

The Year-long Senior Essay in Political Science

Most majors write a one-semester senior essay. Some, however, choose to write a two-semester essay, which is done in PLSC 490a/491b or PLSC 490a/493b (for Intensive Majors). Out of approximately 150 seniors in the major, somewhere in the range of 10-15 students write year-long senior essays every year. Year-long essays are expected to be substantially longer than a regular term paper. While there is no specific page requirement, they are typically at least 50 pages long. It is often the case that these essays are the Department's strongest and a good number of the essay prizes go to year-long senior essay writers. (To see the prize-winning essays over the last few years, click [here](#).)

Some things to know and consider

The year-long senior essay is an appropriate undertaking for students who have a strong interest in a particular topic that they have not been able to explore fully in a course or in a standard research paper. Through the year-long senior essay, they are able to take on a more extensive and substantial research project than what could be carried out in a single semester. Many students find this to be a fulfilling and rewarding experience that allows for deeper immersion into a topic in Political Science.

For a lot of students, the year-long senior essay process begins over the summer between their junior and senior years. Although this is not required, many students use this time to conduct research that is related to their senior essay project. (For information about summer research funding, see [here](#).) Then in the fall of their senior year, they hit the ground running and maintain strong momentum with their research and writing throughout both the fall and spring semesters. For this reason, we require students to secure an adviser for the year-long essay in the spring of their junior year.

Note: If you like the idea of an independent project, but are not certain if your degree of interest justifies committing to the year-long option, then you can, if you wish and if a member of the faculty agrees to advise you, write a one-semester senior essay in PLSC 480a or b rather than in a seminar.

Your adviser

A good choice of adviser is key. Ideally, you and your adviser would know each other from previous course work. Most importantly, your adviser should have expertise in the area you wish to investigate. An essential requirement is that your adviser will be available to meet with you and review your work throughout your senior year. You are strongly encouraged to arrange to meet frequently with your adviser throughout both semesters. Your adviser may also wish to see drafts of portions of your essay at various times throughout the academic year and will, in all likelihood, want to see a completed draft before you submit it. (Note: Your adviser must be a PLSC faculty member. Please find a list of our faculty [here](#). Only the DUS can grant exceptions.)

The application process

Students who are interested in writing a year-long senior essay must submit an application to the DUS Office during the spring term of their junior year. The application is usually due at the beginning of April. (Click [here](#) for the exact deadline.)

The application must include: (1) the [Year-long Senior Essay Prospectus form](#) signed by the faculty adviser who has agreed to supervise the student's essay, (2) an up-to-date, unofficial transcript, and (3) a 1-2 page prospectus that describes the topic, issue, or analytic or theoretical problem you wish to examine. You should also discuss why you think it's an important topic, issue or problem, and how you hope to investigate it. Please describe the questions you'll seek to answer and the type of research

you believe may provide answers to those questions. You should also mention any previous coursework you've done that relates to the topic. Please make sure to discuss your plans with your senior essay adviser and ask him/her to review your two-page prospectus before signing your form.

The DUS Office will notify students by email during the month of April whether they have been accepted into the year-long senior essay program.

The Year-long Senior Essay Course Sequence

Students who are admitted to the year-long senior essay program take two courses related to their essay. In the fall of their senior year, year-long essay writers take PLSC 490a (The Senior Colloquium). Then in the spring, they take PLSC 491b (The Senior Essay). (Intensive Majors enroll in PLSC 493b: Senior Essay for Intensive Majors.)

PLSC 490 meets once a week and is designed to help you refine and develop your senior essay. This is a class in which all of the students who are writing year-long essays meet once a week with the instructor, and students are expected to attend all of the meetings of PLSC 490a. (Note: This seminar fulfills the requirement that all majors must take at least one seminar in the senior year.)

In this course, students develop a research prospectus for the senior essay, begin their research, and present their research plans and drafts of preliminary work to the class. They also provide each other with feedback about the proposed and ongoing research. In addition, they read and discuss recent prize-winning essays to see how year-long essays are structured and organized. At the end of the semester, students submit a 15 page written assignment which is composed of a draft of some portion of the senior essay.

In PLSC 491b (or PLSC 493b for Intensive Majors), students work independently with their senior essay adviser as they further develop and complete their essay. We strongly recommend that, at the beginning of the term, you and your faculty adviser agree to a regular schedule of meetings. Many students find it helpful to meet with their adviser every week at the start of the semester and perhaps every other week in the second half of the semester. We also recommend that, early on in the semester, you and your adviser identify deadlines when you will submit preliminary drafts. For example, you may decide that the first draft deadline should be approximately six weeks prior to the final essay deadline and that the second should be around three weeks prior to the deadline.

Grades

Students who participate actively in The Senior Colloquium and complete all of the work required by the instructor of PLSC 490a will receive a temporary grade of Satisfactory on their transcript. This grade will be converted to a letter grade upon completion of the essay in the spring semester. More specifically, when your senior essay adviser submits your essay grade to the DUS Office at the end of the spring semester, this will be your grade for both PLSC 490a/491b or for PLSC 490a/PLSC 493b (for Intensive Majors).

Additional Information

Additional information about the year-long senior essay can be found on our website:

[Undergraduate Senior Essay](#)

[Senior Essays in Political Science](#)

[Year Long Senior Essay](#)

[FAQs about the Year Long Senior Essay](#)