

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 4600**

**2015/2016**

**GUIDE TO HONOURS SEMINAR AND RESEARCH PROJECT**

Welcome to the fourth year of your Honours Programme in Political Science!

The material that follows is intended to provide you with the background information you will need to complete the Honours Seminar and Essay requirements, and to brief you on the way in which we will compile the so-called “**21st grade**”.

The honours guide is organized under the following headings:

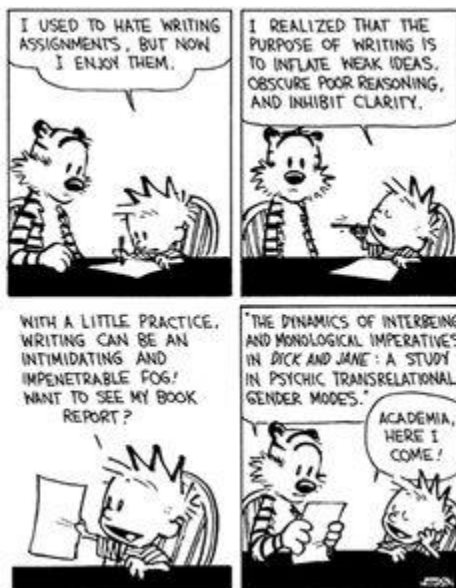
- (1) Gratuitous -- but Immensely Wise -- Advice**
- (2) Honours Seminars**
- (3) Honours Essay**
- (4) Deadlines and Seminar Schedule**
- (5) Grading System**
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**(1) GRATUITOUS -- BUT IMMENSELY WISE -- ADVICE:**

There are three important points to keep in mind (well, there are other points, too, but these three are **REALLY** important!):

- (a) **Stick to a rigorous schedule.** Do as much of your thesis as possible in the first term, and don't fall behind in your research and writing. The worst thing you can possibly do is to attempt to write your entire Honours Essay during the February study break, when everyone else is having fun (or completing term papers for regular classes -- a necessity that you, too, may find yourself having to confront). The year looks invitingly long in September. It isn't!

- (b) **Enjoy your research.** This is the one chance you get to work on an issue that really interests you, as opposed to the sometimes tedious exercises that will have been assigned to you by your professors over the past three years. Try to find a subject that genuinely sparks your curiosity.
- (c) **Do not try to solve all of the world's problems in your Honours Essay!** We realize that NOT trying to solve all of the world's problems may appear to make it difficult for you to respond to Wise Advisory No. 2 (“Enjoy your research”). But remember: *the more specific and precise the topic, the easier it will be to write the essay.* “Currency devaluation as a causal variable in the establishment of military rule in post-Weimar Germany” may not be as engaging a subject as “What causes war?”, but it would be a much more manageable topic to undertake within the six-month period at your disposal. So: if your supervisor urges you to narrow the scope of your inquiries, *listen, heed the advice,* and give thanks!



## (2) **HONOURS SEMINARS:**

There will be an irregular series of seminars, scheduled mainly in the first term, for Political Science Honours students (and for Combined Honours students whose primary subject is Political Science). These will take place in the Political Science Department. Unless stated otherwise, all seminars are mandatory. Emails will be sent about a week beforehand apprising you of the venue for each session.

Some of the first term seminars are designed to help you to construct your thesis, and to make certain that you meet all of the deadlines. (They accord, therefore, with Wise Advisory items (a) and (c). The first few of them will consist of informal discussions, and will address the following questions,

among others:

- (1) **Identifying the issue you wish to investigate, and with whom:** What is the general area in which you intend to do your research? What is it about this topic that interests you? With whom would you like to work?
- (2) **Formulating an hypothesis:** Exactly what cause-and-effect proposition or other assertion (e.g., in political philosophy) are you investigating? It is often helpful to begin your research with the question, “Why...?” and to be guided by a hypothetical answer. Think clearly about what would count as evidence to prove your hypothesis, and what would count as evidence against it – you will need to deal with **BOTH** in your thesis.
- (3) **Determining methodology:** What will be your theoretical framework and how will you defend that choice given available alternatives? How will you approach your research and why is that the best approach? What kinds of evidence will count as “important”, and what kinds not? How will you go about finding the information you need?

Other first term seminars can address such specific concerns as some of you may have, along with problems that arise more generally in the context of doing research in Political Science.

In the second term, the seminars will be confined to a brief period in early February, when each participant will formally present her/his research project to the rest of the seminar group.

Please keep in mind that these seminars are meant to be constructive and supportive rather than competitive. The point is not to see “who is ahead” and “who is behind” in their research, but to be able to solicit input from (and offer suggestions to) your colleagues, and to articulate clearly how your research is progressing.



### (3) **HONOURS ESSAY:**

The “Honours Essay” requirement is intended (1) to provide you with experience in developing a substantial research project at a sophisticated level of analysis; (2) to give you an opportunity to work at some depth in a field of inquiry in which you may have a particular interest; (3) to create a context in which you will be engaged in scholarly exchanges, on an individual basis, with one or more members of the department's teaching staff; and (4) to expose you very broadly to the kinds of challenges involved in research and analysis at the graduate level and beyond.

Honours Essays are obviously not expected to reach the dimensions of an M.A. thesis. On the other hand, **it is certainly assumed that they will be much more substantial than a normal term paper for a 3000- or 4000-level class.** It is difficult to define what this means in the abstract, and ultimately the task of controlling the dimensions of any particular project must be left to the discussions that each of you will have individually with your supervisors. In general terms, however, you will be expected to have a good working knowledge of the most prominent literature in the field immediately related to your topic, and the essays themselves should reveal at least some measure of originality with respect to evidence, data, or interpretation in the case of projects involving empirical research, and of analysis or synthesis in the case of investigations of a more theoretical or philosophical character. **They should be roughly 50-60 pages in length** (double-spaced).

As a rough guide to the amount of work involved, and assuming a normal load of five full-year classes (or the equivalent) in a minimum 45-hour working week, **you should consider an average of 8 to 9 hours per week throughout the academic year as a reasonable allocation of time to the Honours Essay project.** Please understand, however, that in any system which is designed to serve students individually, there will be unavoidable variations from one case to the next in both the volume and level of effort required.

Since one of the purposes of the Honours Essay is to provide you with experience in developing and carrying through a research project on your own, **the initiative is to a considerable extent left to you rather than to your supervisor.** You are expected, for example, to identify your own field of inquiry, although the precise nature of your project may be modified as a result of discussions with one or more members of the teaching staff. The pursuit of source material and the development of a pertinent bibliography are similarly considered to be primarily your own responsibility, although again the faculty supervisor may suggest additional titles or alternative lines of inquiry.

At the risk of repeating “wise advice” too often, it may be worth emphasizing again that **the key to the Honours Essay project is to be as CLEAR about your research as possible.** You should be able, very early in the first term, to state your research agenda precisely and succinctly in **ONE SENTENCE.** At the beginning, this can still be a little vague (“I am interested in examining the roots of authoritarianism in Latin America.”). By early November, however, you should be asking “whether” something or other is the case (“I am investigating whether authoritarianism in Latin America is due to certain problems of industrialization.”). And by the time of your formal presentation in February, you should be able to give a detailed and specific account of your research

enterprise (“I am arguing that authoritarianism in certain Latin American states was due to their need to quell political and social disturbances caused in part by specific economic crises, which were in turn a result of the lack of vertical integration of national industrial structures.”)

The important part of your research is the establishment of *causality*. This can be either empirical (as in the Latin American example above) or normative (e.g., patterns of distribution should be changed *because of* certain principles of distributive justice).

A number of Honours Essays from previous years are available for examination should you wish to peruse them.

For the rest, the configuration and character of your Essay is a matter for you and your Supervisor to determine.

#### **(4) SEMINAR SCHEDULE AND DEADLINES:**

- Friday, Sept. 11:** Orientation to the Honours programme
- Friday, October 2:** Grant-writing workshop; applying for grad school (discretionary). Venue TBA.
- Friday, Oct. 16:** By this date, you must submit to me the title of your thesis project, along with the signature of the supervisor with whom you wish to work (Form 1). It is a good idea to identify a potential supervisor and to complete this form as soon as possible (this form is also available on your POLI 4600 Bbl website). Each professor will be able to work with only a limited number of Honours students, so if you have a particular professor in mind, act quickly!
- Friday, Oct. 23:** Designing your research project (in conjunction with graduate programme). The fundamentals of research design are discussed here. Not a good seminar to miss. Venue TBA.
- Friday, Nov. 13:** Presenting your research project, phase one. This is your first opportunity to present your research verbally to the Honours group. Using the information on research design you learned in the previous seminar, you should be able to explain what your research project is, why current research does not adequately address the problem you identify, and how you intend to investigate the issue. Venue TBA.
- Monday, Nov. 16:** A paper copy of your research outline (template also available on your website) should be submitted to me directly, or through the Department Office, on or before this date. Once I have received them, I will pass the outlines on to your Supervisor for marking. (See “Grading System” below.)

- Friday, Jan. 8:** By this date -- following the Christmas break -- you should be sufficiently immersed in your project to have begun writing your first draft (!) I will be in touch, therefore, with your individual supervisors to obtain a brief report on your progress, and a graded evaluation (see "Grading System") of the quantity and quality of the work you have completed up to that point. (This cruelty is grounded in kindness: recall Wise Advisory (a).)
- First Half of Feb.** In the first half of February, you will be presenting the details of your research project to your colleagues and some faculty members. More information on this formal public presentation will be given to you at the beginning of the winter term. You should at this point be able to make a specific argument, rather than simply describing what it is that you are investigating. This, too, will contribute to the 21<sup>st</sup> grade. (See "Grading System" below.)
- Friday, March 4:** **By this date, you must submit your *penultimate* final draft to your supervisor AND you must supply me with a note signed by your supervisor confirming that the draft has been submitted.** The Essay will not be graded at this point, **but there will be a 2% late penalty per diem in the event that the draft is not submitted and I do not receive the note by this date.** Your supervisor will be able to tell you whether any changes are necessary before the final submission date (March 11). Also **by March 11**, you and your supervisor should have identified an additional faculty reader for your oral examination.
- Friday, March 11:** Submit **THREE COPIES OF THE FINAL DRAFT** of your Essay to me, either directly or through the Department Office. (One copy is for the Supervisor, one is for the Examiner, and one is for the Department's own files.) Be sure to indicate on the cover of the Essay who your Supervisor and Examiner are. While the mark given for your written thesis itself will be the grade for Political Science 4600R, **a late penalty of 2% per diem** will be applied to your "21st grade" (in the absence, at least, of extenuating circumstances that have been confirmed, and are supported, by your supervisor and medical or other documentation; simple procrastination does not qualify as an "extenuating circumstance"). **At this point, you and your supervisor should fix a date with your second reader for an oral examination, which must be held no later than Wednesday, April 6, 2014 and preferably before.**
- Wed, April 6:** Final deadline for oral examinations. If you miss this deadline (even for reasons of illness or other calamity), you may not be able to graduate in the Spring.

(5) **GRADING SYSTEM:**

**POLI 4600.06R:** This grade is a letter grade, and will be based entirely on your written Honours Essay after it has been formally submitted. It will be determined mutually by your Supervisor and your Examiner.

**“21st Grade”:** The 21st grade will be composed on the basis of the following formula:

Contributions to First Term Seminars	10%
Draft outline (due November 16)	10%
Supervisor's Progress Report (January)	20%
Oral Presentation of Project (February)	20%
Oral Examination (March-April)	<u>40%</u>
TOTAL	100%

**N.B.: 20% of your 21<sup>st</sup> grade will be deducted if you miss your presentation in February, so that it has to be rescheduled.**

(6) **MORE GRATUITOUS ADVICE:**

- (1) The foregoing is intended to be helpful, but please remember that **YOU** are primarily responsible for meeting your obligations, both fully and on time. It is not the responsibility of the Supervisor to take the initiative in reminding you of what you have to do next.
- (2) Having said that, **please** do not hesitate to see me at any time if you have a problem, or if you have a question about any aspect of the Honours Programme. I can also be reached by e-mail: **k.fierlbeck@dal.ca** (fall term) or **david.black@dal.ca** (winter term).

(7) **Useful References and Guides for Writing Research Papers in Political Science**

Lucille Charlton & Mark Charlton (2013) The Nelson Guide to Research and Writing in Political Science. Toronto: Nelson.

Bruce Berg (2009), Qualitative Research Methods for Social Sciences New York: Allyn & Bacon.

## **NOTE ON PLAGIARISM**

All students in this class are to read and understand the policies on academic integrity and plagiarism referenced in the Policies and Student Resources sections of the [academicintegrity.dal.ca](http://academicintegrity.dal.ca) website. Ignorance of such policies is no excuse for violations.

Any paper submitted by a student at Dalhousie University may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources. Plagiarism is considered a serious academic offence which may lead to loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University, or even to the revocation of a degree. It is essential that there be correct attribution of authorities from which facts and opinions have been derived. At Dalhousie there are University Regulations which deal with plagiarism and, prior to submitting any paper in a course, students should read the Policy on Intellectual Honesty contained in the Calendar or on the Online Dalhousie website. The Senate has affirmed the right of any instructor to require that student papers be submitted in both written and computer-readable format, and to submit any paper to be checked electronically for originality.