

Political Science Preliminary Senior Honors Thesis Proposal

Your Name: _____

Preferred Faculty Thesis Advisor: _____

(Note: If you would like advice on which Political Science faculty might be a good mentor for your SYE project idea, please talk with your major advisor or the department chair.)

You must have at least one Political Science faculty member read over your thesis proposal before you submit it to ensure feasibility. This person does NOT necessarily need to be the faculty member you listed as your preferred thesis advisor above, though it is a good idea to at least consult with your preferred advisor, too. Please provide the name(s) of the faculty who have read over your proposal here:

Overview

The senior honors thesis is an opportunity for students to conduct in-depth research on a political science question that they develop in consultation with the faculty advisor. The proposal serves as the foundation for this project, outlining the research question, methodology, and significance of the study. This document provides step-by-step guidance on preparing and submitting a successful thesis proposal in most subfields (though if you are proposing a political theory project, please consult with a faculty member about whether an alternative proposal format may be more appropriate.)

Please answer the three questions below. There is no set word/page limit, but the more detailed your answers, the better. Please include a bibliography with any works cited at the end.

1. What is the research question your thesis will seek to answer? Why are you interested in investigating this research question?

Also, provide some brief background on the issue/topic to situate your research question. Finally, discuss the importance of this research within political science/policy.

(Note: Your question should be somewhat narrowly focused in order to make it a manageable research project.) For example:

Too broad: Does foreign aid work?

Focused: What form of environmental foreign aid is most effective at reducing carbon emissions in developing countries?

2. What are 2-3 main sides of the debate or “schools of thought” within political science about the answer to your research question (that you might include in your Literature Review)? What does each side argue? Cite some scholarly sources that align with each side/school of thought.

For example, for the question about environmental foreign aid above, some scholars argue that foreign aid that funds renewable energy infrastructure is most effective at reducing carbon emissions (School of Thought #1), while others maintain that aid that funds reforestation/carbon sequestration efforts (School of Thought #2), or aid that funds sustainable agriculture (School of Thought #3) is more effective. So, you’d discuss all three in this section.

3. What approaches and methods will you use to gather evidence and data to answer your research question? Describe your preliminary thoughts on data sources, case selection, or survey design if applicable. At this point, you do not need to describe a fully developed research design. But you should begin thinking, with a faculty member’s help, about which methodology you might employ. Examples of some common social science methods (both qualitative and quantitative) are: key informant interviews, case studies, archival research, focus groups, process tracing, statistical analysis, survey research, textual analysis, participant observation, and more. As you think about methods, bear in mind that the Political Science Department may be able to provide monetary resources to support travel and other research expenses.

Evaluation Criteria

Approval of SYE Honors Thesis Proposals is not automatic. All proposals will be assessed by the full Political Science department faculty based on:

- Clarity and feasibility of the research question.
- Demonstrated understanding of the main debates in the field surrounding your topic
- Soundness of the proposed methodology.
- Quality of the writing

Proposal Submission

Please email your completed preliminary thesis proposal to the department chair by the deadline specified on the Political Science SYE Honors Thesis webpage:

<https://www.stlawu.edu/offices/political-science/senior-honors-thesis>