

Political Science Honors Program, 2025-26

What does writing an honors thesis entail?

Writing an honors thesis is a year-long commitment in which seniors write a thesis, usually no shorter than 50 pages in length, based on original research under the guidance of a faculty advisor. PSCI students who write an honors thesis have the opportunity to graduate with “Distinction” in the political science major.

Students who are accepted to write an honors thesis will enroll in PSCI 4997, the Political Science Honors Seminar, in the Fall semester of their senior year. The seminar is intended to help students come up with a feasible research question, develop a research prospectus, identify appropriate sources and relevant literatures, and formulate a preliminary hypothesis or argument. The seminar is mandatory. Students will then be enrolled in an honors independent study (PSCI 4999) in the Spring semester under the faculty advisor supervising the research. The faculty advisor is responsible for the grade assigned for the PSCI 4999 independent study. The Undergraduate Committee—a committee made up of the Director of Undergraduate Studies as well as a faculty member from each subfield—will also review all the theses.

Students who write theses that receive an A or A- from the faculty advisor and meet the standards of excellent and originality as determined by the Undergraduate Committee will graduate with Distinction in the political science major.

Please note that PSCI-4997 and PSCI-4999 do **not** count toward the 12 courses used to satisfy all the general political science major requirements.

Selection Process

Students are selected on the basis of five criteria:

1. Major and Overall GPA*
2. Three-page thesis proposal
3. Previous research experience (strongly recommended)
4. Writing sample from a Political Science course taken for a grade
5. Statement of PSCI faculty advisor support

*GPA eligibility. At the end of the Spring 2025 semester, students who want to write an honors thesis must have at least a 1) **3.7** GPA in all political science major courses (not counting major-related courses) and 2) cumulative 3.3 GPA

Political Science Department
The Ronald O. Perelman Center for Political Science and Economics
133 S. 36th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6215
Tel 215.898.7461 Fax 215.573.2073

Application Process

To be considered for the Political Science Honors Program, please send the following materials electronically to Dr. Davis, Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies (bdavis3@sas.upenn.edu) by April 30, 2025 (the last day of classes):

1. Name, email address, telephone number.
2. **A statement of previous research.** Include in this statement a discussion of any significant papers you have written in other classes. Less commonly, if you have done any research outside of the classroom (e.g., as a research assistant for a professor), list that as well.
3. **A three-page statement** outlining the following:
 - a. The topic you propose to study.
 - b. Your motivation in selecting it.
 - c. A statement on the project's feasibility.
 - d. Optional: the kinds of evidence you expect to be able to find on this topic, and how you plan to analyze that evidence.
 - e. A list of five references – that is, sources that you think would be good starting points for your research.

Note while this topic is considered tentative, the more concrete you can be in your research proposal, the better. Honors thesis students will spend the Fall semester in PSCI 4997 finalizing the research plan.

4. **A writing sample** from a Political Science course that was taken for a grade. This writing sample should be submitted as part of your application, and it should also be shared with your prospective advisor.
5. The name of a Political Science faculty member who has **agreed** to direct your thesis, and why that individual is appropriate for your topic. **It is strongly advised that you communicate with your prospective advisor and ask him/her to send Dr. Davis an email of support for your application.** If you do not have the final approval of an advisor, you may still apply to the program, but the likelihood of acceptance to the program will diminish. Faculty members may impose additional requirements as a condition of working with any individual student.

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After submitting your application

All applicants will receive an email in June letting them know whether or not they have been accepted. Students **cannot** pre-register for PSCI 4997. Students who are accepted into the Honors Program will be asked to confirm their intention to participate in the honors program. At that point, students will register directly for PSCI 4997, the honors thesis seminar, with the approval of the Political Science Department. In the meantime, all applicants should pre-register for a normal load of Fall classes.

If you have questions about the application process, contact Dr. Davis at bdavis3@sas.upenn.edu.