

Political Science C3998-C3999Y  
Senior Honors Seminar  
**2014-2015 Academic Year**

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Prof. Macartan Humphreys  
International Affairs, Room 812  
[mh2245@columbia.edu](mailto:mh2245@columbia.edu)  
Office Hours: F, 9-11 am

*Preceptor:*  
Noah Buckley  
[nmb2137@columbia.edu](mailto:nmb2137@columbia.edu)  
Office hours: TBD.

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Class meets: Tuesdays 4:10 – 6 pm, 711 IAB unless otherwise specified (see schedule)

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## 1 OVERVIEW

The Senior Honors Seminar is a yearlong course designed to help seniors in the major complete a publishable scholarly paper on the topic of their choice. Honors theses are typically 80-120 pages, although there is no set page minimum or maximum. At the beginning of the academic year, we will meet as a group to discuss basic principles of research and thesis design. Beginning in mid-October, however, much of your work will be conducted independently. To make sure that you stay on track, it is critical for you to keep in touch with your faculty advisor as well as the seminar advisor and preceptor. Meetings will resume in January; spring semester meetings will be conducted as writing workshops, where students' work is circulated, presented, and critiqued.

Three people are crucially involved in guiding and advising you throughout the year and together they constitute an informal "thesis committee." The most important of these is your faculty advisor. He or she is the person whose individual research is most related to your own topic and, as such, is able to provide you the most specialized and in-depth feedback. Second, the seminar leader (this year, Macartan Humphreys) will read and review all thesis assignments. The role of the seminar leader is to provide a structure for writing the thesis and a sounding board for outlines and chapters. Finally, the seminar preceptor serves as an additional resource for students in the course who can support you in thinking through arguments and evidence and as well point you to resources at Columbia and beyond.

## 2 REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

The final grade for the seminar is dependent primarily (95%) on the quality of your final thesis, which will be due on April 1, 2015. In addition, you will be required to produce a 3 minute video or multimedia presentation summarizing your research findings. This will be due on April 15 and also counts towards your final grade (5%). Because the thesis will not be completed until March, you will receive a grade of YC ("Year Course") for the fall. Your final thesis grade is the average of the grades (for both the thesis and media presentation) from your faculty advisor and the seminar advisor. The final grade is then applied retroactively to the fall semester. A mixed grade of, for example, A/A- can be set by applying a grade of A- to the fall semester and a grade of A to the spring semester.

In order for a student to receive departmental honors, her/his thesis must receive a grade of A- or higher. The bar for attaining honors is very high, but everyone in the seminar has been accepted because they are capable of producing a thesis that meets that bar. Recent honors theses are available from Andy Zapeda ([az2247@columbia.edu](mailto:az2247@columbia.edu)), and you are encouraged to read them to understand both the quality of work that is expected of you and the range of research topics that

past students have tackled (we will analyze some of these systematically in class). Writing a superb honors thesis is no easy task – but producing an excellent piece of original scholarship is an extraordinarily rewarding experience.

### **Collaboration and Support**

Theses must be individually written and no joint projects are allowed, although with the agreement of the advisor, students can collaborate to produce data for use in separate theses. Peer support is a critical part of leading research and we strongly encourage all students to put time into reading each other's work and providing feedback and criticism. There should be no competitive component here and no curve will be employed to determine grades, rather grades will be based on the quality of the research. Criticism should be frank and constructive. You should say when an argument makes no sense to you, but you should also try to think about how to improve other people's arguments that you are dissatisfied with.

### **3 RECOMMENDED BOOKS**

Many have found the resources below useful.

- Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Kellstedt, Paul M. and Guy D. Whitten. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Lipson, Charles. *How to Write a B.A. Thesis: A Practical Guide From Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

**Writing.** People quibble but there is a lot of wisdom in this little book:

- Strunk, William. *The elements of style*. Penguin, 2007.

### **4 TOOLS**

For anyone doing these that requires mathematical writing you should learn to use LATEX. We can give pointers but see here to get started <http://www.latex-project.org/>

For statistical work we can give support especially in R or in Stata. Noah is planning on doing a crash course in getting going on original statistical analysis. R is available free from <http://cran.r-project.org/> Note even if you are not doing statistics you might find R useful for generating graphs or running simulations to illustrate your arguments in the abstract.

**Friday, September 5:** Sign in for short 1:1 meetings with Professor Humphreys and Noah Buckley. See doodle form here: <http://doodle.com/mbanxtvzv4dcrqfb> WITH 15 MINUTES SLOTS. Come prepared to give a 5 minute overview of your question and describe what you see as the major challenges you think you will face.

### September 9: First meeting

1. General orientation
2. 5 minute presentation of research questions to the whole group – if you have a half page hand out for the class so much the better; it will organize your thoughts and keep others focused; may be (but need not be) based on your application to the class. In short presentations like this you want to communicate what you find exciting about your topic; but you also want to give a sense of where you will need support. You should listen out to see which other projects you might have synergies with.
3. Discussion topic: what's a cause? **Read:** <http://e-gap.org/resources/guides/causality/>

### September 16: Topic 1: Causal inference and experiments, field and natural

You should read the below. This class will not be a teach-in; it will be a discussion of the implications of these readings for your work. We will unpack and explain any tricky concepts but you should plan to come prepared to discuss the potentials and the worries you see --- eg are you concerned that some of the arguments in these readings threaten your analysis plan? Do you see pointers for strategies you had not thought about before?

1. King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton University Press, 1994. Chapters 1-3.
2. Dunning, Thad. 2008. Improving causal inference: Strengths and limitations of natural experiments. *Political Research Quarterly*. 61: 2, 282- 293.
3. Green and Gerber. Experiments Chapters 1 and 2.

### September 23: Topic 2: Qualitative Inference & Case Selection

As above. Many of you will likely want to mix qualitative and quantitative methods and many of you will want to use cases and to justify the cases you use. Can you justify your approach? Do you have a strategy for learning from multiple methods? Can you justify your cases? On what grounds?

1. Humphreys, Macartan, and Alan Jacobs. "Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Unification of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches."
2. Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz. "A tale of two cultures: Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research." *Political Analysis* 14.3 (2006): 227-249.
3. Gerring, John. 2007. The Case Study. What it is and What it Does. Boix, Carles and Stokes, Susan, eds. *Oxford Handbook of comparative politics*, 90-122.
4. Kreuzer, Marcus. 2010. Historical Knowledge and Quantitative Analysis: The case of the origin of proportional representation. *American Political Science Review*. 104(2) and responses by

**September 30: Analyses of Past Theses**

Learn from the best.

1. Discussion of four past award-winning honors theses.
2. Four teams of 3 or 4 students are each required to complete a “research profile” form.

**Thesis outlines** will be due on Friday, **October 3** at midnight. Please place outlines in the **Dropbox** folder and provide a copy to your faculty advisor. Theses outlines should be around 5-7 pages and should address, as appropriate, the rubrics in the **Research Profile document** [see end of this syllabus].

**October 7: Discussion of outlines**

One third of the group’s outlines will be discussed on 10/7 the rest of the proposals will be discussed during the subsequent two meetings

**October 14: Topic 3: Data gathering, in lab and field.**

**Guest:** Salvo Nunnari on lab experiments

We will discuss strategies for original data collection (some original data will greatly enhance the quality of your theses; though not essential it often lets you do more targeted testing that you would otherwise, but also gets you much closer to your topic). Salvo Nunnari will describe the opportunities to make use of the experimental lab at Columbia.

1. Adcock, Robert and Collier, David. 2001. Measurement validity: a shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research. *American Political Science Review*. 95:3, 529- 546.
2. King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton University Press, 1994. Chs 4 and 5

**October 21:** Outline workshop part 2 of 3.

**October 28:** Outline workshop part 3 of 3.

[AFTER OCTOBER 28: NO FORMAL CLASS MEETINGS UNTIL NEXT SEMESTER – SEE WRITING SCHEDULE FOR IMPORTANT DEADLINES]

- November 11**      Deadline to turn in the first draft of your **first chapter**.
- December 9**      Deadline to turn in the first draft of your **second chapter**.
- January 16**      Deadline to turn in the first draft of your **third chapter**. Include updated chapter outline. Get feedback by appointment.

## SPRING 2015

### Small Group Feedback

**January 23:** Revised major chapter to be posted to the Dropbox folder for small group feedback discussions. (You may update it until 4 days before your group session)

For sessions from January 27 to February 10 the class will be divided into 3 groups. Each group will meet for one of these three sessions together with Macartan and Noah. There will be no formal presentations, as it will be expected that all group members have read the chapters for all the other group members in advance.

**January 27:** Group 1 – small group meetings to provide feedback on one of your main chapters (the one that you feel most needs feedback).

**February 3:** Group 2 – small group discussions.

**February 10:** Group 3 – small group discussions.

### Mini-Defenses

**February 20: Turn in first draft of entire thesis.**

**February 23:** Mini-defense of thesis. Book a 45-minute slot; coordinate your booking with your faculty advisor. Prepare a fifteen-minute presentation to be followed by 30 minute discussion. You are allowed to invite other classmates to your defense if you want to.

**March 3:** Mini-defenses continue.

**March 3 – March 17:** Between March 3 and March 17 you must meet at least once with Macartan and Noah to present progress. We will block on Monday class times but also be available by appointment at other times.

### Submission

April 1: Thesis due by midnight.

April 15: Multimedia / dissemination projects due.

## 6 WRITING SCHEDULE: ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

<b>October 3</b>	Thesis outlines due
<b>October 28</b>	Revised outlines – plus a work plan for the remainder of the semester – due
<b>November 11</b>	Deadline to turn in the first draft of your <b>first chapter</b> . Include updated chapter outline. Get feedback by appointment.
<b>December 9</b>	Deadline to turn in the first draft of your <b>second chapter</b> . Include updated chapter outline. Get feedback by appointment.
<b>January 16</b>	Deadline to turn in the first draft of your <b>third chapter</b> . Include updated chapter outline. Get feedback by appointment.
<b>February 20</b>	Deadline for first draft of your <b>entire thesis</b> . Feedback by appointment.
<b>April 1</b>	Final draft of thesis due.
<b>April 15</b>	Multimedia / Dissemination project due

## 7 NOTES

- It is your responsibility to complete tasks on time. Failure to submit chapters or drafts of your thesis in a timely manner may preclude you from being granted honors. If you submit assignments late, be advised that comments and feedback may be substantially delayed, which will make it difficult to make progress on your thesis.
- All assignments are due by midnight on the stated due date.
- All assignments should be distributed electronically via the Dropbox folder.
- Be sure to number your pages in all written assignments.
- Please cc me, your advisor, and your preceptor on emails about your thesis.
- Do not sign up for a course that conflicts with the Honors Seminar. You are expected to attend every session listed on this syllabus.
- Continue to study for your other courses. Columbia College requires that you maintain at least a 3.6 GPA in your major in order to qualify for honors.
- April 1 is a hard deadline for theses. Theses submitted after this date cannot be considered for honors. Theses submitted after this date also will be marked down one-third of a grade for every day they are late.
- Be prepared to be wrong; be prepared to be disappointed. It is extremely common to find once you go deep into a topic that things are not as you thought at first. In a way that's the point.
- Have fun – this is an extraordinary opportunity to go deeply into questions you care about. Challenge yourself, stretch your mind and your skills, let go of your prejudices, try things you thought you never could.

## 8 RESEARCH PROFILE FORM

<b>Researcher Name:</b>	Your Name/ The name of authors of research that you are reading
<b>Research Project Title:</b>	Short title
<b>One sentence summary of research question:</b>	Jargon free
<b>Substantive motivation:</b> [half page]	Why should anyone care about the results of this research
<b>Theoretical motivation</b> [half page]	What broader theoretical questions can this research shed light on
Key literatures/debates to which this will contribute: [half page]	Identify 3 or 4 readings that this work will speak to
Primary Hypothesis [half page]	This is a more specific form of the research question; provide no more than three hypotheses. If the topic does not lend itself to hypothesis construction, then indicate the <i>specific</i> research questions the research can answer
Identification Strategy [half page]	Strategy for attributing causal effects, eg experiment, matching, regression discontinuity
Measurement strategy: [half page]	Describe measurement of Y,X, and auxiliary data. Be clear about units of analysis.
Analysis strategy [half page]	How will you draw conclusions from your evidence. How will you know if your theory is wrong?
Interpretation strategy [one para]	Summarize the substantive conclusions you will draw from your analysis. Describe the conclusions both for the case where you do find and where you do not find what you expect to find.
Threats to (internal/external) validity	Note especially any (a) key assumptions in identification of measurement strategies and (b) key scope conditions.
Implementation strategy	Describe major actions you need to take. Highlight any threats you foresee.
Writing strategy	Provide a table of contents.
Marketing strategy	Beyond writing an article /thesis, how else can you disseminate the research findings? Eg describe a multimedia piece you might produce in conjunction with the research.