

MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL

GOVT 799 – six credits over two semesters

Course Description: As the final requirement in the master's degree in political science, students complete a substantial research project to demonstrate the ability to conduct original, independent research. This goal can be achieved by completing a project paper GOVT 798 or a thesis in GOVT 799. In rare cases, it may be appropriate for a student to take GOVT 799 Political Science Thesis. The thesis requires a minimum of 6-credits and is completed over the course of at least 2 semesters (not including summers). Approval will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Students take full responsibility for negotiating the university thesis requirements noted below.

Course Eligibility: Not all MA Political Science students are eligible to complete a thesis. Given the rigorous and self-driven nature of the thesis, certain prerequisites must be met prior to enrolling in the first semester of GOVT 799:

- Students must have completed at least 18 graded credits of MA Political Science coursework prior to registering for the thesis.
- Students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.8 or greater to embark upon the thesis.
- Program director approval is necessary prior to enrollment.

Differences between GOVT 798 (Project) and GOVT 799 (Thesis): Once enrolled in GOVT 799, switching to GOVT 798 is not permitted. For this reason, students should have a clear understanding of what is expected.

Length: Like the GOVT 798 project, the goal of GOVT 799 is to produce a substantial and original contribution to political science knowledge that is appropriate for conference presentation or publication; however, the thesis will normally be 80-100 pages.

Committee: In addition, the thesis requires the approval of a three-member thesis committee and must be publicly defended. George Mason University sets formatting guidelines for the thesis and requires that all students complete a thesis format review with the University Dissertation & Thesis Coordinator. Information on forms and formatting can be found on <http://thesis.gmu.edu>. Students completing GOVT 798 (Project) do not submit their final project for university-wide review or schedule a public defense.

Defense: A student completing a thesis must offer a public defense of the thesis to the committee and others in the School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs. It is expected that the student will make a presentation of findings and respond to questions from the committee and from other faculty and students who are present. Upon a successful defense, the committee will sign the official thesis cover form. The student may then present the thesis for signature in the dean's office by the last Friday of classes of the spring semester for May graduation. This will allow enough time for any minor revisions to be completed to the satisfaction of the committee and official paperwork to be processed.

Submitting a Thesis Proposal: Before the student can submit a proposal and register for GOVT 799, a thesis committee must be approved by the program director. At least two of the three members of the committee, including the thesis director, must be members of the School of

Policy, Government, and International Affairs. One member may be appointed from outside the School, though this is not required. This outside member may be a member of the GMU community or a recognized scholar in the political science community. Members from outside the School must be approved by the program director.

Once the committee is approved, the student must present a proposal to his or her thesis committee that outlines exactly how the student plans to execute the thesis project, including theory, method, selected sources, and data. Guidelines for this submission are below. Students will not be permitted to enroll in GOVT 799 until their proposal is signed by the entire thesis committee and the program director.

Once the proposal is approved by all committee members and the program director, the student submits copies of the proposal and signatures to the MA Political Science academic advisor, who will work with the Registrar to add the course to the student's schedule. We suggest that the approval process take place the semester before the student begins the thesis work, but in any case, it must be completed before the deadline for the last day to add courses for that term.

Checklist for Thesis Approval and Registration:

- Meet with the academic advisor for MA Political Science to ensure that you meet all prerequisites to embark upon a thesis.
- Choose a topic and identify faculty who may be able to support that topic within SPGIA. Then, meet with the MA Political Science program director to discuss who you plan to approach for your committee.
- Identify a professor who is willing to serve as your thesis chair. The student and professor should agree upon a general topic. The student should conduct a preliminary investigation of the subject to ensure that resources to support the study as initially contemplated are available and accessible.
- Develop a 2-3 page thesis proposal. The proposal should include:
 - Description of the topic to be covered.
 - Research outline (how the research will be conducted – readings, interviews, data analysis or a combination of methods).
 - Preliminary bibliography of works to be consulted.
 - Schedule for interim deliverables (progress reports) to be submitted during the period of the independent study so that the professor can offer guidance or assistance in “course correction” if needed.
 - Due date for the final submission and tentative defense. Please note that the dates must coincide with traditional semester dates.
- Approach other members of the committee with your written proposal. Your proposal ultimately must be signed by a total of three committee members and the program director.
- Submit the signed proposal to your academic advisor in the SPGIA Office of Student Services for course registration.
- Submit tuition payment via Patriot Web in accordance with payment deadlines.

