

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE
Department of Politics and International Relations

Guidelines for the Senior Thesis

The senior thesis is one of several options available for a Politics and International Relations (IR) major to fulfill the senior studies requirement. The thesis is the student's opportunity to undertake an original and significant research program, one that they design and execute under the supervision of a thesis advisor and other members of the thesis committee.

The senior thesis is not for everyone, however. Only Politics and IR majors in their senior year who have successfully demonstrated in their advanced courses the ability to work independently should consider pursuing the senior thesis. Furthermore, unless the department's faculty decides otherwise, the thesis is open to seniors with strong grades in the major with an overall grade point average of 3.33 (B+). Most politics and IR majors, including some who have excellent academic records, instead choose either the one-credit senior seminar or the one-credit senior research project as alternatives to the senior thesis.

The Department of Politics and International Relations has a four-step senior thesis policy as follows.

Step 1 (the spring semester of the third year)

During the registration period (for the final academic year), the student shall communicate to their academic advisor their interest in writing a thesis. They shall also speak with faculty members who they might want to serve on the thesis committee, as both chair and as regular committee members. A senior thesis requires a minimum of three faculty advisors, of which one must be from a department other than the Politics and IR department. The student who is a double-major must have a thesis committee comprised of at least four faculty, two from the Politics and IR department and two from the other department (or academic program).

The student shall not be granted permission to register for the senior thesis by their academic advisor until they have submitted a Senior Thesis Proposal Form to the dean of the faculty. This form must contain the following items: (1) all appropriate signatures, including the faculty who are serving on the thesis committee, the chair of the Politics and IR department, and the dean of the faculty; and (2) a research statement of 250-300 words.

Step 2 (the summer between the third year and the senior year)

The student is expected to educate themselves about the process of researching and writing a senior thesis. Among the many helpful resources is Charles Lipson's *How To Write a B.A. Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Paperback copies are available at the Lake Forest College Writing Center and new and used paperback copies can be purchased online.

Step 3 (the beginning of the senior year)

During the first full week of classes in the fall semester of the senior year, the student shall submit a thesis prospectus to their thesis advisor. The five-page prospectus shall include: (1) a title, topic, and explanation of why the topic is important; (2) a research question (or several questions); (3) a thesis statement; (4) an outline of the thesis' main chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion; (5) a description of how the research will be conducted (i.e. methodology); and (6) a timeline for the completion of the thesis. The student and the thesis advisor shall agree on a schedule of meetings for the fall semester. The thesis advisor shall provide a copy of this document to the chair of the department.

Step 4 (the spring semester of the senior year)

The student shall arrange a public defense of the thesis with their thesis advisor and the other members of the thesis committee. Once a day and time have been decided, the student shall arrange with the departmental secretary to secure a classroom for the defense.

The student shall submit the final draft of the entire thesis to their thesis committee members no later than March 31 of the spring semester. At the recommendation of the thesis advisor, the chair of the department shall issue a public notice to other faculty and majors in the department, announcing the thesis defense day and time and welcoming their attendance. The thesis defense must take place by April 20. *All the other deadlines and guidelines associated with the senior thesis shall be determined by the Office of the Dean of Students.*

The thesis student is expected to present their research at the annual Student Symposium, which takes place in early April, but whether they do so is a decision for them to make in consultation with their thesis advisor.

The termination of a senior thesis

A senior thesis can be terminated at any point. If the thesis is terminated before the end of the spring semester drop-add period, then the thesis shall be converted into a one-semester (fall) senior project on the student's transcript. The student will then register for a normal one-credit course for the spring semester to substitute for the second half of the two-credit thesis. If the thesis is terminated after the close of the spring semester drop-add period, then it shall be converted into a two-credit senior research project.

The joint thesis for double majors

Some Politics and IR majors who are also majoring in another academic discipline oftentimes pursue a joint thesis. In these cases, one credit counts for either Politics or IR and the other for the second major. The thesis is assigned two grades. One grade is determined by the thesis co-chair who is a member of the Department of Politics and International Relations. The other grade is determined by the co-chair who represents the other major.

The senior project as an alternative to the senior thesis

Shorter in length, less thorough in its survey of the relevant academic literature, and not requiring the high degree of originality expected in a senior thesis, the senior project is a viable alternative to the senior thesis. The student who chooses the senior project works with a project advisor who is a faculty member of the Politics and IR department. The student does not defend their final work before a public gathering of their peers and mentors. Moreover, the senior project is one credit only. A senior research project must contain at least 30 pages of double-spaced text (in Times New Roman 12-point font) - not including endnotes, bibliography, and other materials (e.g., maps, charts, etc.).

Calendar-year senior thesis

On occasion, a student majoring in either Politics or IR who intends to graduate in December (at the end of the fall semester) decides to pursue a two-credit thesis in the calendar year in which they are a senior. They shall submit the Senior Thesis Proposal Form to the dean of the faculty by the end of the previous fall semester (i.e., the second semester of the student's junior year). They shall submit the five-page prospectus to their thesis advisor by the end of the first week of the spring semester (i.e., the first semester of their senior year). The student shall submit the final draft of the entire thesis to their thesis committee members no later than November 10 of the fall semester. At the recommendation of the thesis advisor, the chair of the department shall issue a public notice to other faculty and majors in the department, announcing the thesis defense day and time and welcoming their attendance. This thesis defense must take place by November 20.