gov 99 website Dropbox by midnight this same day (See *The Guide to Writing a Thesis in Government* for more details).

Template for providing feedback

Assignment receiving feedback:

Name of person providing feedback:

Name of person receiving feedback:

Part 1: Short summary (4 sentences max) of your understanding of the content of the paper/writing.

Part 2: Areas of strength

[Feel free to use bullet points to organize this section.]

Part 3: Areas for improvement

[Feel free to use bullet points to organize this section.]

In order to determine areas of strength and improvement, consider the following questions:

- Is the research question clear and does it end with a question mark? Does it identify a specific IV/DV or mechanism?
- What was convincing about the writing? What was unconvincing?
- Are there particular paragraphs or sentences that are exceptionally clearly written?
- Does the organization support the claim being made? In other words, does the organization of the writing logically build support for their claim?
- Does the evidence provided match the claim the author presents?
- Does the author acknowledge and address counterarguments?
- Are the sources of data appropriate for logically supporting the author's claims?
- Is all of the evidence explicitly and logically analyzed (or connected back to the author's claim)?
- Is the rationale for the research question (or section topic/research/etc.) compelling?

Part 4: Summary of key takeaways

Prioritize the top 1-2 changes you think the author needs to make in order to improve this specific section of their thesis. Feel free to number your bullet this list in order to organize it.