

POLS 590 Honours Thesis – Questions and Answers

What is an honours thesis, and how does it differ from a conventional research paper?

An honours thesis is a 50-60 page research paper based on two terms worth of research on a topic that is broader or more complex than can normally be handled in a term paper for a course. More than length alone, the honours thesis is distinguished by its analytical detail and sophistication; by the need for a disciplined, multi-stage investigation of a research question; and by its scope relative to the work you've done to this point. The major benefit is that you get to engage in this extended project with the one-on-one supervision of a faculty member over the course of an entire academic year. In the end, the honours thesis can be an ideal way to prepare for grad school or delve in deeply in an intellectual puzzle or issue. Many view it as the culmination of their undergraduate career.

You will not work alone. Throughout the year, 590 students will gather with the undergrad chair and discuss common issues such as methodology, writing discipline, timelines, structure or formatting issues. These meetings are part of the course but not evaluated. They are designed to help you connect with others who are working through the same process – but likely different subject.

What is POLS590?

POLS590 is the course you will be registered in if you are writing an Honours Thesis. It is worth 9.0 units so is a full year course. If you are writing an Honours Thesis, you will still be able to register in four other 400-level POLS courses, assuming you are a Politics Major (12 units). POLS Medials taking POLS 590 are still eligible to take two 400-level courses (6.0 units). You do not need to take these extra courses; you only need to ensure that you are fulfilling your fourth year requirements (12.0 units for majors and 6.0 units for medials, of which POLS 590 counts as 9.0).

In addition to writing your thesis you will share your findings in a collegial and friendly environment in April. The "Thesis Colloquium" allows all 590 students to discuss their work with other students, faculty and prospective 590 students who might do write a thesis the following year.

Is it better to do an Honours Thesis than just to take regular 4th year courses?

Not necessarily. The more important question is whether the Honours Thesis option is right for you.

Is the Honours Thesis option right for me?

If you answer “yes” to the following questions, the thesis option may be right for you:

- Do you have a best-30 POLS units GPA of 3.0 or more? This is a necessary (not sufficient) condition for POLS590.
- Do you have an A- average in the POLS subfield in which you are choosing to write your thesis?
- Is there a particular topic that you’ve been wanting to study in detail? Are you interested in spending a whole year studying and writing about this one topic in depth?
- Are you someone who will stay organized and motivated without the structure and social setting of an ordinary course? A thesis requires steady, largely independent work over the course of the full academic year; it is not something you can research and write at the last minute.
- Is there a Professor who works in this area who you think you would get along well with? This would typically be someone who taught a course that you enjoyed, and that you did well in.

Do I have to find a professor to supervise my thesis before applying for POLS590?

You don’t need to have secured the agreement of a supervisor in order to apply for POLS590. However, you must have thought about who would be an appropriate supervisor, and you are strongly encouraged to have contacted potential supervisors to see if they are willing in principle to supervise you, and to get advice on how to formulate your thesis topic. This is normally done in your third year and can typically take the form of a few email exchanges or meetings to determine the research question or area that you are interested in pursuing.

Who do I ask if I have questions about the Honours Thesis?

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