Policies for SYE Senior Thesis Registration and Approval of the Formal Proposal

1. **Eligibility:** All Junior Majors with a Dept GPA of 3.5+ and at least a 3.0 in their Government 290, are eligible to apply to write a Senior Thesis in Government. This is a two-semester project. The Department *strongly encourages* all students who meet the above requirements to consider a Senior Thesis.

2. **Senior Theses Registration:** Once a preliminary proposal has been approved by the Department, senior thesis students should register for Govt. 489 - SYE - Independent Study.

3. **The Proposal Submission Process:** Approval of the thesis proposal is a two-step process.

   a) **Preliminary Proposal Submission.** When the student does decide to pursue a thesis, he/she receives two sets of proposal approval guidelines. These are available from Patty Ashlaw in the Government Office, or from your faculty advisor (They are also attached) the first set outlines a preliminary proposal. The preliminary proposal will be submitted and considered by the Department in the spring prior to the senior year.

   b) **Formal Proposal Submission.** The second set of guidelines is much more detailed, and requires that the student develop a fairly extensive outline of her project, including 1) a clearly focused research question, 2) a proposed thesis statement, 3) a bibliography and/or literature review, and 4) a suggested research methodology. This advanced thesis proposal must be submitted to, and receive formal approval from the student’s thesis committee no later than the deadline for the submission of mid-semester grades.

   The thesis committee is set up and chosen by the student. It consists of the student’s thesis adviser, and two other instructors whom the student requests to work with her. The advanced thesis proposal must be submitted to, and receive formal approval from this committee by the above deadline. Once the student’s formal proposal has been approved by her committee, the Department will change the course registration to Senior Thesis status ([GOVT 497A - SYE:Senior Thesis](#)). The student will then receive an X grade for the fall term.

   Approval of the formal proposal, so that the student may be advanced to senior thesis status, is not automatic. If the student has not prepared a satisfactory proposal by the mid-term deadline date, or decides, for whatever reason, not to pursue the senior thesis, the paper retains its status as an Independent Project. Its completion is then expected by the start of the Spring semester.

   The next contact the student has with her full committee is during the closing weeks of the spring term. The finished thesis should be submitted to the members of this
committee no later than the final week of classes. Then, sometime during exam week, the student meets with the three members of the committee to present, explain, and support orally the central argument of her paper. After this presentation, the committee deliberates and makes the decision whether to award the completed thesis Honors.

4. Honors, and Final Submission and Approval
The awarding of Honors is not automatic. That is why the Department insists on referring to this project as a Senior Thesis. Only after the student has met with the committee at the end of the spring term to present and support her arguments orally is the determination made as to what grade to award the paper. If it is decided to award the paper Honors, the thesis formally receives that designation only upon actual completion of the project. 'Actual completion' means that any revisions students are asked to make at their end-of-term meeting with the thesis review committee must be submitted to and approved by the committee in time for the submission of senior grades.

It should also be noted that, while the Department allows students with a minimum GPA of 3.2 in Government to write a senior thesis, formal University Honors can be awarded only to students who have a minimum GPA of 3.5 in all courses in the major. (See p. 27 of the catalogue.)

5. Senior Thesis Forum
Finally, every year the Government Department sponsors a Senior Thesis Forum, at which all students who have written a thesis present their research and findings to the all government majors, and to the Government Department faculty. At this event, our Faculty and students come together to recognize the excellence in scholarship which it is the goal of the Department to promote. It is scheduled for the Monday and Tuesday (depending upon the number of presentations) of the last week of classes of the spring term.

6. The Two Proposal Formats: (see attached)
I. PRELIMINARY THESIS PROPOSAL

NAME________________________  FACULTY ADVISOR___________________

DATE ________________________

Please address the questions on the following pages in the space provided. You may use additional paper if you wish, but these proposals do not need to be lengthy. If some of the questions seem difficult, don’t despair. A conference with a faculty member will be of help in formulating your answers. What’s more, we realize that you have not yet begun your research, and that your thinking about this topic is probably still in the formative stages. In short, we want to encourage you, not discourage you in your undertaking of a senior thesis.

1. What is the basic question your thesis will try to answer? For the sake of a manageable research with a clear direction, the question should be as focused as possible. For example:

   a. Unfocused: “Is there bias in the news media?”

   b. Better: “Is there a liberal, conservative, or centrist bias in New York Times coverage of the current presidential campaign?”

2. Why is this question important? If it is possible at this preliminary stage, briefly sketch the larger theoretical issues raised by your research question, and mention some of the sources of those theories – particular authors, books, or articles. (For example, the question of news bias might draw on the conservative theory of a “new class” of liberal elites dominating institutions like the media; versus the neo-Marxist theory of cultural hegemony, in which such institutions are dominated by the interests of capitalists.)

3. What areas of scholarly literature will you need to further inform your basic question? (For example, the news bias research would want you to begin by reading previous studies of news bias in general, election-campaign bias in particular, and perhaps discourses on new class and hegemony theory.) If there are particular works and authors you intend to read, please list them.

4. How will you try to answer the question you’ve proposed? (For example, one might try to answer the media bias question above by systematically analyzing the content of a sample of news media stories about the campaign.) At this point, you do not, of course, need to describe a fully developed research design. But you should begin thinking, with your advisor’s help, about which methodology you might employ. Examples of some common social science methods are: elite and specialized interviewing, archival research, focus groups, statistical analysis, survey research, participant observation. As you think about methods, bear in mind that the Govt. Dept. has resources to support travel and other research expenses.
II. ADVANCED THESIS PROPOSAL

Name______________________ Faculty Advisor ____________________
Date ______________________ Committee Members_________________

The thesis proposal submitted to your departmental thesis subcommittee should resemble a research design that students prepare in their 290 courses. First, it should have an introduction, providing background and context for the issue that students intend to pursue. This material should set up the question that students intend to pose. Second, the question should be delineated clearly. Tied to this, students should discuss why their question is interesting or important. Third, the proposal should have a short literature review. The purpose of this section is to insure that students are familiar with different opinions and approaches to their question. Fourth, the proposal should include a hypothesis or thesis statement. Fifth, students should indicate how they intend to proceed with their research, discussing, for example, what research strategies they plan to pursue to answer their question and test their hypothesis. Finally, the senior thesis proposal should conclude by discussing the potential significance of the research.

1. **Outline Format (Flexible)*

   I. Introduction
      
      A. Background/Context-- Describe the topic and focus of the research project.

      B. What is the research question you are attempting to answer? What do you expect your answer to this question might be? (Thesis statement.)

      C. Why is this question interesting or important? Provide a rationale for why you want to pursue it.

   II. Literature/Background review

   III. Methodology/Strategies

      A. Recognizing that the use of qualitative and quantitative data is not mutually exclusive, explain whether the proposal will be conducted primarily along quantitative or qualitative lines.

      B. What will your central variables be? How will you define them so that they may be empirically observed, assessed and/or measured? (That is, whether they are quantitative or qualitative, how do you intend to operationalize these variables?)
C. Specify expected sources of quantitative data, and how they will be transformed into tables, figures, or charts. If survey data are used, specify their expected sources.

D. Identify primary sources of qualitative evidence, such as journals, mass publications, primary documents, etc.

IV. Expected Results

V. Conclusion: Potential Significance of Research

*Portions of this outline are based on Schmidt, Diane E. Writing in Political Science. A Practical Guide. 2nd ed. 2000. New York: Longman.