

Political Science Honors Program Application

Name: _____

Perm Number: _____

Preferred E-mail Address: _____

Proposed Thesis Advisor or Advisors: _____

The proposed thesis advisor must be a regular ladder rank faculty member (an assistant, associate, or full professor) in the political science department or a regular ladder rank faculty member in another department who is affiliated with political science. Lecturers, visiting faculty, and teaching associates may not serve as thesis advisers. See <http://polsci.ucsb.edu/people> (select the “faculty” and “affiliates” tabs) for a list of eligible faculty and descriptions of their research interests. Your thesis adviser will work closely with you over the course of your senior year to help you plan and actually produce your thesis. For now, your goal is simply to identify one or two political science faculty members who are likely to be appropriate advisers, given their research interests. In the fall, we will finalize your choice.

Proposed Topic or Topics: Attach a proposal of 3-5 double-spaced pages to this form. Please consult the guidelines on the following pages. The goal is for you to start thinking about one or two possible topics for your thesis. We will build on this work in the fall quarter to develop a full proposal, or plan, for your thesis.

*Return this form and all supporting documents **no later than 1 September** to the **Honors Program Director, Professor Heather Stoll (hstoll@ucsb.edu)**. Applications can either be placed in Professor Stoll’s mailbox in the political science department, 3rd floor Ellison Hall, or be e-mailed to Professor Stoll (preferably as a PDF file). Please direct questions to either Professor Stoll or the Undergraduate Program Coordinator, Dr. Alison Keleher. Decisions will be announced by 15 September.*

Guidelines for Writing a Thesis Proposal for Your Application

What is an honors thesis?

An honors thesis is a scholarly investigation of a puzzle or problem dealing with politics. A thesis deals with its topic in greater depth than would a regular paper written for a single course. Thesis topics in political science cover a wide array of subjects, ranging from a close analysis of a political theory text to an empirical investigation of a theoretical claim about the political world.

When and how to start?

It is never too early to start thinking about potential topics. We strongly encourage you to begin giving potential topics serious consideration in the spring quarter of your junior year. A topic might emerge from a class you are taking or a paper you have written. You should read about it on your own, thinking especially about what some unanswered questions might be. To begin identifying potential topics, think about what interests you. Which of the courses that you have taken have you been the most excited about? What issues are currently in the news that you find interesting? Is there a book or article that you have recently read that really sparked your interest? You will likely be more successful if you focus on topics about which you already have some knowledge and about which you are passionate.

Choosing a topic and a research question

Your topic should be broad enough to interest others and be worthy of scholarly investigation, but sufficiently narrow enough so that you can do it justice in your thesis. For example, the topic “term limits” is too broad, but the topic, “the effect of legislative term limits upon democratic representation” is more manageable. The research question or puzzle, which is the question that you will actually attempt to answer in your thesis, will be even narrower still. For example, a manageable research question related to this topic might be: “Did California’s imposition of term limits improve the representation of minority groups in the state legislature?” Note that this question deals with a cause-effect puzzle. Your thesis should not simply describe a phenomenon, but should seek to explain it.

You will need to read a lot to be able to identify a manageable, sufficiently narrow topic and research question. Look for puzzles, surprises, or anomalies in the course of your reading about a particular subject area. Is there a debate in the literature that you might help to resolve, such as by providing new empirical evidence? Is there an interesting argument made by a scholar that has not been (sufficiently) empirically tested? Has something happened in the world that seems to contradict “settled” arguments? Is there a gap in the literature that you might fill by studying something that no one else seems to have yet studied?

Try to move as far as you can from a general topic to a specific research question. To help you do this, read a number of articles or books related to your topic. For example, with respect to the topic discussed above, consider reading some works on term limits in general, on term limits in California specifically, and on representation. Here are a few more examples showing the steps from a broad topic to a focused topic to a research question, all drawn from recent political science honors theses:

- Broad topic: Assassination policies. Focused topic: The effectiveness of Israeli assassination policies. Research question: Have Israeli targeted assassinations deterred terrorist attacks by Palestinian groups?
- Broad topic: Piracy. Focused topic: US anti-piracy strategies and their effectiveness. Research question: How effective have the different anti-piracy strategies the US has employed in its history been, and what are the implications for current policy?

- Broad topic: Arab spring/revolutions. Focused topic: The causes of the Arab Spring. Research question: What role did social media play in bringing about the Arab Spring revolutions?
- Broad topic: Voting behavior. Focused topic: Candidate image and its effect on voting behavior. Research question: Do men and women differ in how candidate image---the personal characteristics of a candidate that are inferred from his or her physical appearance---shape their voting behavior?
- Broad topic: Niccolo Machiavelli. Focused topic: Religion in the works of Machiavelli. Research question: What role does Machiavelli think religion should play in a state, and does this have implications for current debates in the United States about the relationship between religion and politics?

Research design

You should also start to think about the approach you will take to answer your research question. For example, what kind of evidence might you gather and how could you use that evidence to support your argument? In general terms, might your approach be qualitative (such as conducting a few case studies) or quantitative (conducting a statistical analysis of a large number of cases)? More specifically, for example, from which organizations might you collect what kinds of quantitative data? Will you examine government documents or other primary source materials? Conduct interviews? Run a survey or an experiment? For theorists, consider issues such as which texts you will consult (notably, primary vs. secondary texts) in which languages. In other words, we expect you to offer some very preliminary thoughts about the kinds of evidence you think that you might use and why.

Writing your proposal

Accordingly, in 3-5 double-spaced pages, the proposal that you will write as part of your application should *briefly*:

- Identify one or two broad topics that interest you as well as the corresponding focused topics, explaining why each topic is important (to you, to the political science scholarly community, and to society at large).
- For each of these topics,
 - Identify the specific research question/puzzle that you would like your thesis to address, again explaining why it is important.
 - Identify a research design (or several possible research designs) that you are considering using to answer the research question/puzzle.
 - Identify a few (4-10) relevant scholarly books or articles.