INTRODUCTION

This seminar has a single purpose: to provide a collegial environment to support and structure the design and completion of your senior thesis. Research completed alone is no fun—and it’s usually not as good as research completed with the help of interested, informed, and sympathetic colleagues. So: we form something of a therapy group—we are here to advise each other, encourage each other, and listen to each other. Your thesis will be better if we work hard together.

WHO IS IN CHARGE (of my grade)?

You have an advisor for your thesis. You should follow the direction of your thesis advisor, who after all is your intellectual mentor, and who in any case will have the major (indeed final) voice in your grade for this course.

But you are also responsible for the material assigned in this course and for the assignments that I ask you to complete. I will grade them. At the end of the semester, I will—candidly—report your grades on the assignments and my overall assessment (grade) to your advisor, who will then assign your final grade. Substantial progress on the thesis during this fall term is required if you are to continue with the thesis in January. If satisfactory progress is not made, you will not continue with the thesis beyond December. “Satisfactory progress” can be defined as a joint determination between me and (especially) your thesis adviser and committee that you have progressed satisfactorily to warrant continued work on the thesis. In addition, you must plan a meeting of your full thesis committee for early December to discuss your progress. (This is a requirement of both the IR and PS majors).

A Note to IR Majors (that PS majors should read too)

This seminar is required of PS major thesis writers, but for IR majors it is entirely optional and voluntary. Those who have taken it have found it useful, and the research issues raised in IR have been instructive for all of us. IR majors should make sure to inform their thesis advisors of the voluntary nature of the seminar, and please let them know of the procedures listed immediately above under “who is in charge?” Please give your thesis adviser the second copy of the syllabus that I provided.

Letter Grades

As to grading: the PS department requires that we assign a letter grade for Fall 2012. IR major faculty advisors may choose to do this as well, or they may choose to assign the traditional grade of “Y” in the Fall, with the final letter grade for both semesters to be assigned in May. IR majors should ask their advisors which they want to do. Either way is entirely acceptable.

DESIGN OF THE COURSE

A major assumption of this seminar is that thinking through each discrete intellectual step of your thesis is the most important task that you face. A second assumption is that writing is hard, but the cure is...well...to write early and often. For this reason, we will focus on thinking and writing more so than reading. In particular, as you will see below, you have to think through the following:

• a.] Just exactly what is your research purpose? What are the specific research questions that you intend to answer?
b. To what extent have these questions been addressed in previous scholarly research? Has someone already researched your question? How do you find it? How do you know if the prior research is sound? What is there to praise or criticize? What is your own “niche” in this literature? How will you build on or depart from previous research?

c. Exactly what methodology do you plan to employ as you seek your own answers to your research questions? Imagine this: you are sitting in the library working on your thesis: what exactly are you doing? Are you collecting statistics of one form or another? Are you writing a narrative history? Or what? And what is the connection between your research questions and the methodology that you have chosen?

d. What software tools can I use to facilitate my research?

e. How should I organize the completed package? Is there a “standard” way to organize the completed thesis? What about tables, graphics, and bibliographic style?

These issues will preoccupy us for the fall term. In January or early February, we may meet one last time, but from that point forward you are back in the hands of your mentor/adviser. By then, you should already be in the process of completing the research and writing it up, with a mind to having a rough draft by early April.

The important point here is that answers to the questions that I have listed above [a-e] must come mostly from your own thinking—guided of course by our discussions. A lot of additional reading will not help here—in my opinion, it can actually be a hindrance. For this reason, you will not find a great deal of assigned reading per se. Nonetheless, I assume that as we cover each topic, you are reading into your own thesis topic, and I also assume that you will be completing readings that help you master the questions listed above. The assignments for the course will encourage this. I will consult with you about readings that will help with each intellectual step, and you should also consult with your thesis advisor on each topic that we cover as you seek readings that will help with your particular topic.

ASSIGNMENTS IN ADDITION TO THOSE LISTED BELOW (to be discussed)

- Enter short profile and topic summary in “Forum” section of Trunk site;
- Complete your section on class spreadsheet that is making the rounds;
- Adopt “Refworks” or some similar software for organizing literature and bibliographies;
- Find a “model” piece of research that treats your research question(s) and read it by Sept 11; prepare to discuss it;
- If your research will include contact with human subjects, read the link on Tufts/IRB regulations—it will be posted under “Resources” on our Trunk site;
- If your research anticipates interviewing political leaders or policy makers, read Professor Jeffrey Berry’s essay on interviewing techniques; it is posted under “Resources/Assigned Readings” on our Trunk site;

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sept 4</th>
<th>Introduction and Overview</th>
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Note: in addition to Trunk posting instructions listed below, all assignments must be handed to me and to your thesis advisor in hard copy …not by email.
I. Clarifying and Finalizing Your Research Questions: From General Topic to Specific Research Questions

-L.W. Political Analysis, chs 14, 1, 2.

-Find a “model” piece of research that treats your research question(s) and read it by Sept 11; prepare to discuss it

IR Program Research Planner: at the following link, read everything under Step 3 (Choosing a Research Topic) and Steps 4, 4a, and 4b (Developing a Research Question & Puzzle; Types of Research Question). I realize that you are probably already beyond step 3 (you have a topic), but it doesn’t hurt to review:

http://irn.tccs.tufts.edu/research_planner/

[specific links will also be on Trunk: Resources/Assigned Readings]

I will lead discussion for the first day of this topic (Sept 11). Then we will shift to a discussion of your research questions (September 25, Oct 2 & 9). Each member of the seminar will have 15 minutes, so prepare to state your questions succinctly.

Assignment 1

Part 1: (due by Monday 9/23 at 12 noon by posting on Trunk (Forums), the logistics of which we will discuss). Write a short (1-3 page) paper in which you do the following: First, summarize the theoretical, policy, political, normative, or other importance of your research topic in a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Second, precisely list the specific research questions that you will pursue. Be as specific and detailed as possible. As we will have discussed, it is entirely possible —indeed it is likely—that your thesis will involve a combination of theoretical, policy, or normative questions. That’s fine, but it is important to list them all precisely in this short paper. Review notes from our discussions: your research questions will literally determine everything you do from here on out: what scholarly literature you review; the methodology(ies) that you adopt; and what information and data that you collect. So it is important to get the questions right.

Part 2: (due before class on Wed 9/25): using Trunk’s facility for providing feedback, read over your colleagues posting of Part 1 and —depending upon your interest and expertise— provide advice, constructive criticism, praise, or questions in response to at least some of them.

Final Discussion and Refinement of Your Research Questions (based on posting of Assignment 1)

II. Finding and Aggressively Evaluating Scholarly Literature and Determining Your “Niche” Within It: An afternoon with Librarians (9/18). Read the following in preparation

At the following link, read everything under Step 5 (Finding and Evaluating Scholarly Literature). Please also read the embedded link “Step 7: Making Faculty Contacts”. There are also links to .pdfs and guides that the library provides, but these have largely been superseded by the new Tisch electronic research guides. Still, look them over and take note if useful.

http://irn.tccs.tufts.edu/research_planner/

also: carefully look over my power point: “Finding and Aggressively Evaluating Scholarly
Assignment 2

Literature", which is under “Resources” on Trunk.

also read: Jeffrey Knopf, “Doing a Literature Review,” posted under “Resources/Assigned readings”.

Oct 16:
I will lead a brief discussion of how to write a literature review, but it will be pretty interactive and we will talk about your topics. We will discuss the literature that you have found and evaluated (or not found and why). Please go back and review the Knopf reading listed above as well as my power point.

Assignment 2 (all of the following due in one posting by Oct 22 at 5 pm)

The end result of this assignment is a review and evaluation of the scholarly literature that addresses your specific research questions. Length is indeterminate, other than to say that it should cover the relevant major literature and that the more you write now, the less you will have to write later (10-15 pages is about right).

Please organize the written assignment under the following section headings.

Consultation with expert colleagues: make an appointment with at least two experts at Tufts or the wider Boston area who have conducted research related to your thesis. Do not conduct the discussion by e-mail. Discuss with that person the most important published research contributions related to your specific research questions. In particular, ask them about “holy grail” publications that overview research controversies and results related to your thesis. Ask them about interesting or innovative research that you should investigate or to suggest particular articles that evaluate research on your questions. You might also ask if there are important research questions that have not been adequately researched (or only poorly so). Report the results of these conversations in the first part of the assignment (“Conversation with Experts”). Try to keep it brief and to the point (1-2 pages). No: the experts may not be your thesis advisor (although your advisor might recommend her/him).

Consultation with Librarian (1-2 paragraphs): Make an appointment with Ms. Connie Reik in the Tisch Library (I will warn her of this). Explore the bibliographic tools that will help you find the scholarly literature that you need. Make sure you know how to use inter-library loan at this early stage so as to forestall panicky last-minute requests next March. Ask about the software tools (RefWorks; Endnote) that might help you automate your note-taking and bibliography building (which can be a major chore if left until last). Briefly report the results of this consultation in a brief paragraph or two.

Review and Evaluation of Scholarly Literature. Write a review and evaluation of the literature that addresses your research questions. Note what I said above about length. At least one of the works covered should be what I have called a “holy grail” resource, that is, a review article or book that overviews the state of research on your research questions (simply mark it with an asterisk [*]) in the references/bibliography. We will have discussed what should be included in a literature review—and each person’s may be different—but I would think that all of us should address: a.) the research questions pursued in scholarly research; b.) the methods/methodologies employed in scholarly research; c.) the results; and d.) the strengths, weaknesses, or other aspects of the research that you can identify—take the time to provide an active energetic evaluation.

Your Niche: conclude the assignment with a brief (1 page) section in which you describe how your thesis research will address gaps or weaknesses in the existing scholarly research on your topic. As we will have discussed in class, this frequently takes the form of a “BUT” statement, as in “The existing research provides an adequate answer to several important
questions BUT it does not adequately address…..my questions.” Or more specifically, perhaps, “The existing research provides several answers to my research question, BUT there are several weaknesses in the way that the research was done, and I hope to correct these in my thesis.” There may be other ways to describe your niche; feel free to offer them.

Oct 23

**III. Methodology: Exactly How You Will Answer Your Research question (also: Operational Definitions)**

- alternative ways to answer research questions
- qualitative versus quantitative research
- inductive versus deductive research
- description, correlation, causation, prediction

*Reading for this topic is above average in importance*

Following links are on Trunk/Resources as well
http://irn.tccs.tufts.edu/research_planner/6.cfm
http://irn.tccs.tufts.edu/research_planner/6a.cfm
LW, Political Analysis, chs 2 (review thoroughly), 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Oct 30 & Nov 6

**III. Methodology continued: Stating hypotheses clearly (where applicable)**


**Assignment 3**

**Assignment 3: Hypotheses and Methodologies** (due November 5 by 5pm by posting on Trunk)

Let us assume that you have now settled on precise research questions, as covered under topic 1 and expressed in Assignment 1 (but later perhaps revised). This assignment is very simple: for each of the research questions that you are now pursuing, provide a brief description of a.) the hypotheses that you have developed to predict the answer to each research question; and b.) the exact methodologies that you will use to answer the question (test the hypothesis). There is no required page-length for this assignment; the only requirement is that you do a thorough job with a.] and b. ]

November 13

**Rudimentary Statistics; Software for Statistics and Presentation; [or] Using Tables and Graphics Effectively [for those who need it]**

LW, Political Analysis, chs 13, 10, 11

November 20

**Pulling It Together: Is There a Standard Format or Style for Every Thesis? [and/or: Using Tables and Graphics Effectively]**

**Assignment 4**

**Due December 21 by 5pm.** This will be discussed in class. Basically, I am going to ask you to transform Assignments 1-3 into the first two or three chapters of the thesis. It can be done!