

**WASHINGTON COLLEGE**  
CHESTERTOWN, MARYLAND 21620

February 1, 2008

**TO:** Junior Political Science Majors  
**FROM:** Melissa Deckman, Department Chair  
**SUBJECT:** Senior Obligation

---

The presentation of an in-depth, substantial research paper during the senior year is the special graduation requirement for all political science majors. This memorandum discusses the purpose of the senior obligation and provides an explanation of the methods and deadlines for fulfilling it.

In the academic setting, the writing process represents a crucial learning tool as well as a means of communication. In other words, there is a direct correlation between clear thinking and good writing. One important purpose of a student-initiated, long-term research project, which will be initiated in the junior year and completed in the senior year, is to provide all political science majors with resources for strengthening their academic growth by developing the ability to use writing as a way of discovering and developing their ideas and communicating those ideas effectively to others. In our complex society this developing process of intellectual maturity is vitally necessary for communication.

A senior research project, as required by the Department of Political Science for all its majors, is one wherein students either pursue topics covered in class lectures and assigned readings or explore topics beyond their regular coursework. Unlike essentially passive approaches to learning such as reading or listening to lectures, the senior thesis actively involves the student in a long-term, substantial project of research and writing. Using reading, writing, research and discussion (with the faculty supervisor and others) interchangeably and regularly, students gain the necessary skills to develop reading and writing fluency, as well as analytical rigor. The department's senior obligation is, in short, designed to contribute invaluablely to student learning.

The department's senior obligation encourages all political science majors to design independently their own individual projects and to pursue them under the supervision of an individual faculty member. Consequently, selection of the subject matter for inquiry falls entirely upon students, who will appreciate the delegation of responsibility, freedom and creativity, the direct contact with faculty outside class, immersion in topics of their interest and selection, and the unique opportunity that research provides.

To help assure successful completion of the department's senior obligation requirement, you are urged to heed the following procedures and to meet specific deadlines as you move toward the completion of your senior thesis.

1. **Junior Second Semester.** Majors normally take POL 493, Empirical Political Research, during the second semester of the junior year. This course introduces you to contemporary techniques and methodology in political science. The course includes a discussion of the use of theory building, hypothesis testing, survey research, statistics, and computers in empirical political inquiry. The course will attempt to address the particular research interests of the students enrolled. The course is not intended solely to teach the craft of research in preparation for work on the senior obligation, but generation of a thesis topic for each student is a major purpose of the course. Whether you wish to pursue a topic requiring the use of behavioral techniques of empirical research, or a topic employing more traditional methods of analysis, you are expected to submit a carefully prepared thesis proposal as part of the work of this course. Your specific topic should be formulated in consultation with a member of the department who, whenever possible, will then be assigned as your thesis supervisor. (In this connection, a course term paper may be developed and expanded into a senior research paper.)

Senior research projects must embody three aspects: the descriptive, the analytical, and the evaluative. The application of the quantitative approach to political analysis, using statistics and computer science, is encouraged but not required.

Students whose particular circumstances, such as transfer status or study abroad, require them to take this course either earlier or later than normal should consult with the chair of the department concerning the development of their senior thesis projects.

2. **By April 4, 2008.** You are required to submit to the department chair the thesis proposal you have developed in POL 493, using the format given to you. **The department expects that the thesis proposal you submit will be the one you actually pursue. Students will not be given permission to change their topics except for the most compelling reasons.** You are also asked to indicate your first and second choice of professors within the department to serve as your thesis supervisor. The department will honor this request whenever possible, but it must also take into consideration the expertise of department members and the need to achieve a fair distribution of the workload.

3. **By April 28, 2008.** You will be assigned a thesis supervisor and informed if the department has any concerns about your proposal. Please confer with your prospective thesis adviser at least once before the end of the Spring term in order to finalize any research plans for the summer.
4. **By September 8, 2008.** Submit to your supervisor a **detailed outline** of your senior thesis (**proposed chapters and subdivisions thereof, in outline format**), accompanied by an **updated bibliography** of sources you have determined to be useful and available. It is expected that this document will reflect significant progress beyond the proposal submitted in April.
5. **September 8, 2008—December 1, 2008.** During this time you are expected to confer with your thesis supervisor to discuss progress on your research. **You should arrange for periodic, regularly scheduled meetings with your thesis advisor.**

6. **December 1, 2008.** You will submit to your supervisor a **draft of one chapter (or evidence of systematic data collection, entry, and statistical analysis)** of your thesis, which need not necessarily be the first chapter. The chapter should be word-processed (or typed), double-spaced, and should **include footnotes (or parenthetical references) and bibliography.** Any student who fails to provide some evidence of written progress by this date will be reported to the department chair for appropriate action.
7. **January 30, 2009.** By this date you must submit to your supervisor a **draft of a second chapter** of your thesis, **including footnotes (or parenthetical references) and bibliography.**
8. **By March 6, 2009.** By this date you must have submitted to your supervisor the **complete rough draft of your senior thesis, including footnotes (or parenthetical references) and bibliography,** word-processed (or typed), double-spaced. **IF YOU FAIL TO TURN IN A ROUGH DRAFT BY MARCH 6, 2009, THE DEPARTMENT WILL ASSUME THAT YOU DO NOT INTEND TO GRADUATE WITH YOUR CLASS IN MAY. Students who give no clear evidence of serious progress will reported to the department chair who, in turn, will advise the Academic Dean of the College to take appropriate action.**
9. **By April 30, 2009, THE LAST DAY OF CLASSES,** you must deliver to your adviser one copy of your thesis, which will not be returned. **This is the ABSOLUTE DEADLINE by which to submit the final draft of your thesis.** The department insists that everyone who hopes to graduate in May abide strictly by this College-wide deadline.

THE REQUIRED MINIMUM LENGTH OF THE THESIS IS 50 PAGES OF ACTUAL TEXT, EXCLUSIVE OF ENDNOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, AND OTHER APPENDED MATERIAL. The final draft is to be printed or typed on white paper in high quality print, double-spaced, properly documented, and prepared in accordance with the practices described in a style manual acceptable to your advisor. It must contain a title page, which includes the full statement of the Washington College Honor Pledge and your signature. There should also be a Table of Contents, a Bibliography or list of Works Cited and other elements if needed, e.g., List of Figures, Table of Cases.

10. **Examination week.** During this period your adviser will evaluate your thesis and make the determination of its acceptability. Papers are judged as either "acceptable" or "not yet acceptable." Papers which are acceptable will receive a grade of Pass. Any student who does not complete the senior obligation--either because a completed paper was judged unacceptable or because a paper was simply not completed in time--will not be allowed to graduate at the May commencement. **THERE WILL BE NO EXCEPTION TO THIS RULE.**

**The department can take no responsibility for the acceptability of papers prepared without regular use of the adviser's counseling and without adherence to the deadlines listed above.** We have learned from many years of experience with the senior thesis that students who fail to meet regularly with their advisers and who delay their work, attempting later to hurry through the various stages in the final weeks of the semester, will simply not complete an acceptable thesis in

time to graduate with their class. If you have any questions about this, please see your thesis adviser or the department chair.

Students are reminded that plagiarism in any form will be severely punished. Any evidence of willful plagiarism will be grounds for failure.

First-semester seniors who hope to complete their work in December, 2007, and any senior who will not be in residence during either semester of the senior year, should see the department chair.

### **Honors Thesis**

**Students who wish to attempt an honors thesis**, as an alternative to the regular senior paper, must make their intention known to their adviser no later than **February 2, 2009**. The department expects that an honors thesis will involve the use of primary sources and reflect an element of originality in analysis, interpretation, or evaluation. The adviser must approve the project and agree to supervise the honors thesis. Since all faculty members of the department must read the thesis before the examination period begins, the department has established an earlier deadline for the submission of the final draft, namely, **April 15, 2009**. Papers submitted after this deadline will be treated as ordinary papers. A student who has decided to attempt an honors thesis may change his or her mind at any time and switch to the preparation of a regular senior thesis. **No one, however, will be permitted to select the honors option after February 2, 2009**. Students who are candidates for honors on the thesis will take an oral examination on their project, administered by the department, normally on the day after the last day of classes. All members of the department will participate in the determination of whether or not a thesis is worthy of honors. Those students who are successful will receive a grade of Pass with Honors. Students who do not earn honors will receive a grade of Pass. **Students who wish to graduate with Honors in Political Science must earn Honors on the senior thesis, as well as achieving a GPA of 3.5 in all political science courses.** Students who do not achieve that GPA can still receive a grade of Pass with Honors on the thesis.

If a student wishes to pursue a double major, he or she should coordinate with the chairs of Political Science and the other department involved. If the obligation in the other department is also a thesis, and that department agrees, the student may pursue a joint project which results in either one thesis acceptable to both departments or two overlapping versions of the thesis, tailored for the respective departments. If the obligation in the other department is something other than a thesis, then the student will have to complete two separate capstone experiences.