

University of Washington
Department of Political Science
Honors Thesis Design (POLS 488) Autumn 2020
TTh 12:30-2:20pm, Synchronous Remote
Professor Susan Whiting
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Office hours: remote, by appointment

Course Description

This course provides you with the building blocks to construct a successful honors thesis. The topics and assigned readings provide guidelines and examples for each element of your project. *In parallel with each topic*, you will be reading and researching your own sources that apply to your thesis project. By the end of Autumn Quarter, you will, step by step, have produced a complete research design and will have begun the research and writing process for your thesis. During Winter Quarter, you will complete and defend your honors thesis.

Our class will meet synchronously. Building a community to support your research and writing is important. Your honors cohort, this class, and the faculty and students of this department are all part of your research and writing community.

Research and writing is a daily practice. Attaining excellence in research is no different than attaining excellence in piano, ballet, or soccer. Practice every day. In addition to assigned readings, plan to dedicate at minimum 30 minutes to an hour each day, at least five days a week, to your thesis project. Some days will include many hours of intensive work, but that is no substitute for your daily practice.

Course Requirements

Weekly thesis assignments (40%)

You will complete weekly thesis assignments every week for the first eight weeks of the quarter; assignments are to be submitted via Canvas the night before Thursday's class. (5% each)

Workshop presentations (30%)

You will present your assignment for a class workshop once during the quarter as noted in the Course Schedule (10%), comment on presentations throughout the quarter (5%) and will present your full research design to the class at the end of the quarter (15%).

Complete research design (30%)

You will submit a complete written research design via Canvas on Thursday, December 3rd.

I will send the grade you receive in this course to your thesis adviser to be incorporated into your final, two-quarter thesis grade. Your grade for Autumn Quarter will initially appear as an 'N.' At the end of Winter Quarter, it will be updated with your final thesis grade.

Deadline extensions are permitted in emergencies or extenuating circumstances with permission of the professor. Also, make sure you are familiar with the norms of academic honesty.

(http://www.polisci.washington.edu/Dept_and_Univ_Policies.pdf)

Course Materials

We will read one outstanding research monograph in the field of political science that exemplifies strong research design and methodology, several honors theses from past cohorts, and short selections from texts on research design and methodology.

All materials are available through Canvas or full-text online via UW Libraries E-Journals and E-books. The book, Perna Singh's *How Solidarity Works for Welfare: Subnationalism and Social Development in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) is also available for purchase at the UW Bookstore and through other online vendors.

Additional Course Information

The Department of Political Science recognizes and affirms the University of Washington’s mission to “value and honor diverse experiences and perspectives, strive to create welcoming and respectful learning environments, and promote access, opportunity and justice for all.” We expect every member of this community to contribute toward cultivating an inclusive and respectful culture throughout our classrooms, work environments, and campus events.

If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disability Resources for Students, 011 Mary Gates Hall (<http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs>). If you have a letter from DRS indicating you have a disability that requires academic accommodations, please present the letter to me so that we can discuss the accommodations you may need for class.

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW’s policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at [Religious Accommodations Policy \(https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/\)](https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form \(https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/\)](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/).”

Course Schedule

The following course schedule indicates the topic, required readings, and assignments for each class.

WEEK ONE

1. Thursday, October 1, 2020

Thesis Writing

Honors Guide, 2020-21. Canvas.

Perna Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare: Subnationalism and Social Development in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Acknowledgements, **pp. xv-xix**. UW Library E-book.

Singh’s book won best book awards in both political science and sociology and is exemplary in its application of research design and methods. We’ll read it throughout the quarter as a model of each step in the research and writing process. Learning about an important new argument to explain health and education outcomes in one of the largest countries in the world is just a bonus. After reading the acknowledgements, consider and be prepared to discuss the following question: What roles did Singh’s advisers, other professors, and fellow students play? Keep in mind that this cohort, this class, and this department are your communities. Since we’re all working remotely, you will have to be even more intentional than usual about building and maintaining your research and writing community.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: Name the first faculty member you will approach to discuss your research. Make an appointment, and report the date and time on Canvas. This is the first step to finding a thesis adviser. In preparation for next week, begin your literature review, using Academic Search Complete.

WEEK TWO**2. Tuesday, October 6, 2020****Topic and Question**

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapter 1, **pp. 1-26**.

Singh's intro chapter is an excellent overview of the same tasks you'll undertake on a smaller scale in your research design and honors thesis. It's a great outline of what we'll be doing this quarter. Pay careful attention to what Singh does in this chapter. She 1) explains why her topic is important, 2) locates her argument in the literature, 3) introduces the motivating puzzle, 4) clearly states the outcome of interest (dependent variable), 5) articulates her hypothesis, including causal relationships and causal mechanisms, 6) identifies alternative hypotheses, 7) explains her case selection, data, concepts, and measures, and 8) explains how she generated and tests her hypothesis. Note that she includes a clear roadmap to the rest of the book.

Dimitar Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016), "Normative vs. Positive," **pp. 24-28**; and "Choosing a Topic," **pp. 44-54**. Canvas.

The first excerpt from Toshkov provides a starting point for considering the differences between normative and positive approaches to political science. Political theory theses deal more with philosophical arguments for and against particular normative propositions than with empirical or causal claims. The second excerpt has some useful advice for identifying a topic and honing it to a researchable question or puzzle.

3. Thursday, October 8, 2020**Workshop: Topic and Question**

Kathryn Karcher, "Welfare Policies in the United States Reinforce Sexism, Racism, and Classism," Honors thesis #1 used by permission. Canvas.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: Submit a one-paragraph statement of your *topic*. Make a clear statement of the *outcome* of interest (*dependent variable*) that you seek to explain or address. Include a short preliminary bibliography of 1-3 (at least one but no more than three) scholarly sources that you have already found to be relevant and useful.

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS 1. Siobhan 2. Madeline

WEEK THREE**4. Tuesday, October 13, 2020****Hypotheses: Causal Relationships and Causal Mechanisms**

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapter 2, **pp. 31-46**.

Causal relationships are often portrayed as $X \rightarrow$ (causes) Y. Causal *mechanisms* tell a *story* about how that relationship works. In this section of Chapter 2, read carefully for how Singh does both. Note her use of causal diagrams. What does she mean by scope conditions?

5. Thursday, October 15, 2020**Workshop**

Dimitar Toshkov, "Research Design," in David Marsh, Gerry Stoker, and Vivian Lowndes, eds. *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), **pp. 219-236**. Canvas.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: Identify the key causal factor(s) of interest (independent variable) that explain(s) your outcome of interest. Cite at least one relevant and useful scholarly source.

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS 3. Kiran 4. Robin

WEEK FOUR

6. Tuesday, October 20, 2020**Alternative Explanations**

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapter 2, “Alternative Explanations,” pp. 46-60 and Chapter 6, “Alternative Explanations,” pp. 227-231. Singh does a really nice job of laying out the possible alternative arguments and testing them with evidence she gathered while researching her own preferred hypothesis. Does she argue that the alternatives are all wrong? What does she argue?

7. Thursday, October 22, 2020

Morgan Galloway, “Blackhawks and Human Rights: The Impact and Consequences of Short-term Incentives in Militarizing ‘Plan Colombia,’” Honor thesis #2, used by permission. Canvas.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: Identify at least one alternative argument to your own. Cite the relevant literature. How will you address the claims of the alternative argument?

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS 5. Ly 6. Abdul.

WEEK FIVE**8. Tuesday, October 27, 2020****Concepts and Measures**

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapter 2, pp. 27-31; Chapter 6, “ pp. 197-207.

In Chapter 2, Singh discusses subnationalism as a theoretical concept. In Chapter 6, she shows how she operationalizes and measures the concept quantitatively. How close do her measures get to the theoretical concept?

Louise H. Kidder, et al., *Research Methods in Social Relations* (New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1986), “Measurement: From Abstract Concepts to Concrete Representations,” pp. 40-41. Canvas.

9. Thursday, October 29, 2020

Deniz Irgi, “Re-Imagining the ‘American’ Nation: A Post-Racial Struggle to ‘Race’ Undocumented Students,” Honor thesis #3, used by permission. Canvas.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: Select a core concept (it could be the key IV or the DV). Articulate in theoretical terms what this concept is. Cite the relevant literature. Specify how you will move from concept to variable to indicator.

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS 7. Noah 8. Faith

WEEK SIX**10. Tuesday, November 3, 2020****Case Selection and Case Studies**

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapters 4, pp. 112-147. Review Chapter 2 “Case Selection”

As Singh notes, she “inductively build[s] a theory of the way in which subnationalism influences social development through a comparative historical analysis of the cases of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, along with a briefer study of Bihar.” She uses comparisons (across space and over time) as well as process tracing (looking at key events and decisions) to develop her argument.

Matt Ryan, “The Comparative Method,” in Marsh, et al., eds., *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, “Mill’s Methods,” pp. 274-279. Canvas. Pay attention to how variation provides analytical leverage.

11. Thursday, November 5, 2020

Sabrina Suen, “How the Rise of Local Identity Eroded Pan-Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan and Hong Kong,” Honors thesis #4, used by permission. Canvas.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: How many cases do you plan to study? Describe and justify your case selection.

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS 9. Joe 10. Hazel

WEEK SEVEN

12. Tuesday, November 10, 2020

Process Tracing

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapters 5, **pp. 148-196**. Review Chapter 2 “Mixed Methods” To get analytical leverage, Singh builds in variation in the selection of cases in Chapters 4 and 5. As noted above, she uses comparison (across space and over time) and process tracing (looking at key events and decision) to develop her argument.

13. Thursday, November 12, 2020

Matt Ryan, “The Comparative Method,” in Marsh et al., eds., *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, “Within-case Analysis,” **pp. 285-287**. Canvas.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: Regardless of the number of cases in your research design, sketch a brief description of a single case. There are many ways to use case studies alone or in the context of a mixed-methods design. What can you learn in your project by examining one or more cases? Cite at least one relevant and useful scholarly source.T

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS 11. Aaron 12. Megan

WEEK EIGHT

14. Tuesday, November 17, 2020

Hypothesis Generation and Testing

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapter 6, “Testing the Subnationalism Argument,” **pp. 207-226; 232-233**. Review Chapter 2, “Mixed Methods,” Chapter 4 “Conclusion,” and Chapter 5 “Conclusion” to remind yourself how Singh developed her hypothesis. How does she go about testing her hypothesis with additional data in Chapter 6?

Optional: Peter John, “Quantitative Methods,” “Testing and Reporting Models,” **pp. 265-268**. Canvas.

15. Thursday, November 19, 2020

Miguel Mariscal, “Demographics, Partisanship, and Competitiveness: Poll Closures in the Wake of Shelby,” Honors thesis #5, used by permission. Canvas.

YOUR THESIS ASSIGNMENT: Where does the analytical leverage come from in your design to enable you to make an argument?

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS 13. Maha 14. Kaley 15. Batoul

WEEK NINE

16. Tuesday, November 24, 2020

Comparative Historical Analysis

Optional: Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapter 3, **pp. 64-111**.

No class meeting. Bring your questions and comments on Chapter 3 to class on December 1.

Singh's Chapter 3 presents a comparative historical analysis of the sources of subnationalism, including cases where it is both present and absent. You've already seen Singh apply the comparative historical method in her analyses of welfare outcomes in Chapters 4 and 5.

17. Thursday, November 26, 2020**Thanksgiving****WEEK TEN****18. Tuesday, December 1, 2020****Valid Descriptive and Causal Inference and Conclusions**

Singh, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare*, Chapter 7, **pp. 243-263**.

Singh's conclusion suggests how her theory of subnationalism can contribute to better explanations of welfare outcomes in other cases beyond India. It also suggests policy-relevant implications. Think ahead to how you plan to approach the conclusion of your honors thesis.

Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, "Causal Inference," pp. 160-164; "Structuring Research" and "Ethics" pp. 331-340 Canvas.

19. Thursday, December 3, 2020**Complete Research Design Due**

FULL PRESENTATIONS 1. Siobhan 2. Madeline 3. Kiran 4. Robin 5. Ly

We will discuss the format for your research design throughout the quarter. The following are elements that most research designs include:

Topic (why is it important)

Motivating Question or Puzzle (clear statement of what you intend to explain/outcome of interest)

Literature Review (major existing arguments, including alternative arguments)

Hypothesis (what you think you'll find, even though you might be wrong)

Concepts, Measures, and Data Sources (primary and/or secondary)

Case Selection (how many cases will you have and how and why did you select them)

Basis for Hypothesis Generation or Testing (where your analytical leverage comes from)

Implications (anticipated relevance to policy, understanding of other cases, etc.)

Full Bibliography

WEEK ELEVEN**20. Tuesday, December 8, 2020**

FULL PRESENTATIONS 6. Abdul 7. Noah 8. Faith 9. Joe 10. Hazel

21. Thursday, December 10, 2020

FULL PRESENTATIONS 11. Aaron 12. Megan 13. Maha 14. Haley 15. Batoul