GOVT-491: HONORS SEMINAR
Fall, 2016

Professor David M. Hart
Schar School of Policy and Government
George Mason University

Times, Places, and Contact Information
Class meetings:  Wednesdays, 4:30-7:10 p.m., East 134
Office hours:  Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00 p.m. or by appointment
Office location:  Robinson A236 (Wednesdays) or Founders Hall 609
Email (preferred):  dhart@gmu.edu
Office phone (if necessary):  703-993-2279

Overview
This course is the first of a two semester sequence that will help students to write great senior honors theses. Its primary purpose is to create a learning community among the participants that supports the students as they design and execute their thesis projects. As members of this community, the students will define the goals for their projects, identify research topics, explore and synthesize the literature on these topics, and devise preliminary designs for their own original research, which will mainly be carried out in the spring semester. In addition to becoming familiar with one another’s topics and delving deeply into the many challenges of designing and executing original research projects, students will become acquainted with Schar School faculty members who may serve as their individual thesis advisors.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of this course, students should have:
1. A clear understanding of what original political science research is (and is not),
2. Completed literature reviews and preliminary research designs for their theses, and
3. Experience with and commitment to the habits and norms of a supportive learning community.

Participants
GOVT-491 is open to students majoring in Government and International Politics who have been accepted to pursue honors.

Course Texts and Additional Readings
John Gerring and Dino Christenson, Social Science Methodology: An Introductory Guide (to be published by Cambridge University Press in 2017), to be made available by the instructor with the authors’ permission.

Additional readings will be made available through the course website or linked through the syllabus to open web sources.
Format
The primary format for this course will be the seminar, with a significant role for students as discussion leaders and participants. The seminar format will be supplemented by faculty lectures and occasional guest speakers.

Assignments and Grading
1. Class participation, throughout (20%).
2. Initial topic proposal and presentation, both due September 7 (10%).
3. Literature review, due October 19, and presentation, September 28 or October 5 (30%).
4. Thesis prospectus, due December 14, and presentation, November 30 or December 7 (40%).

Detailed handouts with instructions for each assignment will be provided well in advance of each due date.

Late Assignments
Late assignments are not acceptable and will receive an F.

Class Participation
Students need to attend regularly to participate effectively. Please contact Prof. Hart if you will miss a class.

Students with Special Needs
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodation, please see the instructor and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

Read the plagiarism policy attached to the end of this syllabus. Ignorance of or failure to understand the policy will not lead to lenience in case of violation.
GOVT 491 - Class Schedule and Reading List

Class 1: Situating Your Thesis
August 31
Reading: Baglione, chapter 1; Gerring and Christenson, chapter 1.

Class 2: Scoping Your Thesis
September 7
Reading: Baglione, chapter 2; Gerring and Christenson, chapter 12.
   Due: Initial topic proposal and presentation

Class 3: Refining the Scope and Building a Work Plan
September 14
Reading: Baglione, chapter 3; Gerring and Christenson, chapter 11.
   Note: this class session will include individual meetings.

Class 4: Identifying a Community
September 21
Reading: Baglione, chapter 4.

Class 5: Initial Results – Literature Review
September 28
Reading: Gerring and Christenson, chapters 2-3.
   Due: Literature review presentation – group 1

Class 6: Initial Results – Literature Review
October 5
Reading: TBD.
   Due: Literature review presentation – group 2
GOVT 491 - Class Schedule and Reading List (continued)

OCTOBER 12 – NO CLASS DUE TO YOM KIPPUR

Class 7: Hypotheses  
October 19  
Reading: Baglione, chapter 5; Gerring and Christenson, chapter 6.  
Due: Literature review

Class 8: Research Design 1  
October 26  
Reading: Baglione, chapter 7; Gerring and Christenson, chapters 7-8

Class 9: Research Design 2  
November 2  
Reading: Gerring and Christenson, chapters 9-10

Class 10: Data Collection  
November 9  
Reading: Baglione, chapter 8; Gerring and Christenson, chapter 13.

Class 11: Research Ethics  
November 16  
Reading: Gerring and Christenson, chapters 15-16.

NOVEMBER 23 – NO CLASS DUE TO THANKSGIVING

Class 12: Prospectus Presentations – Group 1  
November 30  
Reading: TBD.
Class 13: Prospectus Presentations – Group 2  
December 7

Reading: TBD.

THESIS PROSPECTUS – DUE DECEMBER 14
**SPGIA Policy on Plagiarism**

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university, as well as the field of public policy inquiry, depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus, any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the University and the purpose of the School of Policy, Government and International Affairs. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable. Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. It is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in termination from the program and possible termination from SPGIA. This termination will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (eg. F-1, J-1 or J-2), termination also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the SPGIA policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit a student’s work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The SPGIA policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it. ([http://policy.gmu.edu/honorcode](http://policy.gmu.edu/honorcode))

**Professor Hart’s Addendum**

I believe deeply that intellectual integrity is a fundamental element of learning. I firmly support the School’s zero tolerance policy on plagiarism and will enforce it stringently. Ignorance is not an excuse. To avoid plagiarism, a simple rule of thumb may be of help: when in doubt, include a citation. Citations, including those to web sources, should include sufficient information to allow a reader to verify the source. Further details on when and how to cite sources will be discussed in class. However, providing a citation to a block of text taken with minimal change from a source is not sufficient to avoid plagiarism. You must put the block in quotation marks, thereby acknowledging the source’s contribution of specific words as well as ideas in the block.