

2019-2020 Gov 99: Senior Thesis Writers' Seminar Syllabus

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I. Goals of Government 99:

Gov 99 is designed to *supplement*—not replace—the advice and support you will receive from your primary thesis adviser, and runs from now until the end of the writing process in March 2020. All senior thesis writers are required to successfully complete both semesters of Gov 99 in order to submit a thesis to the Government Department for honors consideration.

This seminar is designed with four goals in mind:

- (1) Structuring the writing process: Gov 99 encourages you to write early and often by imposing a set of tangible deadlines. Your final product will be much better if you are persistently writing (and thinking, and talking) about your topic.
- (2) Helping you convincingly present a good question/research design: It is one thing to have a strong interest in a particular topic and to begin asking questions about it. It is quite another, however, to formulate a question that engages political scientists and then go about writing up your findings according to disciplinary standards and expectations. We want to be clear: Gov 99 is not intended to “compete” with your primary adviser (who will help you frame your question, determine how to engage with existing scholarship, and identify appropriate ways to proceed with the research). Instead, Gov 99 is here to support you (and your adviser) in writing up your results in the best possible manner.
- (3) Generating opportunities to receive feedback: Peer review is an essential part of Gov 99, meaning that you will share your written work with fellow thesis writers. The goal of this process is not to receive expert feedback—even your adviser may know less about your research than you do—but rather to improve the general organization and clarity of your written work. Organization and clarity matter in the thesis grading process, so taking these exercises seriously will prove helpful down the road.
- (4) Providing support: Gov 99 is not designed as group therapy, but there are moments when it can feel that way. There are peaks and valleys in the thesis-writing process, and this seminar will help you to navigate through this occasionally challenging terrain. Completing an assignment of this nature requires mental perseverance as well as sustained motivation—and we’re here to help.

II. Format and Procedures:

Gov 99 meets seven times in the fall, and three times in the spring, with each meeting lasting for two hours. Your assigned seminar leader will work with you and your peers, insofar as possible, to try and schedule class meetings at a mutually agreeable time. Nonetheless, as your thesis is the capstone of your academic career at Harvard, you are expected to treat this class as a priority. Sections for Gov 99 will meet for the first time the week of Sept. 9th 2019 (there is a mandatory orientation session beforehand

when all thesis writers will meet together as a group—you will be emailed details before the start of the fall term).

Sections have been formulated with one primary (though not always achievable) goal in mind: placing students with similar thematic, regional and/or methodological interests together in small groups of 4-6 individuals. As a result, not every section of Gov 99 operates on precisely the same schedule. The due dates for writing assignments are uniform across sections, but how class time is spent — e.g., discussing how to conduct a country study within comparative politics, or how to write an effective literature review, or how to present regression results —will vary according to the needs of you and your classmates. *It is critical that you provide feedback to your seminar leader concerning what exercises will prove most helpful. S/he will have some ideas, but you help set the agenda for Gov 99.*

Please remember that the Gov 99 seminar leaders are only here to help you write the best thesis you are capable of; your actual grade for Gov 99 is—under normal circumstances—is determined by your thesis adviser. However, the Gov 99 instructors are in close touch with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Gov 99 Coordinator, and non-attendance, tardiness, or failure to complete assignments will be noted and may prevent you from successfully completing the thesis-writing process.

III. Course Requirements:

1. *Class attendance:* Participation in Gov 99 is a mandatory component of writing a thesis. If you do not pass the first half of Gov 99, you will not be allowed to continue writing. You are expected to complete the assignments listed below in a timely manner, and to provide substantive feedback to your peers when requested (*this seminar only works if students really take time to think about the work being circulated; minimal or unhelpful comments will be treated as if the reviewer did not fulfill the assignment*).
2. *Course readings:* There are no required books or course packs for this seminar. At the first meeting, you will receive a copy of *A Guide to Writing a Thesis in Government*; this should be read prior to the second meeting. Section leaders may additionally ask that students read journal articles or book chapters that offer (a) a model for thesis-writers, and/or (b) covers an important aspect of the thesis-writing process. They may also ask you to read chapters from a completed thesis to give you a sense of where you are headed. The actual content of the readings will be up to the discretion of the instructor, and will be based on what s/he deems most appropriate for the section you are in.
3. *Assignments.* Including the final submission of the thesis in March 2020, Gov 99 consists of **seven** writing assignments designed to help you along in the thesis-writing process. Assignments #1, 2, 3, and 6 must be completed **at least two days prior** to your section meeting or scheduled individual conference, unless otherwise specified, and circulated to the appropriate individuals in order to provide adequate time for recipients to read and comment on your work. Please note that that assignment #5 is only sent to your formal thesis adviser. Assignment #7 consists of handing in the completed thesis to the Government Department.

IV. Grading:

Gov 99 is graded SAT/UNSAT. However, failure to either attend your assigned section or complete any of the writing assignments will result in an automatic UNSAT grade. Similarly, a SAT Gov 99 grade will be awarded for the Spring 2020 term provided you attend section, complete all assignments, and turn in a thesis to the Undergraduate Program Office by the March deadline. Note that the Spring Gov 99 grade is unconnected to the grading of the thesis for honors, which is a separate process.

V. Academic Integrity and Collaboration:

The exchange of ideas is essential to your work in Gov 99, where peer-review is an integral component of class. You may therefore find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers both in and out of the classroom, but any work you submit for evaluation must be your own. No collaborative research or writing is permitted. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in the discipline. All suspected instances of plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty will be referred to the College for possible disciplinary action.

VI. Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

In compliance with Harvard University's policy and equal access laws, the ADUS (Dr. George Soroka) is available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students needing accommodations because of a documented disability must present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and consult the Department no later than the second week of the fall term. All discussions will be strictly confidential, although AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

VII. Course Schedule & Assignments:

Fall 2019

Meeting 0: September 3, 4:30-6:00 pm, CGIS S-030 (*Mandatory Thesis-Writers' Orientation and Reception [pre-sectioning]*)

Meeting 1: Week of September 9 (*Your section leader will email you about the day, time and place*)

Meeting 2: Week of September 16

Assignment 1 due: preliminary statement of question and research methods (1-2 paragraphs, circulated before class to your 99 instructor and all class members for group peer review this week).

No class week of September 23

Meeting 3: Week of September 30

Assignment 2 due: a thesis proposal (cover sheets with questions to be answered are available online or from the Undergraduate Program Office) detailing your thesis question and research method(s) (about 1,500 words, submitted your Gov 99 instructor and class members for peer review this week). A final thesis proposal, with a coversheet signed by your adviser (not your Gov 99 instructor), must be dropped off by *you* to the Undergraduate Program Office in the Government Department by 5pm on Friday, October 5.

No class week of October 7

Meeting 4: Week of October 14

Assignment 3 due: first draft of an "academic engagement" chapter due (10-15 pages). This preliminary chapter may take the form of a traditional literature review designed to situate your project in the debates of the discipline, or an alternate form (e.g., discussion of research design and methodology) agreed to in consultation with your thesis adviser (circulated before class to your 99 instructor and your assigned peer-review partner for review this week).

No class week of October 21

Meeting 5: Week of October 28

No class week of November 4

Meeting 6: Week of November 11

Assignment 4 due: first draft of a substantive empirical or analytical chapter (15-20 pages). This chapter may consist of hypothesis testing or other forms of textual/data analysis. The key point: in this draft you are no longer telling others what you will do or building the foundations for your research, but you are actually demonstrating how you are going about generating results (circulated to your Gov 99 instructor and assigned peer-review partner for review the week of November 18).

Meeting 7: Week of November 18

In-class review of the substantive empirical or analytical chapter circulated the week of November 11.

No class week of November 25

Assignment 5: *By the last day of fall 2019 classes you will need to submit at least 7,500 words (roughly 30 double-spaced pages) of written work for evaluation to your thesis adviser (not the 99 instructor). This typically takes the form of a revised and expanded Assignment 4. However, the specific content of the assignment should be negotiated directly with your adviser. This, along with your active and engaged participation in Gov 99, will form the basis of your fall Gov 99 grade.*

Spring 2020

Meeting 1: Week of February 3

Assignment 6 due: A draft of a second substantive empirical or analytical chapter (not a rewrite of what you handed in back in November [15-25 pages], circulated to your Gov 99 instructor and assigned peer-review partner for review this week).

Meeting 2: Week of February 10

No class week of February 17

Meeting 3: Week of February 24

At your instructor's discretion, individual conferences may be substituted for the final class meeting.

Assignment 7: *On Wednesday the week before Spring Break (no later than 5 pm) you must submit a physical copy of your completed thesis to the Undergraduate Program Office. Please do not forget you are also required to upload an electronic copy to the Gov 99 website dropbox by midnight this same day (see the Guide to Writing a Thesis in Government for more details).*