

# Political Science

## Honors Thesis Requirements and Guidelines

### Why Write an Honors Thesis?

An honors thesis allows students to conduct independent research on a topic of interest while under the supervision of a faculty member (faculty mentor). Students gain valuable research tools during the course of study, including development of critical thinking and writing skills, as well as in-depth knowledge about a particular topic. Students also benefit from special attention from a faculty member, which contributes to the quality of student research and which can lead to a publication and detailed reference letters later in a student's career.

### Eligible Students

Junior or senior honors students who are Political Science majors are eligible. Students who do not meet these requirements may submit a petition to the Political Science Director of Undergraduate Studies, who will consult with the Honors College in making a final decision. This petition should include a detailed letter of recommendation from the prospective faculty mentor, who will have the best sense of whether a student has the necessary background to begin work on a thesis project in Political Science.

### Eligible Mentors

Any full-time faculty member in the Political Science department may supervise an honors thesis in Political Science.

### Overview of Honors Thesis Process

There are two models for an honors project in Political Science, as described below. With both models, students must make an original contribution to the field of Political Science. The thesis must be conducted in collaboration with a faculty mentor-and must involve more effort and sophistication than would be expected from a classroom assignment. It is expected that an honors thesis will be a minimum of 20 pages, double-spaced (although the format may vary). Final length and format will be decided in consultation with the faculty mentor.

### **MODEL 1: Independent Research under Guidance from a Faculty Mentor (two semesters)**

Model 1 involves an honors project conducted over two semesters. In the first semester, students enroll in POLS 4870 Honors Thesis I (1-6 credit hours) and complete a literature review of their topic. They have regular meetings with their faculty mentor. Students are often asked to write reading summaries and/or construct an annotated bibliography as they do research. The final output of the research semester may be a detailed outline for the thesis or a preliminary introduction following a review of the literature. Particular assignments and the weight for those assignments for the research semester are determined by the faculty advisor. A student's grade for the research semester typically includes consideration of attendance and participation at meetings with her/his advisor, completion of short assignments (e.g., reading summaries) in which a student demonstrates mastery of the literature, and a more heavily

weighted final assignment (e.g., annotated bibliography and/or a thesis outline) in which the student shows that s/he is ready to begin writing a thesis.

In the second semester, students enroll in POLS 4880 Honors Thesis II (1-6 credit hours) and write their thesis. They continue to meet regularly with their mentor to discuss their progress and go over drafts of their work. Particular assignments and the weight for the assignments for this semester are determined by the faculty mentor. A student's grade during this semester typically includes consideration of attendance and discussion of the thesis during regular meetings, the timely submission of drafts, the student's effective response to feedback on drafts, and an assessment of the quality of the writing and critical thinking skills demonstrated in the final version of the thesis.

The exact number of credit hours for both courses depends on variables such as the student's academic readiness, mentor requirements, schedule and/or financial constraints.

### **MODEL 2: Significant Expansion of Previous Work (one semester)**

This option requires that students have prior coursework on the topic of their project and that students build their thesis from previous research (such as a seminar paper) with a faculty member. In order to qualify for this model, the prospective faculty mentor needs to write a statement explaining that the student has the requisite preparation for this model. Students who qualify for this model enroll in POLS 4880 Honors Thesis II (1-6 credit hours). Students will likely do some additional readings early in the semester to further develop their prior research, but the project should be developed enough that the student can spend the bulk of the semester expanding and developing their research ideas through writing. Particular assignments and the weight for the assignments for this semester are determined by the faculty mentor. A student's grade during this semester typically includes consideration of attendance and discussion of the thesis during regular meetings, the timely submission of drafts, the student's effective response to feedback on drafts, and an assessment of the quality of the writing and critical thinking skills demonstrated in the final version of the thesis. The exact number of credit hours for the depends on variables such as the student's schedule, financial constraints, and/or mentor requirements.

### **The Product**

Completed honors theses will be a written product with a minimum of 20 pages, double-spaced (although the format may vary). Final length and format will be decided in consultation with the faculty mentor.

Most honors theses will result in a journal article-style paper whose approximate length is 20 double-spaced pages, inclusive of references (exact length may vary). The faculty advisor will choose the most appropriate style guide for the work (e.g., APA, Chicago with parenthetical citations, Chicago with footnotes, MLA, etc.)

### Model A: An empirical thesis

In this model, students either collect new data or analyze existing data to address a research question. The written product often comprises an Introduction, Review of Existing Literature, Data & Methods, Results, Discussion, and Reference Section (although the exact format should be determined in consultation with the faculty supervisor).

#### Research Compliance:

Prior to beginning your research, you must get approval from the GSU Institutional Review Board if your thesis uses human subjects in any way (e.g. surveys, questionnaires, experiments). Consult your faculty mentor about this process.

### Model B: A critical literature review

In this model, the student summarizes, synthesizes and critiques the published scholarly literature on a particular topic. The review could include a new interpretation of the findings, a timeline of the progression of knowledge. The overall goal of the critical literature review is not only to demonstrate comprehensive, sophisticated knowledge of the current literature on a particular topic, but also to create a new understanding of previous findings.

### **Evaluation**

The thesis will be evaluated by the faculty mentor. The checklist in Appendix A can be used to evaluate the thesis (to be modified by faculty mentor in line with specific subfield expectations).

### **Undergraduate Research Conference**

All students working on an Honors Thesis are encouraged to share their research with the wider Georgia State University community by participating in the Undergraduate Research Conference, which is held annually in the spring.

### **Proposal and Course Authorization**

Students who intend to pursue an honors thesis must complete the Political Science Honors Thesis Proposal Form, which is available from the Director of Undergraduate Studies, and submit it with their advisor's signature together with a narrative thesis proposal. Once students have been approved, and before they enroll in honors coursework, they must notify the Honors College of their intent to conduct an honors thesis by completing the online Intent to Conduct a Thesis Form, which requires that students 1) identify the faculty member who has agreed to supervise their project; 2) write a 200-word summary of their project; and 3) provide a tentative title for their project. This form is due 1 **April** for summer registration, 1 **August** for fall registration, and 1 **December** for spring registration.

### **Deadlines**

The faculty mentor will impose deadlines along the way for components of the project and drafts of the thesis. Unless otherwise specified by the faculty mentor, the student will turn in a complete draft of the honors thesis to their faculty mentor no later than three weeks prior to

the last day of classes. The faculty member will evaluate the thesis using the rubric found in Appendix A as a general guideline. The student will then revise the thesis based on feedback from their faculty mentor, if required, no later than **the last day of final exams during the semester in which the thesis is completed**. Students must also notify the Honors College that they have successfully completed their honors thesis by completing the Certification of Successful Completion Form. This form is due by **the last day of final exams during the semester in which the thesis is completed**.

### **Required attendance at Honors Thesis Sessions**

Students are required to attend three 2-hr sessions led by the Honors College Thesis Team each semester that they are working on their honors thesis. The three sessions are held at the beginning, middle and end of the semester. The last session is the Thesis Pitch, which is an oral competition event where students have 3 minutes to communicate the importance of their research. Presenting at the Thesis Pitch is voluntary, but attendance is required.

### **Honors College Support**

Honors College students writing an Honors Thesis are eligible to borrow a laptop computer from the Honors College for the semester, contingent on availability. These students may also apply for financial support to present at conferences and/or purchase supplies for their research. In addition to the three required sessions, there are several workshops held in the Honors College each semester to provide support to Honors College students engaged in research and thesis activities. The Faculty Associate for Research and Theses and the Research Program Coordinator are available to advise students and their mentors.

### **Questions**

For questions, contact the Political Science Director of Undergraduate Studies, the Honors College Research Program Coordinator or the Office of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships Director.

*This page was last edited on 10/14/2020*

This policy was approved by the Political Science Undergraduate Committee, October 27, 2018. This policy was approved by the Political Science Faculty on November 12, 2018.

**Appendix A. Political Science Honors Thesis Rubric** (to be modified by faculty mentor in line with specific subfield expectations)

Please provide a rating of 1 = excellent, 2 = satisfactory and 3 = unsatisfactory for the following:

Skill	Rating	Comment
Stated a clear, novel, and specific research question (or hypothesis or topic overview)		
Used appropriate methods to answer research question/hypothesis		
Demonstrated an understanding of relevant literature, terminology, and theory		
Demonstrated understanding of the scientific method or scholarly inquiry		
Critiqued and analyzed relevant studies and presented an integrated synthesis		
Analyzed information or data collected using appropriate research methods		
Drew appropriate conclusions supported by evidence		
Demonstrated understanding of results and their interpretation		
Communicated effectively in written form		
The writing was consistent with the chosen style and free of typographical and grammatical errors		

Overall grade: \_\_\_\_\_

General Feedback: