

ONE: WALK BEFORE YOU RUN

Senior thesis is an extremely rewarding, yet challenging process. This is one half of the political science capstone program. The capstone (consisting of both thesis and internship) is designed to assess the skills and abilities you have learned as a political science major. It is an independent study project, undertaken during one's last year at Cal Poly Pomona. The thesis project requires a student to devise their own research question and argument, use the library to investigate the theories and past research relevant to the student's project, and collect original evidence in the hopes of testing the argument. The thesis is a project that is completed within just under eight months. The department requires that students submit a thesis that is 30 to 40 pages double-spaced and for students to orally present their work in our department-wide 'Senior Conference'.

Before we set out on the journey of researching and writing a thesis, let's talk basics. As the capstone is designed to assess the skills you have learned in the political science major, it is crucial to talk about what we do here in the department.

Political Science, Research, and Subfields

Political science is our major. However, it is also the academic department. While students take courses in the major, the department is staffed with professors: academics and researchers who have earned doctorates (PhDs) in political science. Formally defined, **political science** is the academic study of politics. The main objective of each of your courses is to inform you about the academic research in that particular area. **Academic departments** are responsible for teaching you about political science research, but they also have a hand in contributing to that research.

Research is the systematic investigation of various phenomena in the world. As we are concerned with the study of politics, we are generally interested in the systematic investigation of conflict and decision-making surrounding government. Scholars around the globe have dedicated their careers to studying politics but also publishing that work. Your professors are real-life examples of these scholars! Each professor in the department has published their research in peer-reviewed publications, usually in the form of journal articles and books. Although we all study very different things, we typically follow the same approach to research (guided by the scientific method!).

Since politics does touch on such a wide variety of issues, we have identified fields of study that we call **subfields**. Most professors have chosen to specialize in a subfield early on in their careers, usually when they first began studying for their PhD. We often encourage students to specialize or take courses in subfields that they prefer, but undergraduates are expected to be generalists in the major, taking courses in all of the subfields. Each political science department has a different combination of subfields, based on the composition of their respective faculty. Here at Cal Poly Pomona, we have six subfields of political science:

- **American Politics.** The analysis of government and politics in the United States, we offer a number of different courses in American Politics (2010) including Congress, Presidency, the American Judiciary, the Electoral Process, Women and Politics in America, Race and Ethnic Politics, American Institutions and Behavior, and California Government. Faculty experts in American Politics include Profs. Chaturvedi and Guerrero.
- **Public Administration.** Focusing on the relationship amongst public agencies, private and public sector, we offer a number of different courses in Public Administration (2060) including Politics of Public Policy, Public Organization, and Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation. Faculty experts in Public Administration include Profs. Collins, Emerson, Reese, and Speak.
- **Public Law.** The study of legal institutions, actors, practices, and the norms of the judicial system, we offer a number of different courses in Public Law (2070) including the Criminal Justice System, Constitutional Law, Jurisprudence, and Contemporary Issues in Public Law. Faculty experts in Public Law include Profs. Hargis, Reese, and Speak.
- **Political Theory.** Focusing on normative questions regarding philosophy, science, and ethics, we offer theory courses (2040) in Ancient and Medieval Political Thought, Modern Political Thought, and Contemporary Political Thought. Faculty experts in Political Theory include Profs. Hargis and Speak.
- **Comparative Politics.** The systematic investigation and comparison of different political systems, we offer a number of comparative courses (2020) in African Government & Politics, European Government & Politics, Latin American Government & Politics, and Middle Eastern Government & Politics. The faculty expert in Comparative Politics is Prof. Nyenhuis.
- **International Relations.** Focusing on the relationship amongst and between states, International Relations (2030) covers such courses as International Conflict and Law, Terrorism, International Political Economy, Ethnic Conflict, Transnational Crime, Foreign Relations of the US, and International Law. The faculty expert in International Relations is Prof. Scarcelli.

What is Independent Study?

As stated previously, senior thesis is an independent study project. In the catalog, PLS 4610 and 4620 carry a designation in the course catalog as an independent study course. This means the capstone is not run like any other course you have taken before, although you enroll in thesis just like any other class.

An independent study course is arranged, planned, and managed by a supervising professor in conjunction with goals that are proposed by the student, then refined and approved by the supervising professor. Independent study does *not* mean “not involving a teacher” but more accurately refers to “independent of regular class meetings” and “independent of other students”. Although we are scheduled like any other class, we meet infrequently throughout the year and

class meetings are only provide general guidelines. Independent study means you are responsible for your own work and cannot get by only showing up for class meetings.

Working with your Advisor

While thesis requires self-discipline and goal-setting, this is an incredible opportunity to work one-on-one with your professor. As you have enrolled in my thesis section, I will be your main advisor throughout the entire process. I will supervise, help refine, approve, and grade your work. Less formally, I hope this means that I will get to have conversations about your scholarly interests and background. Usually, my thesis students have already enrolled in one of my courses. If that's the case, good to see you again! If not, nice to meet you! Hopefully you have selected my section because you're interested in writing a thesis in American Politics or Public Administration. My expertise is political behavior, political communication, and elections. Although I have advised senior thesis projects in all of the six subfields, if you are planning to write a thesis outside of American Politics or Public Administration, you should switch sections.

As an advisor, I envision myself as a mentor. I am here to help you through thesis, but I am here to help you finish your senior year. Thesis is an incredibly daunting task, but it is my job to ease you through the process itself but also to challenge you when the occasion arises. I make every effort to be accessible to my students. Office hours are mandatory in fall semester and you should utilize that one-on-one time as an invaluable resource to advancing your ideas. However, feel free to email me to schedule appointments outside of regular office hours. I am always available for questions via email or instant message. If you have any question, no matter how small, please do not hesitate to ask. I am here to help!

In addition to teaching and service responsibilities, please remember I advise around 20 other student projects. Please be courteous, respectful, and conscientious not only of my time, but also your classmates' time. When coming to office hours, be purposeful and have a list of questions ready to go.

Structure and Format of the Thesis

Thesis is a 30-to-40-page paper. In all likelihood, this will be the longest, most thoroughly researched paper you will write in your undergraduate career. Since this is the longest paper that most students will ever write, we do guide students with a format. This format should be thought of as sections of the final thesis paper. But remember, ultimately, this format is merely a suggestion. Students should format their project however they think is appropriate for their research.

Our suggested format is based on **scientific inquiry** or the **scientific method**. The scientific method is how researchers provide answers testable implications about the world. All academic disciplines follow variations of the scientific method, thus most academic papers follow a similar format.

Again, the structure of thesis is completely up to the individual student. You can tailor and design the thesis however you would like, dependent on what you believe is the clearest and most appropriate structure based on your topic. Organization is paramount, however. Thus, in our department, we generally advise students to take on a format similar to this table below:

#	Component	Suggested Length
Pre	<i>Title Page</i>	<i>1 page; does not count toward page total</i>
	<i>Abstract</i>	<i>100 to 250 words; does not count toward page total</i>
1	Introduction Research Question Argument	3-5 pages
2	Literature Review	8-10 pages
3	Methodology	4-5 pages
4	Results	12-15 pages
5	Conclusion	3-5 pages
Post	<i>References</i>	<i>20 sources minimum; does not count toward page total</i>
	<i>Appendices</i>	<i>Optional, as needed</i>

It is beneficial to think of these components as sections of the paper, each with their own subheading to help orient the reader. Again, you are welcome to deviate from this structure however you see fit. We work toward honing in on your ideas in class, completing the paper in sections that match what you see in the above structure.

For example, in the first four weeks of fall semester, we work to complete the Introduction, Research Question, and Argument. This is also covered in Chapter 2 of this guide. Eventually, you should have an introduction to your thesis (spanning 3-5 pages) that covers both the research question and argument. The literature review, where you are expected to investigate how other scholars have viewed your topic, is covered in Chapter 3 of this guide. The methodology section is one of the hardest sections to write as our students have little experience in designing their own research projects. The research methodology process is extensively covered in Chapters 4 and 5 of this manual. The final section contains the results of the original research you have conducted for your project, which looks remarkably different in each respective thesis project.

The pre- and post-matter of the thesis include the title page, abstract, references, and appendices. These pages do not count toward your overall 30-to-40 page count. However, the title page, abstract, and references are required for your paper. In spring semester, you will be provided with more directions regarding how to format your title and abstract pages. The construction and formatting of your references (works cited) are both covered in Chapter 3 where the literature review is discussed. The last component, appendices, is a convention that has been adopted by most academic journals and publications. Most academic manuscripts place their tables, figures, and graphs at the end of the paper in a section titled “Appendix”. *You should not place tables, figures, and graphs within the body of your paper’s text.* In the body of the paper, where you

want to include the appropriate table, figure, or graph, you would make sure to direct the reader to the appendix by having a placeholder like so:

(Insert Table X.X about here)

This practice also forces students to write a comparable amount of pages for senior thesis as some students have a significant amount of tables, figures, and graphs. As such, students should also be judicious in choosing which tables and graphs to incorporate into the thesis. If you present any tables or figures, you need to walk the reader through each part of the data presentation by describing the key findings of that table or figure. It is also important to emphasize that you do not need to include every single data point possible, you should be selective in regard to what best evidence proves your argument.

Finally, students should be careful about the actual formatting of the tables and figures. Tables and figures need to be **professionally presentable**. For those presenting quantitative data, you should not present your findings in the form of SPSS output. This is messy and unprofessional. All students should work toward presenting tables and figures by carefully working with the design features of their word processing programs.

Our Timeline

Senior thesis is a two-semester sequence during your senior year. We meet rather infrequently, but our progress in the course matches various portions of the paper. The following is a rundown of the activities we undertake in the two semesters:

Enroll in senior thesis	Spring and Summer
Choose a topic (Statement of Interest)	Fall, Week 2
Develop a Research Question	Fall, Week 3
Develop Argument	Fall, Week 4
Thesis Proposal	Fall, Week 6
Finalize Annotated Bibliography	Fall, Week 9
Complete Literature Review Draft	Fall, Week 10
Finalize Research Methodology	Fall, Week 14
Finalize Literature Review	Fall, Finals Week
Collect evidence and complete analysis	Spring Semester
Cal Poly Pomona Student Research Conference	Spring, Week 6
Complete Thesis Draft	Spring, Week 10
Senior Conference	Spring, Week 10, Friday
Submit Thesis	Spring, Week 13