This Government and International Relations Department Brochure is written for majors in Government and in International Relations who may be interested in writing an Honors Thesis during their senior year. As such, it contains information for sophomores and juniors just beginning to think about doing Honors, and for seniors entering the program.
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I. Introduction

WHAT IS A THESIS?

A Government or International Relations thesis is a sustained, scholarly investigation of a problem, puzzle, or other important question. In many instances there is original research and often there is a contribution to the literature. Generally a thesis has 20,000 to 30,000 words of text. At 250 words per page, these figures translate into a typical length of 80-120 pages. A thesis differs from normal course work in a number of respects. The most obvious difference is in the sheer magnitude of the undertaking. In addition to being a large number of pages, a thesis represents a significant time commitment. Whatever your thesis topic, it has to be something about which you care enough to devote a year of your life.

Students enrolled in the Honors Program take Government 497 in the Fall Semester and 498 in the Spring Semester, receiving a total of eight (8) credits for their work. Successful completion of the first semester’s work earns the student a grade of “IP” (In Progress). At the end of the second semester, a letter grade is given for the written thesis and the oral defense, which applies to both semesters. A thesis must be of “A” or “A-” caliber.

A thesis deals with its topic in greater depth than a term paper can hope to attain. Unlike a series of term papers, moreover, it carries on its investigation continuously for approximately one hundred pages. Success is not merely a matter of intensive research and a few all-nighters; it requires planning, organization, and efficiency. Almost as much time will be spent in defining your topic and deciding how to handle it as will be spent in research and writing.

Thesis writing also differs from normal coursework in its environment. Thesis writing lacks all the reassuring structure of the classroom. There is no course description, no syllabus with a schedule for readings and exams, not even an instructor. All of these things are your responsibility and you must learn to work with a faculty advisor in order to meet these same responsibilities. This requires initiative and self-reliance.

WHY WRITE A THESIS?

The thesis can be the culmination of your undergraduate experience. If you are fascinated by some problem, if you want to study something in depth, if you welcome the opportunity to engage in original research and to work at the cutting edge of the discipline, then writing a thesis will be rewarding experience.

Seniors stress the need for a deep commitment to the thesis. This “commitment” is not necessarily a passionate love of the subject, but it is always a solid determination to invest the time and effort needed to see the thesis through to completion. Students with out this commitment tend to drop their thesis, or wish they had. Thesis writing tends to be
a mixture of highs and lows. Only commitment to your thesis can see you through the lows (when your computer erases a solid week’s work, for example).

WHY NOT WRITE A THESIS?

The following are the most-frequently-cited-and-wrong reasons for writing a thesis:

**I have to write one to get honors.**

*False.* At Connecticut College, Latin honors *(summa cum laude, magna cum laude, and cum laude)* are determined by your overall grade point average. “Distinction in the Major Field” is awarded to students based upon their grade point average in courses taken for the major. (For a detailed discussion of these standards and calculations, see “Academic Honors” in the *Connecticut College Catalogue.* Writing a thesis determines only whether you will graduate with “Honors Study in the Major Field.”

**I have to write one to get into law / graduate school.**

*False.* A thesis is only one part of your academic record. Writing a thesis will not guarantee your admission, any more then failing to write a thesis will prevent you admission. Although a good thesis is a mark of distinction, it is not the only way to distinguish yourself.

Students interested in graduate study may, however, wish to experience writing a thesis in preparation for law or graduate school. The third-year paper required at many law schools is usually a 50- to 60- page legal analysis. A master’s thesis is typically 50-100 pages in length. Ph.D. dissertations that are part of every doctoral program range from 250-400 pages.

**I have to write one or my parents will kill me.**

*Perhaps,* but so will writing a thesis that does not interest you.

**I have to write one for my resume.**

*Well,* a good thesis can improve a resume, but it is hard to write a good one merely for the sake of your resume. A well-designed selection of courses, demonstrating your strength as a liberal arts college graduate, will also convey you intellectual integrity and talent.

**A thesis seems to be the logical culmination to my educational experience at Connecticut College.**

*However,* writing a thesis is not the only way to cap scholarly endeavors at Connecticut College. Alternatives include doing an independent study under the supervision of a faculty member, receiving credit for field research outside of regular course work, participating in an internship program or college center, taking an advanced course or seminar that requires a research paper, or taking more than one seminar.

**Independent studies,** it should be added, resemble a thesis insofar as they too typically involve original analysis and/or research. They provide students with the opportunity to explore a topic systematically, to establish their own reading list, and to work over a semester with guidance from the supervisor. Most resulting papers are 25-40 pages in
length. Your supervisor can also write you a letter of recommendation in which he or she elaborates on your work and accomplishments. However, independent studies are unaccompanied by the stresses associate with preparing approximately 100 pages of written work that meet honors standards. See the department’s Course Brochure for more information about independent studies.

All of these poor reasons have one thing in common: you would be writing the thesis for someone or something other than yourself. It you do not have the personal commitment to the thesis, do not write it.

WRITING THE THESIS: AN OVERVIEW

There are three cardinal rules in writing a thesis. First, start thinking about possible topics and research questions early. That means in February of your junior year, or earlier. Second, consult a department faculty member about your research interests and your formulation of a thesis proposal. The third rule may be the hardest to implement: Organize. Working with your advisor, you will divide your project into manageable chunks, set deadlines, and keep to your schedule.

The process of writing a thesis and graduating with “Honors Study in the Major Field” can be divided onto four stages that span a total of seventeen months. The first stage involves selecting both a topic and an advisor. The second and longest stage concerns the actual research and writing of the thesis. The third is the final month of hectic revision in April. The fourth and last stage takes place after the thesis is handed in.

I. The Research Question, Faculty Consults, the Thesis Proposal, and Thesis Advisors

Briefly, a good research question focuses on an important problem or puzzle concerning some issue in the study of government, politics, public policy, or political philosophy. An faculty consultant is a professor in the Department of Government and International Relations who agrees to help you formulate your question and thesis proposal. If the thesis is approved, the consultant may or may not be the ultimate thesis advisor (For a more complete and detailed discussion of the consultant’s and advisor’s roles, see Section IV.) The thesis proposal is a 3-4 page statement of your question, hypotheses, research design and methodology, and preliminary sources. (Theses in political theory are structured differently; Part V below elaborates on this issue.) Your search for a research question and an advisor should begin in February; it will end in April, when proposals must be submitted to the Department. Extensions until the Fall Semester are quite rare.

Students who are away from the College during the spring term of their junior year must either complete their proposal before they leave, or develop the proposal through e-mail correspondence with a faculty consultant. If the latter course is taken, preliminary arrangements should be made prior to the spring semester. The completed proposal must be submitted to the Government and International Relations Department Office, and the Department as a whole determines which students are
So that the department will be able to appreciate the quality of work devoted to the proposal, it is very important that students confer with a faculty consultant while formulating their thesis proposals. A good thesis proposal will require preliminary research and several rewrites.

Approximately one week after the spring deadline, the department meets to review thesis proposals. At this time, faculty members assess the feasibility of the proposed topics, the congruence of topics with faculty areas of expertise, and the students’ capacities for honors work. The first two criteria are determined by reference to the proposal (for a discussion of research design and proposal formats, see Section III) and by discussion of each student’s work in formulating that proposal.

The third criterion – each student’s capacity for honors work – is determined by reference to the applicant’s previous grades in the major. The eligibility requirement for juniors to apply for honors program is 3.50 grade point average in the major, including at least one “A” in a Government course beyond the 100-level. Receiving honors require earning an A or A- on the thesis. If you have not been doing “A” or “A-” quality work in the major, your proposal must convince the Department that you are capable of and committed to doing honor-quality work in your senior year.

Remember that Government and International Relations faculty are permitted to supervise only two theses per year. Consequently, acceptance into the Senior Honors Program is a competitive process. After review of the proposals, the department will either accept the student into the program, condition acceptance into the program upon a revision of the proposal, recommend that the student pursue independent study rather than honors study, or recommend that the student take a 400-level Government seminar in lieu of a research project. The faculty member who will work with the student is the thesis advisor. Therefore, if your thesis proposal is approved, you should immediately meet with your thesis advisor. Before the end of spring semester, you should have a mutual understanding of the tasks that you plan to accomplish during the summer before your thesis year.

II. Refining the Methodology Section, Conducting Research, and Writing

Once the Government and International Relations Department has accepted you into the Honors Program and assigned you an advisor, the real thesis work begins. This is the second stage. Like a term paper, you begin with an introduction to your thesis topic. You then refine the methodology section that you discussed only briefly in your proposal. Here, in close consultation with your thesis advisor, you will seek to flesh out your proposal. You might, for example, conduct a literature survey that clarifies your contribution to the scholarly literature, and state and explain the hypotheses that inform your study. These tasks involve considerably more background and theoretical reading than a term paper. This chapter (or sometimes two chapters) sets the stage for your empirical research, the subject matter of your middle chapter or chapters. Also in contrast to a term paper, you may be writing one chapter while still researching the next, so there will be no clear dividing line between researching and writing. Your various conclusions come in your final chapter. This stage, from initial research to complete first draft, should last from June to March, or ten months.
III. **Preparing the Final Draft**

The third stage, from April to the early-May due date, often resembles a month-long all-nighter. In these last four weeks, everything that you put off earlier comes back to haunt you. The final month is a tremendously emotional experience. You will either come to love your thesis or to hate it; often you will experience both feelings simultaneously! Faculty supervisors and students routinely try to avoid this outcome by planning ahead and setting deadlines, but a stress-free April is a rarity among thesis writers.

IV. **Submission of the Thesis and the Oral Defense.**

The fourth stage begins after the thesis has been submitted. All thesis writers are required to defend their thesis orally. The defenses are typically scheduled a week or two weeks after the thesis has been submitted. During the thesis defense, the student will meet with the thesis committee to answer questions about the research and the final manuscript. The queries are often taken from previous meetings about the thesis, when the student and the faculty members evaluated data from different perspectives or reached contrasting conclusions. Oral examinations thus provide the student with an opportunity to expand upon their studies and their findings; faculty members may also offer their suggestions on how the thesis might be further refined as an article or as a graduate thesis.

V. **Special Considerations for Political Theory Theses**

Students writing a thesis in the field of political theory will benefit from the general advice in this brochure with the following exceptions. First, the thesis in this field may or may not be primarily a research thesis; original analysis of classic texts (with due regard for relevant secondary literature) is also a possibility. Second, social science methodology will not be the form of exposition and analysis. Knowing how to write thesis in political theory requires a kind of apprenticeship in the appropriate kinds of questions to ask and ways to answer them, and these skills are acquired slowly by taking political theory courses. Furthermore, background courses in philosophy, classics, and history may prove useful depending on the subject of the particular thesis. Students searching for a general idea of the possibilities available are encouraged to review previous honors theses in political theory and in philosophy retained in the Shain Library.
II. Identifying a Topic and Formulating a Research Question

START BY IDENTIFYING YOUR AREAS OF INTEREST

Since you cannot have an advisor until you have a topic and a research question, and you cannot have either until you have an area of interest, your earliest step must be to discover your scholarly interests.

The search for a thesis topic is a time for self-examination. Look over your past work at Connecticut and find those themes that run through the choices you have made. Is there a pattern? Is there a question or an event that jumps out at you? Is there an article or a monograph that you feel is just waiting to be written? Does something puzzle you, upon reflection? Retrace your steps in your education that led you to major in Government or International Relations. What played the most prominent role in your decision? Think about why you selected particular courses or paper topics, why you participated in various internships, and which books or articles you found most interesting.

Your initial answer is most likely to be a very broad subject: “I’m interested in immigration policy.” Sometimes the area is more specific: “I want to see whether gender affects interest group relationships.”

NARROW YOUR AREA OF INTEREST TO A TOPIC AND A RESEARCH QUESTION

Refining your area interest into a thesis topic and research question is no small achievement. You must always remember that a thesis is a challenging academic undertaking – the length of the Government and International Relations Department Thesis is comparable to a Masters Thesis in many graduate schools. As this should suggest, your thesis is about more than exploring your personal biases or preference (however interesting those might be!) or about proving the accuracy of your worldview (however great the benefits of such a contribution!). Instead, your thesis is a sustained and precise investigation of a particular issue or question, weighing alternative interpretations and offering original insights. In reference to the area of interest described above, for example, the following assertions would not constitute thesis topics: “I want to prove that United States immigration policy is fatally flawed;” or “I want to prove that gender discrimination causes women to practice transformative interest group politics.” These declarations are suited to a more editorial and opinion-driven undertaking then to the academic enterprise of a thesis.

Once the impulse to write a polemic is controlled, most problems with topics fall into two categories: Initially, topics are likely to be too broad, encompassing too much of the discipline of political science, or they may be too narrow, interesting only the writer. This is where consulting with your prospective thesis advisor(s) and with other Government and International Relations students can be especially helpful. Rest assured, however, that balancing these extremes is one of the challenges that will follow you through the entire thesis project.
Narrowing the broad topic

To give focus to a broad interest, read widely on the subject until some anomaly or surprise catches your eye. Ask yourself what specific concerns led you to the general issue. How did you first see the problem or puzzle? Was there an important book? A series of lectures? A recurrent argument about current affairs? Talk with others about the topic. What events stand out? What cases do the discussions revolve around? Formulate questions with these specific facts in mind.

Maya Perry ’97, for example, had always been interested in United States immigration policy and had written a paper on this topic for Government 252 (United States Foreign Policy). When she began to explore the topic for the thesis, she did so from a human rights and historical perspective, consulting with Professors Borer and Rose. Ultimately, Maya decided to compare Cold War and post-Cold War immigration policies. Her research subsequently focuses upon the responses made to Cuban and Haitian immigrants, weighing the responses made to refugees from a communist and a non-communist state.

Broadening the narrow topic

To expand a topic, delve into the scholarly literature on the specific even or case that you have chosen. What basic concerns do the writers emphasize? Imagine defending yourself against an opponent who claims that there is nothing worth studying here. What justification do you come up with? What significance does this issue have? Where does it fit into the fields of political science?

Karen Douglass ’97, for example, was the Mary Foulke Morrisson Intern at the League of Women Voters in the summer before her senior year. She decided to base her thesis upon that experience, which would provide her with ample opportunity to learn about the function of one women’s interest group. When she began to consider how this information could yield a thesis, she talked with Professors Borrelli and Swanson. Because so much of the literature focuses upon the effects of gender upon small-group dynamics, Karen’s research asked whether and how gender might influence the relationships between groups within a federated interest group. Her investigations were subsequently based upon case studies of the League of Women Voters and of the National Women’s Political Caucus, two women’s organizations with very different histories and feminist philosophies.

Write your topic as a research question

At this early state, your topic should be formulated in a few questions, each one more specific that the last. It may have the form, “What is the relationship between…?” Or, “Why…” Answering these questions requires judgment and analysis; be careful not to formulate a question that merely requires a statement of various facts, a description of events, or a detailing of your own biases.

Once you have reached this stage, you are ready to prepare your thesis proposal.
RESOURCES

Ultimately, you need to take the time to think, to discover your topic, and to formulate your research question. In the process, don’t ignore Connecticut College resources—a few of which are listed below.

**Take Courses that Require a Research Paper:** Some department course offerings require longer papers that involve original research. Some others have assignments that give students some experience setting up a research design, conducting research, and evaluating the uses and limits of the findings. See the current Course Brochure for a complete listing. Finally, sometimes term papers form the basis for an Honors Thesis or independent study.

**CONNssharp—Connecticut College Social Sciences, Humanities, Arts Research Program:** These competitive summer research fellowships are administered by the Dean’s office. Students (preferably in their junior year) apply to serve as faculty research assistants, continuing their summer service into the academic year through honor’s study or through two independent studies. The award includes a $3,000 stipend for the eight-week period in the summer. The deadline for student applications falls in late February or early March of each year. The proposal must be developed in close consultation with the faculty member for whom the student would conduct research.

**Shain Library:** Speak with librarians about sources for reading in your area. They can help you locate unusual material that might grow into a topic. Reference Librarian Jim MacDonald is the Library Liaison for the Government and International Relations Department. He is happy to help students formulate topics or locate resources for research.

**Connecticut College Archives:** More than one student has recommended that a prospective writer review previous theses. A complete collection is available in the College Archives; a selection of more recent theses, representing the various subfields of political science, is now available on the digital commons. Pay particular attention to the titles, introductions, and conclusions to learn how a workable topic is formulated.

**Faculty:** Talk to professors who know something about your area. Find out whether your ideas are substantial, workable, original, and relevant to political science. Such conversations can also serve as your first foray into the world of potential advisors. Remember that you are very strongly encouraged to meet with prospective advisors while formulating (and writing) your thesis proposal.
“How can good topics be found? Starting yesterday, keep a ‘Books and Articles that Someone Should Write’ file. When you form a mental picture of something you want to read, but a search reveals that it doesn’t exist, record its hypothetical title and stash it in your ‘Books and Articles’ file. Many of these absent articles won’t be suitable projects for you, but some will.

“After each [Government course that seemed particularly interesting], write an audit memo about the subject area of the course asking what was missing. What important questions went unasked? What answers did you expect to find in the literature that never appeared? What research projects could provide these answers?

“…Topics can also be found in public policy debates. First, read up on a policy debate you care about. Then identify the key disputes of fact or theory that drive opposing sides to their opposite conclusions. Then devise a research project that addresses one or more of these disputes. This search method locates research questions that are unresolved and germane to important public policy questions.”

III. The Thesis Proposal

DEPARTMENTAL STANDARD FOR THE REVIEW OF THESIS PROPOSALS

The following are guidelines the department uses when considering honors proposals and in evaluating thesis. You should keep these factors in consideration while preparing your 2-4 page proposal. Thesis writing in political theory is organized somewhat differently (see Part V of the Introduction above).

Government and International Relations faculty are permitted to supervise only two theses per year, so the review of thesis proposals is a competitive process. The current eligibility requirement for juniors to apply for the honors program is a 3.50 grade point average in the major and a grade of “A” in at least one Government course beyond the 100-level. Receiving honors requires earning an A or an A- on the thesis. It involves a lot of work and creativity, including going through several drafts of key chapters with your thesis supervisor – especially the first chapter.

Keep in mind that honors quality means well written as well as demonstrative of thoughtful and creative analysis. Your proposal should reflect these characteristics.

If you have not been doing A or A- quality work in the major, your proposal must convince the department that you are capable of doing honors quality work during your senior year.

The most general substantive requirement is that a thesis typically involves original research. You might deal with a current, unresolved controversy and seek to settle at least part of it. You might contribute a new or refined interpretation and explanation for a political phenomenon. Or you might seek to fill a gap in our knowledge, although you would need to
demonstrate that filling the gap is worthwhile. There may be other way to make original contributions, including combinations of the above.

If you have one or two ideas for a thesis in mind, meet with appropriate Government and International Relations faculty member(s) to explore them. Typically a good proposal goes through several drafts, so have this meeting at least a month before the proposal is due. The departmental deadline for proposals typically falls in early May of your junior year.

The topic and research question must be sufficiently focused and feasible that the thesis can be completed in two semesters. The topic may be part of a larger issue, which is fine as long as you tell the reader how your thesis fits into the larger issue, or it could be entirely self-contained. Remember too that the topic should be related to the interests and skills of a department member. The Department strongly advises that you take at least one course with your prospective advisor, so that you will already be familiar with how that professor interprets quality political science research.

Approximately one week after the Department’s thesis proposal deadline, Department faculty meet to review thesis proposals. At this time, faculty members assess the proposals. If accepted by the department into the Honors Program, the student will be assigned a thesis advisor. No commitments to supervise theses can be made prior to this department meeting. Once accepted, the student will need to be in compliance with rules and guidelines for enrolling in the thesis program, which are set by the Office of Records and Registration.

A departmental Application Form is provided at the end of this booklet; they are also available from the Government and International Relations Department Office in 305B Fanning Hall.

COMPONENTS OF A STRONG THESIS PROPOSAL

Here is an outline of typical components of a political science research proposal, which resembles a skeleton of the first chapter. Not all theses need to follow this pattern, but this list does reflect the depth of thought that goes into any successful thesis. Within each field of political science (IR, comparative, and US politics), different professors emphasize different issues. Political theory theses may be quite different; see Part V of this booklet’s Introduction.

I. The Question

State as succinctly as possible the question you are addressing. Somewhere in your introduction, indicate your preliminary response to the question; this should be the most promising hypothesis that guides your research. Your response should not be mere opinion; instead, the answer should reflect both knowledge and insight.

II. The Significance of the Question

Tell the reader why and to whom the question is (or will be) important. In close consultation with your faculty consultant, you may wish to consider issues such as those that follow. If the question is controversial among scholars or practitioners, what are the competing
views? If you are examining a familiar topic in a new or innovative manner, how have others approached it? What contributions will you make with your approach? If you are exploring a new topic, what is the gap in the literature and why is it significant? During your senior year, when you actually write this part of the thesis, you will be able to elaborate more.

III. Hypotheses and Questions to Guide Research

To help you sort through mountains of facts as you conduct your research – many of which are irrelevant—you need something to guide your research toward potentially important causal factors. Unless you have some pretty good ideas about what the answer to your master question may be, there is no rational way to plan your research.

A good starting point is to state hypotheses, which are tentative answers to your overarching research question. Sometimes hypotheses are written as “if-then” statements: “if a country experiences a mass revolution, then interstate security competition will be intensified.” Often, however, they are stated in other ways: “I want to examine the hypothesis that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not contribute to the reconciliation between white and black South Africans.” Often you will have more than one hypothesis, and you will find it helpful to break each hypothesis into a series of smaller research questions to be answered when examining evidence. Concerning the hypothesis on revolution and security competition, for example, the following questions will be helpful. “Did the country under study experience a mass revolution? Did security competition between the revolutionary state and a neighboring state intensify following the revolution? What form did the security competition take?” For the hypothesis on the Truth and Reconciliation, one of a series of questions could include the following: “Did white South Africans attend any Truth Commission hearings?”

So, if you have one or several promising hypotheses/questions, what are they?

Where can you find promising hypothesis? One source is a debate between scholars or policy analysts. Hypotheses may be inferred from key points of disagreement—whereby each scholar emphasizes different factors, conditions, or causes intended to explain an outcome. Your subsequent research may shed light on whose interpretation is the more comprehensive or promising. Hypotheses may also be derived from theories, if you find that some theories are more useful in explaining phenomena than others. The usual approach is to state the theory (or theories) and deduce appropriate hypotheses.

An excellent resource that details the hypothesis-building process is Guide to Methodology for Students of Political Science (1997), by Stephen Van Evera. A full citation is listed in the bibliography toward the end of this brochure. This small guidebook is on reserve for Government 497-498, and the College Bookshop carries it as well. It has applications for all social science fields, although the author emphasizes international relations and security affairs.

IV. Research Methods

You need to explain the way in which you will conduct your research, in order to test your hypothesis or to answer your questions. Secondary sources are sometimes useful for preliminary research or for establishing a basic chronology within a case study. Primary sources are usually needed for more refined research (e.g., on key points in a chronology, or to create
usable data). Many students have analyzed primary documents obtained from various archives and through the Internet, have conducted interviews with decision-makers and officials, have conducted participant-observer studies, and have formulated quantitative models based upon survey data. In describing the work that you intend to undertake, be careful to explain your answers to two questions. First, will you have access to the information, whether it is to be obtained by library research, visiting archives, accessing foreign language newspapers, or by interviewing government officials? Second, do you have the training to collect and analyze the data? For instance, have you previously taken a course on research methods? How about a course that requires a research paper? Have you conducted interviews? Studied statistics? Interpreted legal texts? If you do not yet have all the required skills, state how you intend to acquire them. As these points indicate, considerations of feasibility and rigor are extremely important to your research methodology statement.

Many theses are organized around case studies. For example, the Perry and Douglass theses described earlier each make use of case studies to test their hypotheses. Perry compared U.S. immigration policy for Cuban and Haitian refugees in the Cold War and post-Cold War years; Douglass compared organization relationships within the League of Women Voters and the National Women’s Political Caucus. Note that in each of these instances, the cases—Cuba and Haiti, the League and the Caucus—were selected to test theories about larger issues. In other words, these theses were about immigration policy or organizational theory; they were not about Cuba and Haiti, the League and the Caucus, per se. It is for this reason that your proposal needs to explain and defend your choice of cases. In doing so, be clear and logical, so the reader understands the criteria used to select evidence. Such a systematic approach is central to “analysis.” In contrast, “advocacy” selects anecdotal facts and ideas to “prove” some point. Of course you may wish to advocate a position or policy, but you are more likely to be taken seriously if you have approached the relevant evidence in a well-organized and honest fashion.

V. Other Considerations

Tell the reader about anything else that you think is important and relevant to your proposal. Possibilities include a preliminary statement of you principal findings, suggestions for related research beyond what you intend to conduct in your thesis, or possible applications of your basic research. You may wish to include a brief annotated bibliography or principal works in your intended field of research, in order to highlight the preliminary research you already conducted and your pending contribution to the discipline.

Most important at the proposal stage is to convey that you have developed an interesting question and have thought through how to answer it.
SAMPLE PROPOSAL

The following is the full text of a thesis proposal, just as it was approved by the Department in Spring 1996. Note that many different formats are appropriate for a thesis proposal; the only “wrong format” is one that fails to make an orderly and analytic presentation in accord with the criteria outlined above. By way of encouragement, although the above standards are daunting, the Department responds favorably to most of the submitted thesis proposals.

Thesis Proposal: Women’s Issues Organizations
By Karen Douglass ‘97

Topic Statement
Through a comparative case study, this thesis will determine whether women practice organic and transformative politics within their interest groups. This research will investigate the internal structure of the national and state/local offices of four influential women’s organizations. It will also determine how organizational structures facilitate or impede mobilization of women in the wider society.

Note that the topic is clearly outlined in a brief paragraph, which also provides an overview of the research method and anticipates research findings.

Research Proposal
There is debate about whether women’s and men’s gendered socialization causes them to organize differently. There is an established organizational literature, which argues that gender does not make a difference, that men and women lead in the same way. (Wilson 1989) However, there is other research that argues that gender affects personal relations due to the differing moral development and perceptions of self of women and men. (Gilligan 1982) Other research maintains that gender influences small group relations and results in a consensus method of operation within women’s organizations. (Iannello 1992) No one, however, has looked at the effect of gender upon relationships between organizations. This thesis will address that gap in literature.

Citations are provided, with an annotated Bibliography given in the last section of the Proposal. Note that the contribution of the thesis to the literature is clearly indicated.

I will examine four women’s interest organizations to compare the relationships between the national offices and the state/local branches. I want to examine whether or not there is a close relationship between the national and state/local organizations and, if so, which part of the organizations is dominant. At the most general level, therefore, I will be focusing on the democratic versus republican practices in organizations intended to politically socialize women.

Ultimately, the thesis narrowed to two case studies – the League of Women Voters and the National Women’s Political Caucus. This was a function of balancing the constraints of time and resources against the need to prepare a rigorous analysis. The
failure to include a men’s organization was compensated for through a detailed analysis of the literature.

I will examine the significance of the organizations’ internal structures for their mobilization of women. I will prepare comparative case studies of the League of Women Voters (non-partisan), the National Organization for Women (informally affiliated with the Democratic Party), the National Federation of Republican Women (affiliated with the Republican Party), and the National Women’s Political Caucus (multi-partisan). These organizations comprise a political spectrum of the women’s issues groups committed to organizing and mobilizing women. Additionally, these four organizations have experienced both positive and negative national and state/local relations. At the same time, there are contrasts among the organizations. The partisanship of each of the groups will allow for an assessment of the influence of politics of the organizations. The patterns of agreement and disagreement on agenda issues can be examined as the groups do not all deal with the same issues. As a means of determining gender distinction, I hope to compare the dynamics of a male-dominated organization with similar challenges and structures. The similarities and contrasts will allow me to study the causal relationship between partisan ideology, feminist ideology, policy priorities, and organizational structure.

Note that the reasons for selecting the organizations are carefully listed, which further develops the topic and foreshadows the research methodology.

Research Questions
1. How do the national offices and the state/local branches of women’s issues organizations organize?
2. What are the relationships between the national office and the state/local branches of women’s issues organizations?
3. What is the effect of each office’s internal organization on its mobilization of women?

Questions are taken directly from the topic statement—note how carefully each part of the proposal related to the other.

Methodology
I plan to interview women and men associated with the four organizations and to observe how they work within their interest group. Interviews will allow me to reveal the internal structure and relations of the organizations. Additional participant observation will uncover how the organization members perceive themselves as mobilizing women. I understand that there are some inherent problems with the reliability of interviewing. To control these, I will standardize my questions, use questions that allow for discussion, and interview a variety of people at different levels of the organization. I am also investigating the possibility of interviews with state/local organizations in Connecticut, Maine and Massachusetts. Additionally, I am currently researching the possibility of archival research at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women.

Note the careful attention to explicating and then defending the method of research; you need to convince the department that your information will
be accurate (i.e. valid and reliable, in research method terminology).

This project is feasible because I am the Mary Foulke Morrisson Internship recipient and will be interning with the League of Women Voters this summer. I will be based in Washington, D.C. where the other three organizations are centered. I also interned for a British Member of the European Parliament during the Fall semester of 1995 and gained experience working with lobbyists there.

 Again, stress feasibility, feasibility, feasibility.

Sources
This section fits under “Other Considerations” in the Guidelines above; providing a brief annotated Bibliography at once demonstrates your (preliminary) familiarity with the field and helps the Department faculty to see which political scientists you are “talking with.”

   This Classic work will be supplemented with works by David Truman, Mark P. Petracca, Alan Rosenthal, Jack Walker, and Carl E. Von Horn.

   This book focuses on how successful women’s interest groups were in achieving their demand in the 1970’s. It uses interviews and questionnaires to gather data regarding how the organizations operate.

   This book focuses on the moral development of women by examining their views of relationships and self.

   This book examines feminist views of organizational theory and practice and uses the modified consensus by three women’s groups.

   This essay analyzes the patterns and similarities in organizational behavior of women’s interest groups.

   This is the classic, cumulative work on bureaucracy in the public sector.
IV. The Advisor(s)

You are responsible for finding your own faculty consultants / potential advisor(s). Work closely with your faculty consultant in preparing your thesis proposal; seniors have repeatedly stated that this is one of the most important steps in the thesis project. List the name of your requested thesis advisor on the application form, and be sure that this person knows you are listing him or her.

THE SENIOR THESIS ADVISOR; SECOND AND THIRD READERS

For Government and International Relations majors, the senior thesis advisor is a member of the Government and International Relations Department’s faculty who agrees to guide the student in the preparation of a thesis. Your thesis advisor is not necessarily your academic advisor, however, for your Government or IR major. The advisor may also be different from the department member you consulted as you wrote your thesis proposal.

Students should also understand that each thesis writer will also work with a second member of the department while preparing the thesis. Usually the second reader is decided at the time that the thesis proposal is approved. The second reader typically complements the expertise of the thesis advisor (sometimes called the chair of the thesis committee) and reviews chapters as they approach their final draft. In the case of the Perry thesis, there was not a member of the Department faculty who had a particular expertise in immigration policy. However, Professor Borer has had longstanding interest in and had published on human rights. She agreed to serve as the advisor; the second reader was Professor Rose, who is well versed in foreign policy. Karen Douglass’ thesis advisor was Professor Borrelli, who has research has centered upon women-and-politics; her second reader was Professor Swanson, who was an expert in interest group politics.

The participation of a third reader, a faculty member from outside the department, is at the discretion of the supervisor and the student. The benefits of such input can be extraordinary when the work is heavily interdisciplinary.

Second and third readers are not as engaged as the supervisor, but they do become involved in the thesis writing process. A mutual understanding of when and how much the second (and perhaps third) readers are involved should be reached early in the fall semester of the senior year. Sometimes, for instance, the second reader is heavily involved from the very beginning and offers insights that greatly enhance the quality of the research. At the other extreme, some second and third readers do not get seriously involved until midway or late in the spring semester. Be sure to keep your thesis advisor apprised of the arrangement; sometimes the advisor recommends a change in the relationship.
Occasionally an IR major whose thesis is strongly interdisciplinary will have two thesis advisors who share responsibility for supervision: one from the Department of Government and International Relations and the other from another department (e.g., Economics, History, or Sociology).

THE ROLES OF THE SENIOR THESIS ADVISOR

Once again, you will need to examine your strengths and weaknesses, this time in order to decide what kind of advisor will best suit your working style. Some students cannot meet unenforced deadlines and need an advisor to serve as a task maker, to ensure that the project moves along. Others like to impose and adjust their own deadlines, looking to the advisor as a resource and sounding board for ideas. As you will know from taking courses with different members of the Government and International Relations Department, our faculty members have contrasting styles of teaching and writing. These differences need to be considered by prospective thesis writers, as they recruit their advisor / potential advisor.

The following are some of the contributions that advisors make to the students’ experience of the thesis program.

**Expertise:** A thesis advisor is an essential resource for your studies. He or she can locate your research in the context of the greater body of scholarship, acting as an invaluable, source for bibliographic references and always testing your interpretations. In addition to this substantive expertise, a faculty member will also help you develop and then refine your research methodology.

*Often, a student’s topic is quite particular, and no one at Connecticut College could be called an expert in that area.* If this is the case, be sure that a faculty member is willing to undertake a thesis in your area of interest.

**Editorial insights:** Writers need second opinions about the clarity, coherence, and good sense of their argument. The advisor can oversee the mechanics of your writing and give advice on style.

**Criticism:** At times it helps to have unpitying criticism from a reader who can help you make an objective determination of your progress. A devil’s advocate can strengthen your argument as well.

**Deadlines and Guidelines:** In addition to Department deadlines, you will need to follow a writing schedule. An advisor can motivate you to keep the work moving along.

**Support:** There will be moments of excitement, disinterest, calm, and anxiety. One week you may think you are remaking the world, the next you will be convinced that everything has already been said. A advisor can guide you through many of these highs and lows.
FINDING A FACULTY ADVISOR

You should begin looking for a faculty advisor the minute you know what area you will study. Often the search for a faculty consultant and the job of defining the topic and research question can be accomplished together. Seek out possible consultants and discuss your first thoughts about various topics. Ask them to judge the inquiry and to suggest further reading.

Note that you will need to list a prospective advisor on your application form. It should be obvious that you would consult with a faculty member before listing her/him as a prospective advisor! In fact, you should work with the individual or individuals in writing and revising your thesis proposal.

*If you think that a particular person might be a great fit for your central area of interest, take at least one course with the professor before your senior year.* Otherwise it is very challenging to develop a productive working relationship that can help you as you write your proposal.

INFORMAL ADVISORS

As noted in the “Resources” section above, you should never feel confined to the insights of a particular faculty member. Though your advisor and your readers are those with the most immediate knowledge of you work – they will be responsible for conducting your oral defense and for grading the final thesis – you should always feel free to speak with other members of the Connecticut College community: faculty, librarians and fellow students.
V. The Thesis Schedule:

Registration, Writing, and Grading Requirements

FALL SEMESTER, SENIOR YEAR

After participants in the honors program are selected in May, those students admitted to the program should consult with the Office of Records and Registration about formally enrolling in the Thesis Course. Under exceptional circumstances the department chair and thesis advisor may jointly permit a later application, but no student may be accepted for honors study after the beginning of the senior year. In the event that an application is received between May and the beginning of the senior year, the Office of Records and Registration should be informed no later than the first week of September.

During the first week of the senior year, honors students meet with their thesis advisor to schedule for periodic meetings and to organize a preliminary calendar of deadlines. This is also a good time to agree on the composition of the thesis committee, deciding who will be a second reader from the department and considering whether there will be a third reader. (See the previous section on thesis advisors.)

The schedule for writing and research will vary with each thesis advisor and writer. For instance, some advisors want a through outline of the first chapter written soon after classes begin, while others begin by assigning a preliminary set of readings. In any event, the outline and the text of the first chapter will usually go through several drafts. Rewriting this chapter is likely to continue throughout the thesis year. As you work on subsequent chapters, you will think of refinements; some parts, such as the summary of you principal findings, cannot be written definitively until the entire thesis is completed. Don’t be too discouraged at this prospect, as rewriting the chapters after the introduction will be more finite process.

So that the re-writing is easy, write your thesis on a computer and don’t forget to keep back-up disks! Every year, at least one thesis writer loses her or his thesis to a malfunctioning hard drive, an affliction that has also cost faculty members their book and article manuscripts. Needless to say, computer problems will not be taken as an excuse for missed deadlines or for poor performance during the thesis process. To save you extensive re-typing in the event of a disaster, be sure to keep several back-up disks (including an off-site location). By the same token, to save lost hours of work, be sure to keep paper copies of all drafts and all advisor comments.

Always remember that quality and succinctness are more important than length.
By the end of the first semester, your thesis advisor typically needs two things. First, you should have a near-perfect draft of the sections that precede the research. Depending on the format of your thesis, this could involve one or two chapters. Second, you will need a high quality draft of the first chapter of research, or at least an agreed upon component of a research chapter. If these components are of A or A- quality, then you will receive and IP (In Progress) grade for Government 497.

If the written work is not of honors quality, Government 497 will be converted into an Independent Study with an appropriate grade. Students dropped from the program then drop Government 498 during the Add-Drop period of the spring term. Unfortunately, this outcome has occurred in the past—usually when the student gives the thesis lower priority than assignments in other courses or extra-curricular activities.

If you find yourself overwhelmed by your thesis, just try to relax and keep plugging away. Remember that the Department only accepts people into the Honors Program who they believe will succeed. It just takes planning, discipline, and commitment. And just think of the elation and sense of accomplishment you will feel when you hold the completed project in your hand!

SPring SeMester, SeNioR YeAr

Although taking a reduced course load during the spring semester may allow more time for the thesis, underpointing in the second semester is neither expected nor recommended of senior thesis writers. Indeed, most senior thesis writers successfully combine a thesis with a full course load. The exception is students who are not sufficiently disciplined to give adequate priority to their thesis. Such students give priority to completing course tests and papers, with the result that they fall behind in their thesis schedule. Don’t let this happen to you!

That said, and assuming you receive an IP for Government for 497 and pre-register for Government 498, you will develop another schedule of tasks and meetings with your advisor for spring semester.

The final draft of the thesis is typically due late in April or early May. Your thesis advisor must receive advanced drafts of all chapters several weeks ahead of this deadline, so that she or he has time to offer suggestions and you have time to revise. Second and third readers may also wish to make comments throughout this semester; the thesis writer is responsible for scheduling regular meetings and responding to their comments.
Getting the paper to your advisor early permits fine-tuning that can make the difference between a good paper and an excellent and sophisticated piece of research.

All of the faculty readers will be present at your oral defense, which will usually be scheduled one to two weeks after the thesis is submitted.

After the oral defense, students will be told their grade for their senior thesis. This grade must be an “A” or an “A-“ to qualify for “Honors Study in the Major Field,” and it will apply to both semesters. Thus, this letter grade will be substituted of the “IP” grade assigned for the first semester’s work.

Students completing a thesis and earning Honors will have good reason to be proud. They will have mastered the complexities of graduate-level research, and these skills will give them an edge when seeking employment or applying to graduate schools.
Bibliography:

A Few Resources for Research Design and Methodology


Name: ___________________________ Box: _____ Telephone: _______ E-mail: _______

Major: GOV ___ IRL ___ Center: yes ___ no ___ If yes, which one? __________________________

Topic: (See Proposal Guidelines in the Government and International Relations Department Honors Brochure)

____________________________________________________________

Requested Thesis Supervisor:

List in sequence all courses for your major that are completed or are in process:

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List other courses that you regard as relevant to your preparation for the thesis.
Please indicate if this work is part of a double major or certificate program

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List other experiences (if any) which contribute to your preparation for the thesis: previous research papers (for what courses?), an internship, campaign work, study away or travel.

Attach a two-to-three page, typed description of your research proposal. For ideas on what to include, see the Government and International Relations Department Honors Brochure. Be sure to consult with a faculty advisor in the course of refining and revising your proposal. See the Government and International Relations Department Course Brochure for all departmental deadlines relating to the thesis proposal.