

## Thesis Guidelines (Thesis Tutorial)

**Meet:** Quasi-weekly

**Instructor:** Jack Reilly

[jreilly@ncf.edu](mailto:jreilly@ncf.edu)

**Office:** SSC 205

**Description:** A senior thesis is the culmination of your years of work at New College. It serves both as a capstone on your time here and as an illustration of what your education has wrought to your peers, professors, and broader social network. It's a display of your abilities, skills, interests, and labor. That said, **the thesis should not be that intimidating. It is just another class** (as can be seen by the fact that you're currently reading a syllabus for it), and like any other class, so long as you follow along with the reading and meeting your deadlines, you'll "sat" and have a successful thesis at the end. The only difference is that, similar to an ordinary tutorial but more so, most of the actual content of the course is up to you.

The aim of this document is to help you write your thesis, and the aim of the thesis tutorial is to give you support and sounding boards for your work from both your fellow students and from me as your thesis advisor as you work through the process. This also outlines my core expectations, guidelines, and deadlines for your thesis.<sup>1</sup>

**Prerequisites:** Thesis year status, Research Design Workshop, extensive coursework in area of interest. Students should either have taken "Quantitative Political Analysis II" or be taking it with the first semester of their thesis tutorial unless their thesis is purely qualitative or theoretical, in which case alternate advanced methods courses should be investigated.

### **Suggested Books**

- Baglioni, 2016. *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science*. CQ Press.
- Lipson, 2005. *How To Write a BA Thesis*. Chicago.
- Becker, 2007. *Writing for Social Scientists*. Chicago.
- Turabian, 2013. *A Manual for Writers*. Chicago.

### **Thesis Requirements**

#### **1. Tutorial Meetings**

1. Group meetings (every other week)
2. Optional Individual meetings (every other week)

#### **2. Weekly Progress Reports** (<https://forms.gle/r6D2GP8FA8PLUoJB9>) and/or Trello

#### **3. Thesis Deadlines**

1. Week 3, fall semester: outline of thesis and working bibliography
2. End of mod 1 (fall semester): draft of chapter 1
3. End of mod 2 (fall semester): draft of chapter 2

---

<sup>1</sup> Most of which are negotiable with me - this is your thesis, after all, not mine.

4. End of ISP: recommended time for first results (if applicable)<sup>2</sup>
5. Week 5, spring semester: draft of chapter 3
6. End of mod 1 (spring semester): re-draft of chapters 1-3, intro, conclusion
- 4. Final Draft** (submitted to committee 1-2 weeks before baccalaureate defense)
- 5. Baccalaureate Exam Defense**
- 6. Final Copy** (submitted to library)

**Tutorial Meetings:** The tutorial is a full-credit course devoted to doing the work for your thesis. We will meet every week to talk about your progress. Every other week will be a group meeting, and the off weeks will be individual meetings. Individual weekly meetings are at your and my discretion: we have them when either or both of us wants to have one. You're welcome to meet with me every off week if you like, but are not required to do so.

**Weekly Progress Reports:** Each week, with your tutorial meeting, you submit a report on your thesis progress to me. This is not meant to be onerous (it should take five minutes) but serves as a way to show me what you've done and for you to plan what you're going to do next week. It should include three parts: what you did on your thesis last week, what you will do this coming week (your "minimal" or "realistic" goal), and what you hope to get done this next week (your "maximal" or "stretch" goal).

Progress reports can be submitted here: <https://forms.gle/r6D2GP8FA8PLUoJB9>

### **Thesis Deadlines**

There are only five additional deadlines I've set, aside from those imposed by the college.

**Outline and Bibliography** (end of week 3, fall): you should submit a detailed outline of your thesis, including abstract, tentative chapter titles, titled subsections, and a brief paragraph addressing goals of each section. This outline should include two components of self-assessment: first, a narrative at the end (that can be broken up by chapter and/or section) that identifies what still needs to be done for each component of the thesis, and second, a "guess" next to each chapter indicating how much of the work is done as a percentage of the whole. In addition to your outline, include your working bibliography. You will still add things from this stage, of course; I just want to see what you're working with so far.

**Chapter Drafts (3):** Each chapter draft, while still a draft, must be complete. (If you want to think of it this way, this is not a "first draft", but a "rough draft.") Like your outline, I would like a brief self-assessment with each chapter: what you think still need work on, what you're happy with and not, etc. (Think of this as updating your outline document from above with every chapter submission). Your introduction and conclusion can be written whenever you like, but I recommend doing them during spring semester while I'm reading over your final chapter draft. (Some people like writing the introduction earlier in the thesis process - that's fine, too.)

---

<sup>2</sup> If you are conducting an experiment, this guideline is more appropriate for when you will be running your study.

Once you receive my edits on your chapters, and implement them to my satisfaction, you may schedule your baccalaureate defense. (For your benefit - I will not acquiesce to you scheduling a baccalaureate defense until I am confident you can pass. While this may sound intimidating, think of it this way: if I've let you schedule a bacc defense, you know I'm on your side.)

**Final Pre-Baccalaureate Draft:** A copy of your thesis, complete with three chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion, submitted to me for final edits before you send it to the rest of your committee. (Note you may still have appendices and bibliography to prepare/polish at this point, but the narrative text should be largely complete.)

**Evaluation:** For a satisfactory evaluation for your fall tutorial, you must meet all fall deadlines by the end of the semester (outline, chapter 1 draft, and chapter 2 draft). For your spring tutorial, a satisfactory evaluation will result if you meet your two spring chapter deadlines (chapter 3, final pre-bacc draft) as well as successfully defending and finishing your thesis.

### **Thesis Structure & Guidelines**

I generally recommend a three chapter thesis, with an additional short introduction and conclusion, although we may mutually agree on a separate outline. Generally speaking, your three substantive chapters consist of a literature review chapter, a theory and research design chapter, and an analysis chapter. (Your theory may also be contained in your literature review, or spread over both literature review and research design chapters, depending on your preference). When you write these chapters, I highly encourage you to focus on *quality* over *quantity*: a common misconception is that theses must be very long to be of acceptable quality. In contrast, in my experience, some of the best theses I've read have been short, concise, and focused on a particular problem. If you have 100 good pages to write, write 100 good pages. But if you have 50 good pages, write 50. A good rule of thumb - start off by shooting for the following:

1. Intro (2-5 pages)
2. Literature Review (15-20 pages)
3. Theory & Research Design (6-10 pages)
4. Analysis & Discussion (10-20 pages)
5. Conclusion (2-5 pages)

This yields approximately 35 to 60 pages, not including bibliographies, title pages, acknowledgements, and the like.<sup>3</sup> Thesis length will naturally fluctuate widely depending on the student and requirements of the topic (thus, an emphasis on the words "guideline" and "rule of thumb" here, rather than "requirement") but this serves as a decent starting point.

---

<sup>3</sup> Be sure to consult library thesis formatting guidelines for all required components before your bacc and library copies: <https://sites.google.com/a/ncf.edu/thesis/Thesis-Guidelines?pli=1>

There are other ways of writing a thesis, as well. For example:

- **Classic Theses** (in empirical political science) generally fit the format above.
- **Portfolio Theses** contain three separate essays (chapters) connected by an overall theme. They tend to require more thorough introductions and conclusions to link together their separate chapters, but can be less imposing than a single-topic thesis.
- **Multi-Study Theses** contain more than one core study on the same topic.
- **Replication Theses** reproduce, with new studies and/or data, results from a prior work in the field, and can fit into any of the above three kinds.
- **Political Theory Theses** often look like more focused portfolio theses, with three essays on a related topic, but can form a single (very) high quality in depth essay as well. (I encourage more the latter than the former, in fact.)
- **APA Style Theses** tend to be more quantitatively or experimentally oriented and follow the APA article style. These theses tend to be used by political psychology students.

In general, I encourage students to err on the side of doing *less* at *higher quality* rather than doing *more* at *lower quality*. The goal of a thesis is to conduct interesting *original research*, not produce pages of prose. When we discuss your thesis layout, you may be surprised to find me recommend you avoid a multi-study thesis in favor of something more focused, or recommend you spend more time on your experimental design or data analysis as opposed to generating pages of writing. Make sure to talk with me before heading too far down any path.

### **Thesis Examples**

Students often ask for example theses to look at to guide their structure. While I generally encourage students to model their work off of articles they have read in their field as opposed to other student's theses, the following theses are all examples of successful theses at New College. Note, however, that any of the following theses will still have their issues - don't assume that because it's in this list it's perfect (the authors of these theses, I'm sure, could tell you better than I can what they would have liked to have been better).

Carl Backen (multi-study thesis, quantitative, economics and policy centric)

Leigh Barber (classic thesis format, 50-state US sample, student constructed dataset)

Jack Belk (classic thesis format, quantitative/computational/big data, US politics)

Zach Conn (political theory, portfolio style thesis)

Isaac Duerr (quantitative, international)

Danielle Gaden (classic thesis format, quantitative survey analysis)

Matthew Kirchman (comparative qualitative case studies with quantitative components)

Evan Murphy (political psychology, APA format, experiment, online sample)

Kim Napoline (classic thesis format, quantitative, student constructed dataset)

Raina Nelson (classic thesis format, quantitative survey analysis)

Paige Pellaton (classic thesis format, quantitative survey analysis)

Eugenia Quintanilla (political psychology, APA format, experiment, online sample)

Melissa Rettig (historical analysis)

Audrey Ryan (classic thesis format, experiment, multi-college sample)  
Sarah Scully (multi-study, historical survey, quantitative, student constructed dataset)  
Pariesa Young (political psychology, classic thesis format, experiment, local Sarasota sample)  
Mollie Saumier (classic thesis format, comparative political behavior)  
Malorie Sneed (multi-study thesis, quantitative, student constructed dataset)  
Hannah Yates (classic thesis format, experiment, New College student sample)

### **Presenting Your Work**

Research is made to be shown to others; it isn't done just for yourself. This is why you present your work at your baccalaureate defense (and write your research up in a thesis format in the first place). Once you finish, I encourage you to also consider presenting your work at a conference. Please consult with me for appropriate opportunities; previous students have successfully presented at both professional political science conferences (such as the Florida Political Science Association Annual Conference) as well as the New College New Scholars Conference.

New College also has a student-run scholarly journal: Aeolus. If interested, and your thesis is of high enough quality, you might consider publishing your work there.

### **Final Requirements: The Baccalaureate Defense and Library Submission**

At the end of the thesis process, there are two required steps for graduation: first, you must present and defend your work to your baccalaureate committee, and second, you must submit your work (with an abstract signed by your thesis sponsor) to the library.

#### **For the baccalaureate defense:**

- Schedule early, and go during bacc week! It is hard to find times all members of your committee can meet - faculty members are very busy - and you want to be able to get a time convenient to them and you. You will also want time after your bacc to make any changes and tweaks you want to the document itself.
- Be prepared to submit your thesis to your committee one to two weeks ahead of time. (Before you do this, it must be approved by me.)
- Schedule two hours for your bacc itself, and think about including an extra half hour ahead of time for you to set up and get comfortable, etc. (This is especially the case if you're bringing food or refreshments of some sort.)
- Bring copies of your transcript (found on SES) and baccalaureate audit form for each member of your committee.
- **Practice** your presentation beforehand. Your bacc has many components aside from just your presentation, but this is the part you have the most control over: make sure you're comfortable with it!

#### **For the library thesis copy:**

- Be sure to consult library thesis formatting guidelines for all required components before your bacc and library copies: <https://sites.google.com/a/ncf.edu/thesis/Thesis-Guidelines>

- Make all changes (if any) requested by your committee members.
- Schedule a debrief meeting with me sometime after your thesis. We'll use this time to talk about potential changes, the overall thesis, and any final details that need to be taken care of before submission (appendices, etc.)
- **Don't forget** to get me, and any other primary sponsors, to **sign** your abstract before submission. The library will not take it if it is not signed, and if you don't have a submitted thesis, you can't graduate! Signed copies are typically due to the library by the Monday of finals week.

### **Wrapping Up**

Remember: what you get out of the thesis process is precisely what you put into the thesis process. One of the guiding principles of a New College education is never more true than in the thesis: your education is your own responsibility. You have many good advisors willing to spend lots of time to help you, and many resources to make use of at the college, but in the final analysis, you are designing your own research, with your own name on it. Take your time, work on the thesis weekly, and you'll have something you can be proud of at the end. It is a little intimidating, but should be mostly exciting: you have a whole year to learn more about something for nothing more than the joy of learning about it.

**Good luck!**