

ISCOR 497, Senior Thesis
Jonathan Graubart
Fall 2014
graubart@mail.sdsu.edu
119 Nasatir Hall
Office Hours: Tues-Thurs: 10:53-12:06 and by appointment

Eligibility: Consent of instructor, nine units of ISCOR core courses and nine units in selected specialization.

Course Description:

This is not a conventional course. There will be no regular weekly meetings. Rather, through a series of intermediary steps and with the guidance of two faculty members, you will write a substantial work of academic research. The senior thesis is an original and extensive research paper on a topic in the broad discipline of international affairs. The appeal of the course is that it enables you to pursue a theme from a prior upper level course that especially intrigued you, such as human rights, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nuclear proliferation, or imperialism. Now you can be one of the few experts on the topic.

Be aware that **this will be the most difficult course you have taken in your undergraduate career. Preparation of this paper will require more work than any other course on your schedule. This is not something you can put off until the last few weeks. Be prepared to engage in extensive research, work on a variety of subtopics, and work on multiple revisions.**

Accordingly, consider carefully whether you have the right motivation and the time and energy to undergo this commitment. If you are working full time and taking four other courses, you will not be likely to succeed in this course. If you are not self-motivated and usually require close supervision as a student, you will also be unlikely to do well in this course. Most senior theses involve multiple chapters and total from 35 to 50 pages.

If you decide to take this course, keep in mind that you only have one semester to complete the thesis. Thus, you need to select a topic quickly and find a faculty member willing to serve as your chair. Normally, I will serve as the second reader. It is strongly recommended that you select a topic with which you already have considerable familiarity and which flows from a previous learning experience you have had in an upper level ISCOR or ISCOR-related class. You need to find a chair and decide on an approved topic by the end of the second week of the semester. You will then meet regularly with your chair (typically once every two weeks) and provide written summaries of your progress.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Develop expertise in a specific topic
- Engage in comprehensive independent research
- Develop skills at revisions, self-editing, and incorporation of critiques from your adviser

- Engage in sophisticated critical analysis
- Develop your own analytical and theoretical synthesis
- Develop sophisticated writing skills

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at 619-594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Getting Started:

Build on what you already know. Use a prior 300 or 400 level ISCOR or ISCOR-related course you found rewarding. Then, think about a specific topic from that course that especially interested you and consider what more you would like to know.

Find a professor who will agree to supervise your thesis. You are strongly advised to select a professor you liked from a prior upper level ISCOR or ISCOR-related course and make sure that your thesis topic is relevant to the professor's interests. Arrange an appointment early with the professor to discuss your thesis. Be mindful of the fact that your professor could decline to work with you for a variety of reasons. It is a bad idea to select a professor with whom you have not previously taken a class. I will need to approve the selection of your chair.

The Senior Thesis:

The specifics of your thesis are to be worked out with your chair and myself. Most theses will generally include the following:

1. An Introduction:

The introduction states what your topic entails. This can take the form of an interesting and important puzzle, of a clearly spelled out normative or philosophical argument, or of a well-delineated question concerning the development and significance of a specific historical phenomenon.

For instance, if you are interested in the development of international humanitarian law, you could choose to focus on the effectiveness of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in international politics. That would form your main question. Your introduction would then set up the question, and also give the reader a sense of why it is an important one.

This may include:

a. A clear account of the main concepts you will employ. In this example, what exactly do you mean by “effectiveness”? How would you measure or establish it? Is it possible that an institution, such as the ICC, that is “effective” from the standpoint of certain elite interests could be “ineffective” from a different standpoint?

b. An account of competing theoretical paradigms or policy orientations that pertain to the question at hand. In this example, are there competing theories in International Relations that would lead one to expect the ICC to be ineffective or effective? How do these different theories inform your approach to the question?

c. An explanation of how you will answer your question and the kind of evidence will you bring in. This evidence can be of an empirical, historical, or philosophical character.

d. A quick summary of the structure of your argument, and the logic and content of the chapters following the introduction.

2. A background section on your topic:

For example, if you picked the ICC, you should explain what it is and how it emerged. Depending on how much detail is necessary to make sense of your question, this can be either a separate chapter or incorporated into another chapter.

3. A review of the debates pertinent to your topic:

These debates can be of a political or theoretical character. In the example of the ICC it may be useful to provide a sense not only of the scholarly debates around the question, but also of the arguments about it that circulate in political discourse, be it at elite or popular level.

4. Your argument:

This is your most important section because it provides your original research and explains your contribution to the topic. This is, of course, the heart of your work and should be substantial in length, cogent, and well integrated with the other components of your thesis. While the research paper may not turn out to be original in the strictest sense, it should express your own distinctive understanding of the question you chose, and should develop an argument that goes well beyond a mere restatement of existing positions or a few cursory impressions.

5. Your conclusion:

What did you learn? What are the implications of what you learned? On the basis of your findings, which further avenue of research should be pursued?

Course Requirements and Important Dates:

1) Find a chair, submit a 2-3 page proposal that summarizes your thesis topic and discusses your plan of research. You must have all of this done by the end of the second week (**September 4**). **You will also need to inform me in writing that you have read through all of the deadlines and will strictly comply with them all.** If you are unable to do so, you will be unable to enroll in the class (the deadline for adding is Sept. 4). Submit one copy of the proposal to your chair and one to me.

2) Introductory Statement, Extensive Outline and Preliminary Bibliography (**September 18**). Turn in one copy to me and one to your chair:

a. Introductory Statement: This statement should be two pages in length and set forth the main question or topic you are planning to address in your thesis. Think of it as a refinement of the initial proposal you prepared. It is important to have a sense of what your project will be and how you are planning to approach it in the thesis. In other words, you will need to have an idea of what kind of sources you will examine in order to make your argument. For instance, will you examine legislative actions to compare US and European welfare policies toward the elderly? Will you look to media reports and findings of human rights groups to investigate the extent of human rights violations in Latin American states? Will you read court opinions to assess the value of the International Court of Justice?

b. Preliminary Outline: The main purpose of an early outline is to get you to think in detail about your project. In this early stage of your work, your outline will necessarily be tentative and subject to change. Before you write your preliminary outline, you might make a list of subtopics or related variables you can think of in connection with your particular analysis. Then discard subtopics or possible variables that appear to be less central to your analysis. Finally, begin to create a logical outline of subtopics and variables that will lead to what you expect will be your conclusion.

c. A serious bibliography: You need to know what scholars have written about your topic so you will not be reinventing the wheel. The bibliography will help your readers to tell whether you are on the right track or not. Be sure to include mostly books and scholarly articles. Standard forms for bibliography include Kate Turabian's A Manual for Writers (available in most bookstores).

3) Rough Draft due **November 23**. Submit one copy to me and one to your chair.

The more complete the rough draft is, the more likely you will receive positive and specific suggestions for revision. Your chair's comments (I may also include some comments) will chiefly concern the substance of the draft. Do not expect your chair to help you with your spelling, grammar and other matters of form and language. It is your responsibility to do the extensive proofreading. I recommend finding someone to help you with style editing.

4) Final Version due **December 10**. Submit one copy to me and one copy to your chair.

The final thesis should be a revision and extension of the rough draft after you get it back with professors' comments. Be sure to incorporate your professors' suggestions in a way that you determine best articulates the arguments you wish to make.

Grading:

The evaluation of your thesis (by both members of your committee) will be based on the following considerations:

- The quality of your research.
- The clarity of formulating your questions and presenting your arguments.
- The analytical depth of your paper.
- The integration of your research and your argument.
- The originality of the work.
- The organization and the quality of writing.

Also affecting the overall grade will be the quality and timeliness of the preliminary assignments and the student's progress throughout the semester. Students who fail to submit the preliminary formal assignments on time will suffer substantial grade deductions. **If the readers suspect that plagiarism has occurred, there can be a submission for a computer analysis to help establish that a project is the author's own work.** Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for this thesis and will be reported to the university.

It is your responsibility to make sure that the members of your committee receive all materials in due time and in a suitable format. For example, sending these materials to them via email is only acceptable if they have agreed to it.