Senior Seminar  
Political Science BC 3761, section 5  

Fall 2011  
Wed., 4:10-6:00 pm  

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Office hours: Tue. 10am-12pm, and by appointment

Course Description  
Students will use this seminar to research and write the senior thesis. Regular meetings (some with the group as a whole, and others individually with the professor) will provide students with the resources, structure, and feedback that are necessary for the successful completion of the thesis.

Research and writing of the thesis is designed to serve as the capstone of the Barnard experience. The thesis process requires students to think creatively and critically, to complete in-depth, primary-source research, to make cogent and original arguments, and to write clearly and well. The path to completion is neither straight nor easy; throughout the semester, students will be expected to revise their research strategies, arguments, and writing. The research process itself will also uncover places where revisions in plans are necessary. Hence the final product will likely look somewhat different from the original design. At times, thesis research and writing can be very frustrating; but at times it will also be exhilarating. For those willing to put in the necessary time and effort, the thesis process is likely to bring great personal rewards: it will stretch students’ intellects and capabilities in new directions, and will help students find their own voices in their writing.

This is the second year when the Barnard Political Science Department senior thesis is designed to be a one-semester course. When students declared their majors sophomore year, this change had not yet gone into effect. This class-year is therefore considered transitional, and any student who wishes may ask to write a two-semester senior thesis instead. Students must decide on the two-semester option by Sept. 28, 2011. The first semester would then be a modified version of this syllabus, worked out with Prof. Marten, with at least 30 pages of original writing due on Dec. 14; and the second semester would be an independent study under Prof. Marten’s supervision, requiring at least 30 more pages of original writing by April 13, 2012. A two-semester thesis would receive 8 points of credit rather than 4, and students should be aware that the resulting thesis would therefore need to be much more rigorous and much more thoroughly researched than the regular thesis. The two-semester thesis is most appropriate for a student who is passionate about her topic, and wants to pursue it in great depth. Each semester of work will be graded separately; in other words, 4 points of work will be graded in December, and 4 points in May. Students wishing to pursue the two-semester option should be aware that the second semester would not include peer partner support or a pre-designed syllabus. The burden would be on the student to work independently and meet with Prof. Marten in office hours.

Learning Objectives  
Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:
- Turn a topic idea into a well-defined research question
- Craft a useful research design, based on a controversy in the literature
- Perform a thorough literature review of existing work on the question
- Perform rigorous and independent research, including the use of primary source materials
• Critically evaluate and synthesize arguments and evidence to reach an independent and creative argument
• Write a cogent and convincing 30-page (or longer) independent research paper

Course Requirements and Procedures
One copy of a thesis of at least 30 pages on an original research question in the field of political science is due at the instructor’s office on Wednesday, Dec. 14. The thesis should be bound in one of the standard fashions available at copy shops. It must be double-spaced, with consecutively numbered pages from start to finish. In addition to the 30 pages of substantive research and writing, it must also include a title page, a table of contents, and a bibliography of sources used. It must use a standard footnote citation system.

Most theses will include three chapters. The first will be a literature review that sets up the arguments to be tested and describes what other scholars have written on the topic. The second will present the student’s own research findings. The third will be a short, argumentative conclusion that links the first two chapters together. Prof. Marten will keep for her records the copy turned in, so students should also make a copy of the thesis for themselves. Students who are double majors are responsible for informing Prof. Marten of their status, and for seeing that the advisor in the second major also receives a copy.

In addition, students are required to participate in all group meetings of the seminar, to provide constructive critical feedback to their assigned partners, to attend all individual meetings scheduled with the professor, and to turn in intermediate written assignments as scheduled. The grade earned by the student for the course will reflect not merely the final semester product, but also performance on the intermediate assignments. Late assignments will be penalized, except in the event of a family or medical emergency. If you need to miss a class meeting or appointment, please notify Prof. Marten in advance.

Assigned Reading
One book has been put on reserve at the Barnard College library and copies have been ordered at Book Culture, 536 W. 112th Street:

Laura Roselle and Sharon Spray, Research and Writing in International Relations, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2012 [but available now]).
Class Schedule

**Before the start of the semester:**

1. Each student should send a brief email note to Prof. Marten outlining her initial topic ideas, so that Prof. Marten can prepare a list of internet database sources for our first class.
2. Each student should print up and bring to our first class meeting one article from a social science or policy journal, which takes a stand in the controversy that the student intends to explore in her thesis.

**Sept. 7. Introduction.**

In the first half of class today, students will meet each other and the professor, discuss their initial topic ideas, and be introduced to course expectations. Prof. Marten will assign peer partners based on initial topic ideas. For the second half of class today we will examine some of the internet database sources available to students both through the Columbia library web and elsewhere. If our assigned classroom does not have internet capability, we will adjourn to Prof. Marten’s office for the second half of class.

Assignments for the week that follows:

1. Read Roselle and Spray, chapters 1 and 3 (pp. 1-14 and 32-45).
2. Prepare a short oral statement to give in class on Sept. 14, with your initial formulation of your research question. Note that your ideas may change based on the material covered at the start of class next time.

**Sept. 14. Turning a topic into a research question.**

Today’s class will focus on the notion of causality, and the nuts and bolts of how to turn a topic interest into a good research question. In the second half of class, students will present their initial formulations of their research questions.

Assignments for the week that follows:

1. Read Roselle and Spray, chapters 2, 4, and 10-12 (pp. 15-31, 46-66, and 123-43). Browse through the “Project Resources” section (pp. 67-122) to look for useful ideas related to your topic interest if you are writing in international relations.
2. Browse through the first chapters of the theses on reserve at the Barnard Library for Prof. Marten’s section of this class. In each case, note especially how the author sets up the causal question being asked, as well as the design of the literature review.
3. Write a page-long preliminary description of a research question for your thesis, including a brief description of the research techniques you hope to use (i.e., a “baby research design”). **Due in class on Sept. 21.**
4. Begin work on your literature review annotated bibliography. **Draft bibliography is due in class on Oct. 12.** It should include at least 15 high-quality secondary sources, and at least 5 specific source locations of primary source material.

**Sept. 21. Preliminary research question description due today.** At the start of class we will meet as a group to discuss topics of student interest. Then Prof. Marten will meet with each student individually to give feedback on the one-page research question description.

Assignment for the week that follows:

1. Write your 3- to 5-page research design, **due at the professor’s office and to your peer partner by 5pm on Friday, Sept. 30.**
2. Continue work on your annotated bibliography. Start reading through the substantive chapters of the senior theses on reserve for Prof. Marten’s course to get ideas.
Sept. 28. Individual meetings with professor to discuss progress.

Assignments for the week that follows:
1. Finish your 3- to 5-page research design. Give one copy to your peer partner and leave one copy at Prof. Marten’s office by **5 pm on Friday, Sept. 30**.
2. Review your peer partner’s research design; prepare an oral presentation for the class that summarizes and constructively critiques your partner’s design, referring back to the issues we’ve discussed in class concerning causality and social science methods. (The care you use in preparing a critique that points out both the strengths and weaknesses of your peer mentor’s design will count towards your final grade in the course. Does she have a well defined causal research question? Is her plan of action clear and logical? Will she be able to answer the question she sets for herself?)
3. Continue work on your annotated bibliography.

Oct. 5. Presentation by peer partners of research design critiques.

Assignments for the week that follows:
1. Review carefully both Prof. Marten’s and your peer partner’s critiques of your research design. Then rewrite the design to incorporate their comments, due on Oct. 12.
2. Finish your annotated bibliography, due on Oct. 12.
3. Begin your literature review for Chapter One.


Assignments for the week that follows:
1. Work on Chapter One, using your preliminary bibliography and research design.

Oct. 19. Individual meetings to discuss progress.

Assignment for the week that follows:
1. Write a substantial draft of Chapter One of your thesis, due on Friday, Oct. 28.


Assignments for the week that follows:
1. Finish Chapter One. Turn in one copy to Prof. Marten’s office and one copy to your peer partner by **5pm on Friday, Oct. 28**.
2. Review your peer partner’s Chapter One. Prepare an oral presentation for the class that summarizes and constructively critiques your partner’s chapter, referring back to the issues we’ve discussed in class concerning causality and social science methods. (The care you use in preparing a critique that points out both the strengths and weaknesses of your partner’s chapter will count towards your final grade in the course. Does she have a well defined causal research question, and has she clearly presented competing theories that address that question? Does her secondary-source research seem thorough?)
3. Begin research for Chapter Two. Continue to browse through the past theses on reserve for Prof. Marten’s course for ideas.

Friday, Oct. 28: Substantial draft of Chapter One due. Turn in one copy to Prof. Marten’s office by 5pm and one copy to your peer partner.
Nov. 2. Presentation of peer mentor critiques of first chapters.

Assignments for the week that follows:
1. Rewrite Chapter One, based on the critiques you received; due on Nov. 9.
2. Continue research for Chapter Two.

Nov. 9. Individual meetings to discuss progress. Rewrite of Chapter One due today.

Assignments for the week that follows:
1. Put aside Chapter One until December!
2. Continue research for Chapter Two.
3. Write a detailed outline of at least a full page, explaining how you will structure chapter two. Due on Nov. 16.

Nov. 16. Individual meetings to discuss progress. Chapter Two outline due today. We will go over this outline at our meeting, so that you have the feedback you need to complete your chapter.

Assignments for the two weeks that follow:
1. Write Chapter Two. Due on Nov. 30.

Nov. 23. No meeting; Wednesday afternoon before Thanksgiving holiday. Use the extra time this week to work on Chapter Two.

Nov. 30. Individual meetings to discuss progress. Substantial draft of Chapter Two due today.

Assignments for the following week (this is crunch time!):
1. Write a draft of Chapter Three (this should be a short chapter). Due on Dec. 7.
2. Continue work on Chapter Two (you will undoubtedly not be done with it yet).
3. Make any final changes necessary to Chapter One.

Dec. 7. Individual meetings to discuss progress. We will go over my comments on Chapter Two and review your draft Chapter Three.