Course Description

This is the first part of a required year-long course for all third-year doctoral students in political science. Before taking this course, students should have already taken POS 516 and either POS 517 or POS 618, as the knowledge they gained from these courses will play an important role in this class. This year-long course is designed to help advanced graduate students formulate and execute a major research project that could potentially be developed into a future dissertation or a journal article. Students are encouraged to use this opportunity to produce a working draft of a dissertation proposal by the end of the year. During the fall semester, the course will begin with a review of fundamental issues of conducting social scientific research, and then proceed to discuss what constitutes a good dissertation; what the essential elements of a dissertation prospectus are; how to situate a research project within the existing literature and debates; how to craft specific, relevant, and doable research questions; and how to design a viable research plan to adequately answer these questions. Students will also participate in, and benefit from, peer review processes as they develop the skills of providing informed feedback to, and accepting constructive criticisms from, their colleagues. By the end of the fall semester, students should be able to produce a solid draft that they can build on, expand, and improve upon in the spring semester.

Course Requirements

The seminar relies heavily on students’ participation. Students must complete the assigned readings prior to the seminar meetings. Starting from the beginning of the semester, each student is required to pick and work closely with a faculty mentor, ideally his/her future dissertation advisor, throughout the year. Each student is expected to complete a series of writing assignments, make presentations based on these assignments, and provide feedbacks to their colleagues. These assignments and presentations will culminate in an end-of-semester 15-20 page draft research proposal and in-class presentation on December 6, 2017. Grades will be assessed as follows:

- Class participation 20%
- Preliminary writing assignments and presentations 20%
- Peer-review feedbacks 20%
- Final draft research paper and presentation 40%
Readings

There are no required books for this course. All the required readings are available on Blackboard. Those marked with “available on-line” can be retrieved by clicking on “E-Journals” from the Libraries web page and typing in the title of the journal in the search box.

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August 30: Introduction

- Course syllabus
- **1st Assignment:** A 3-5 page, double-spaced first-draft description of your proposed research project that covers your research question(s) and how this project fits within the existing literature.

September 6: Designing Political Research

- **1st assignment due; presentations on the 1st assignment**
- **2nd assignment:** Peer review of the 1st assignment: is the research question clearly stated? Does the author explain how it fits within the existing literature? Provide some suggestions regarding how the project can move forward.

September 13: Junior Faculty Panel: Designing and Starting Dissertation Research

- Professor Chris Clary’s prospectus
- Professor Tim Weaver’s prospectus
- **2nd assignment due**
- **3rd assignment:** A meeting with your mentor/advisor to discuss your research project

**September 20: Literature Review I**

- **Report on mentor meetings**
- **4th assignment:** A preliminary annotated bibliography containing at least 10 academic articles and books from reputable publishers related to your research project, including brief explanations or notes for each reference. Starting to read all these works.

**October 4: Literature Review II**

- **4th assignment due; presentation on the 4th assignment:** did the literature that you find change or shape your project in any way?
- **5th assignment:** Draft your literature review.

**October 18: Current ABDs Panel: Conducting research**

- Andy Vitek’s prospectus
- Kat Slye’s prospectus
- **5th assignment due**
- **6th assignment:** Peer review of the 5th assignment: is the literature review representative of the major debate on the given topic? Does the author make it clear what he/she can contribute to this literature?

**October 25: Define and Operationalize Analytic Constructs I**

- **6th assignment due**
- **7th assignment:** Identify your key concepts and “variables,” if any, and how you “measure” these elements (not necessarily quantitatively; just how do you know there is more/less of the stuff you find important to understanding an outcome)
November 8: Define and Operationalize Analytic Constructs II

- 7th assignment due
- 8th assignment: Peer review of the 7th assignment: does the author define all key concepts clearly? Are the measurements convincing?

November 15: Putting Everything Together

- 8th assignment due
- Final assignment: Entire first draft of your research proposal (15-20 double-space pages) that includes your research question(s); literature review; your proposed argument, with all its key elements clearly defined and operationalized; and a tentative plan on data gathering.

November 29: Final Consultations

- Individual consultation sessions with the instructor

December 6: Final Presentations

- Final assignment due
- Final presentations