

Designing your Dissertation, Part I

Political Science 481, Fall 2024

Tuesdays, 10:30–11:50pm

<https://canvas.stanford.edu>

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May be updated

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Objectives:

The primary objective of this two-quarter course sequence is to guide students through a structured process for developing and completing their dissertation prospectus. In this first quarter (Part I), students will engage in essential steps toward constructing the core components of a prospectus, including defining research questions, reviewing existing literature, developing theoretical frameworks, and designing research methodologies. By the end of the quarter, students will have refined their research focus and made substantial progress on drafting their prospectus.

The course emphasizes collaboration, providing opportunities for feedback from both peers and faculty to help refine each participant's work at every stage of the research process.

Please note that this syllabus serves as a preliminary plan for the fall quarter. Adjustments may be made based on the evolving needs of the participants. Updated versions of the syllabus will be posted on canvas.stanford.edu.

Expectations and Assignments:

The seminar will operate collaboratively. Members are expected to participate energetically in all seminar sessions and provide extensive feedback to other participants.

Each participant will complete a series of written assignments. Descriptions and due dates appear in the timeline at the end of this syllabus.

Texts: There are no textbooks for this class

Students with Documented Disabilities:

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) located within the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). SDRC staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the SDRC as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk, phone (650) 723-1066.

PLAN FOR THE QUARTER

PART 1: ORIENTATION, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND EXISTING LITERATURE

Tuesday, September 24 (Week 1): Orientation

During the first meeting, we will discuss plans for the fall quarter and share tips about how to structure your time to ensure success during the third year. We will also invite each member of the seminar to say a few words about the progress they have made to date in coming up with their dissertation ideas, and we will divide the class into two groups for the purpose of scheduling presentations later in the quarter. Finally, we will hear brief presentations from students who have already written their prospectuses and have volunteered to describe the process, discuss things that went well and things that could have gone better, and offer a few tips as you embark on your own prospectus-writing journey.

Sunday, September 29: Deadline for Group 1 to Submit Research Questions

Each member of Group 1 will submit a brief memo (maximum 2 single-spaced pages) that describes and motivates their research question. What is your research question? Why is it important? What is the current state of knowledge about the question, and where do you hope to make a contribution? Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, October 1 (Week 2): Presentations by Group 1 on Research Questions

Each member of Group 1 will make a brief presentation (maximum 7 minutes) that describes and motivates their research question. Before we meet, all members of the class should read the memos circulated on September 29 and come prepared to offer constructive comments for the presenters.

Sunday, October 6: Deadline for Group 2 to Submit Research Questions

Each member of Group 2 will submit a brief memo (up to 2 single spaced pages) that describes and motivates their research question. What is your research question? Why is it important? What is the current state of knowledge about the question, and where do you hope to make a contribution? Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, October 8 (Week 3): Presentations by Group 2 on Research Questions

Each member of Group 2 will make a brief presentation (maximum 7 minutes) that describes and motivates their research question. Before we meet, all members of the class should read the memos circulated on October 6 and come prepared to offer constructive comments for the presenters.

Sunday, October 13: Deadline for Inviting Faculty to Join Prospectus Committee

Each member of the class must invite three faculty members to join their prospectus committee. Email Jens and Mike no later than 5pm, indicating who you invited to join your committee and whether they have already accepted or not.

Sunday, October 13: Deadline for Submitting Literature Reviews

Each member of the class must submit a brief memo (maximum 4 single-spaced pages) that summarizes the existing literature on their research question. Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, October 15 (Week 4): Peer Discussion of Literature Reviews

At this class meeting, students will meet in pairs to discuss the literature review memos that were circulated on October 13. Before we meet, Jens and I will assign partners. Each member of the class should carefully read the memos written by their assigned partners and come prepared to offer constructive comments.

PART 2: THEORY AND OBSERVABLE IMPLICATIONS

Sunday, October 20: Deadline Group 1 to submit Theory Memos

Each member of Group 1 will submit a brief memo (maximum 4 single-spaced pages) that describes their theory and/or hypotheses. The nature of this memo will vary by project. At a minimum, describe the argument you hope to make and what you see as its observable implications. Where appropriate, provide details about the actors, their goals, the constraints they face, and how you expect them to interact. Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, October 22 (Week 5): Presentations by Group 1 on Theory

Each member of Group 1 will make a brief presentation (maximum 7 minutes) about their theory. Before we meet, all members of the class should read the memos circulated on October 20 and come prepared to offer constructive comments for the presenters.

Sunday, October 27: Deadline for having approved prospectus committee

Each member of the class must have an approved prospectus committee and a plan for meeting with members of the committee. Email Jens and Mike no later than 5pm, indicating who you confirmed to serve on your committee and describing your plan for meeting with committee members.

Sunday, October 27: Deadline for Group 2 to Submit Theory Memos

Each member of Group 2 will submit a brief memo (maximum 4 single-spaced pages) that describes their theory and/or hypotheses. The nature of this memo will vary by project. At a minimum, describe the argument you hope to make and what you see as its observable implications. Where appropriate, provide details about the actors, their goals, the constraints they face, and how you expect them to interact. Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, October 29 (Week 6): Presentations by Group 2 on Theory

Each member of Group 2 will make a brief presentation (maximum 7 minutes) about their theory. Before we meet, all members of the class should read the memos circulated on October 27 and come prepared to offer constructive comments for the presenters.

PART 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Tuesday, November 5 (Week 7): No Class

November 5 is Democracy Day, a university holiday.

Sunday, November 10: Deadline for Group 1 to Submit Research Design

Each member of Group 1 will submit a brief memo (maximum 6 single-spaced pages) that describes their research design. The nature of this memo will vary by project. For empirical projects, identify your dependent and independent variables; say whether your plan involves observational and/or experimental research, a specific identification strategy, and qualitative and/or qualitative data; and provide details so that other members of the class can offer feedback. For purely theoretical projects, provide a detailed summary of how you will conduct your research. Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, November 12 (Week 8): Presentations by Group 1 on Research Design

Each member of Group 1 will make a brief presentation (maximum 7 minutes) about their research design. Before we meet, all members of the class should read the memos circulated on November 10 and come prepared to offer constructive comments for the presenters.

Sunday, November 17: Deadline for Group 2 to Submit Research Design

Each member of Group 2 will submit a brief memo (maximum 6 single-spaced pages) that describes their research design. The nature of this memo will vary by project. For empirical projects, identify your dependent and independent variables; say whether your plan involves observational and/or experimental research, a specific identification strategy, and qualitative and/or qualitative data; and provide details so that other members of the class can offer feedback. For purely theoretical projects, provide a detailed summary of how you will conduct your research. Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, November 19 (Week 9): Presentations by Group 2 on Research Design

Each member of Group 2 will make a brief presentation (maximum 7 minutes) about their research design. Before we meet, all members of the class should read the memos circulated on November 10 and come prepared to offer constructive comments for the presenters.

PART 4: COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

Sunday, November 24: Deadline for Getting Feedback from Committee

By this date, all members of the class should have met with their committee at least once and collected feedback on their projects. Email Jens and Mike no later than 5pm to confirm that you have completed this step.

Tuesday, November 26: Thanksgiving Break

Sunday, December 1: Deadline for Submitting Summary of Committee Feedback

All members of the class will prepare a brief memo (maximum 4 single-spaced pages) that summarizes the feedback they received from their committee and how they plan to implement the feedback. Submit your memo as a PDF to Jens and Mike no later than 5pm.

Tuesday, December 3 (Week 10): Peer Discussion of Committee Feedback

At this class meeting, students will meet in pairs to discuss the committee feedback memos that were circulated on December 1. Before we meet, Jens and I will assign partners. Each member of the class should carefully read the memos written by their assigned partners and come prepared to offer constructive comments.