Department of Political Science CAL POLY

SENIOR PROJECT HANDBOOK

General Overview of Senior Projects

The senior project is a capstone experience required for all Cal Poly students receiving a baccalaureate degree. It integrates theory and application from across the student's undergraduate educational experiences. The senior project consists of either (1) a research paper of at least 35 pages in length, double-spaced, or (2) a hands-on research project, which also must have a substantial written component. Examples of (2) include designing a webpage, a study abroad program, and an interdisciplinary class, working on an electoral campaign and keeping a journal, and organizing a voter registration drive.

The senior project is related to the student's field of study, future employment, and/or academic goals and is carried out under direct faculty supervision by the regular faculty (see table below). Amelia Andrews, Craig Arceneaux, Martin Battle, Chris Den Hartog, Ron Den Otter, Jennifer Denbow, Shelley Hurt, Michael Latner, Anika Leithner, Elizabeth Lowham, Matthew Moore, Jean Williams, or Ning Zhang. The precise form of a senior project is to be determined by the student and faculty advisor. We recommend working with a faculty member with whom you have taken classes and/or whose area of expertise lends itself to your project.

Faculty	Research Area
Amelia Andrews	Policy, American Gov't
Craig Arceneaux	Global Politics
Martin Battle	Global Politics/Methods
Jennifer Denbow	Law and Society
Chris Den Hartog	American Government
Ron Den Otter	Law and Society
Shelley Hurt	Global Politics
Michael Latner	American Government
Anika Leithner	Global Politics
Elizabeth Lowham	Public Policy
Matthew Moore	Political Theory
Jean Williams	American Government
Ning Zhang	Global Politics

Senior Project Requirements

To satisfy the senior project requirement, you must enroll in either (1) POLS 461 and POLS 462 (each class is two units). POLS 461 and 462 are independent study sections in which you work independently with your senior project faculty advisor. With your advisor's permission, you may spread out your senior project by taking POLS 461 one quarter and POLS 462 the next quarter.

First Steps

To begin the Senior Project process, first talk with a member of the Political Science faculty who is likely to be knowledgeable about topic(s) in which you are interested during the quarter before you plan to enroll in POLS 461. Also, be aware that different faculty members have different philosophies about how to develop a senior project. As soon as possible, set up a tentative schedule for when you will complete each part of the project.

The topic has to fall under the umbrella of "politics," but this can include an explanation of political events, phenomena, institutions, or behavior, interpretation of political text(s), analysis of judicial decisions or legal issues, or any number of domestic and foreign policy issues. Above all, you must have a crystal clear research question that you will investigate. You also must develop an equally clear answer to that question that you will defend in your paper. The Resources page has various links that are useful for exploring topics of interest and for conducting research. Keep in mind that some faculty members require you to complete the Senior Project Contract prior to beginning your senior project.

Keep in Mind…

The senior project is an opportunity to be especially creative and scholarly. Take it seriously. Begin work on it as soon as possible and stay in touch with the faculty supervisor on how your work is progressing. You are NOT a Cal Poly graduate and you do NOT receive a diploma until a senior project is completed.

Learning Outcomes
To formulate a clear research question
To formulate an equally clear answer
To defend that answer
To write clearly, concisely, and fluidly
To organize the paper effectively
To understand and synthesize the literature that is relevant to your question
To analyze carefully the data that you plan to use
To build knowledge and conduct original research

General Requirements

The total number of senior project units must be 4. Normally 30 hours of student work will be required for each unit of credit granted. Thus, a senior project should occupy approximately 120 hours from start to finish. The student is responsible for identifying costs and potential funding sources for the senior project prior to its initiation. Costly projects are discouraged. It is the student's responsibility to become informed about the university's intellectual properties policy and

human subjects policy when necessary. If your project involves research on people, including interviews or polls, you must obtain clearance from the Human Subjects Committee prior to beginning work. This process can take several weeks.

All senior projects must be grounded in the relevant literature. That means that you must do an overview of the main arguments in the field. This overview may take the form of a traditional literature review, which demonstrates that you have read much of the existing literature and understand what the major positions are, how and why people disagree, where gaps or unanswered questions lie, and where things might be headed next. A literature review is not just several short book reports put together like pieces of meat and vegetables on a skewer. Instead, it should synthesize the ideas and arguments of others to place your research in a scholarly context. Please consult your faculty advisor for the details of how he or she expects you to ground your project in the relevant literature.

All senior projects must include some element of original research. Examples include conducting interviews, presenting original readings of primary documents, and performing your own analyses of data.

Procedural Requirements:

The faculty of the Department of Political Science has adopted the following guidelines as the minimum standards required for the successful completion of a senior project in this major. These guidelines are only procedural. We recommend that you use Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style* (most recent edition) for all submitted written material. All senior projects shall represent, in the opinion of the faculty advisor, the hours required to successfully complete a minimum of four units of work. The proposed research question of the senior project must be agreed to by the faculty member overseeing the project prior to its beginning. If these criteria are successfully met, and the project is technically correct, it shall fulfill the department's minimum requirements for graduation. The grade shall be determined by the advisor's professional evaluation of the quality of the project.

The Political Science department requires that senior projects be evaluated for compliance with ethical standards regarding the treatment of human subjects established by the University's Human Subjects Committee. If your research involves human subjects you are required to prepare and submit the Human Subjects Protocol Approval Form with the guidance of your advisor. The Human Subjects Committee must approve research involving human subjects prior to the beginning data collection. Research involving human subjects is defined as any systematic investigation of living human subjects or human materials that is designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Examples of human subjects research in political science include, but are not limited to, the design and implementation of survey research, conducting focus groups, in-depth interviews, or engaging in participant observation. For further information, see the *Policy for the Use of Human Subjects in Research*.

Senior Projects should be submitted in the format requested by the faculty advisor. Submission of the Senior Project to the Library and Digital Commons is optional. See Library for more information.

The senior project is time-intensive and may be difficult to finish in a ten-week quarter. You should begin thinking about the research question that you will address in your senior project as soon as possible. We also strongly recommend that once you begin your senior project, you arrange weekly meetings with your faculty advisor.

Suggested Timeline:

Ultimately, the timeline for the completion of your project and for when individual pieces of your senior project might be due will be established between you and your faculty adviser. Since every senior project is different and brings with it its own set of challenges and requirement, you should discuss the best option for a timely completion with your adviser when you begin your work. Below, you will find a general timeline for a 10-week and for a 20-week senior project. All deadlines are subject to your adviser's approval.

Rough Schedule For a 10-Week Project	
Week 0	Prior to the beginning of the quarter that you plan to start your senior project, you should have an advisor who has agreed to supervise the project. Do not wait until the first week of that quarter to find an advisor. That is too late. In addition, you should begin reading the literature that concerns your tentative topic so that you can refine your research question before the quarter begins.
Week 1`	On the first day of the quarter at the latest, you should have a clearly stated research question and a description of the methods you plan to use.
Week 2	By the end of the second week, you should have identified most of the literature relevant to your project.
Week 3	Read that literature.
Week 4	By the end of the fourth week, you should have an annotated bibliography ready.
Week 5	By the end of the fifth week, you should have finished an outline of the entire project.
Week 6	Write the rough draft.
Week 7	Write the rough draft.
Week 8	Turn in a complete rough draft to your advisor.
Week 9	Revise the rough draft based on your advisor's feedback.
Week 10	Turn in the final draft no later than the Monday of final exams week unless you have made a different arrangement with your faculty advisor.

Rough Schedule For a 20-Week Project	
Week 0	Prior to the beginning of the quarter that you plan to start your senior project, you should have an advisor who has agreed to supervise the project. Do not wait until the first week of that quarter to find an advisor. That is too late. In addition, you should begin reading the literature that concerns your tentative topic so that you can refine your research question before the quarter begins.
Week 2	On the first day of the quarter at the latest, you should have a clearly stated research question and a description of the methods you plan to use.
Week 4	By the end of the second week, you should have identified most of the literature relevant to your project.
Week 6	Read that literature.
Week 8	By the end of the fourth week, you should have an annotated bibliography ready.
Week 10	By the end of the fifth week, you should have finished an outline of the entire project.
Week 12	Write the rough draft.
Week 14	Write the rough draft.
Week 16	Turn in a complete rough draft to your advisor.
Week 18	Revise the rough draft based on your advisor's feedback.
Week 20	Turn in the final draft no later than the Monday of final exams week unless you have made a different arrangement with your faculty advisor.

Awards

At the annual spring dinner, the best senior project is awarded the John H. Lynn Prize for Outstanding Senior Project. Faculty members nominate senior projects for consideration and the Faculty Awards Committee makes the final decision.

Eligibility

The awards are given in Spring quarter. Papers submitted in the preceding Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter quarters are eligible to be nominated for paper awards. Similarly, students who have been enrolled during any one of those quarters are eligible to be nominated for academic excellence/service awards.

Papers must be submitted to the committee in the same form as they were originally submitted for grading/evaluation. No subsequent changes or revisions may be made.

Past Senior Project Topics

American Government

- The Effectiveness of Negative Campaigning: Television Advertisements

- The Lesbian and Gay Rights Movement

- Immigration Policy: Immigration Reform and Employer Sanctions

- Education Policy and Educational Inequalities

- Whiteness and the Social Construction of Race

- Prison Privatization and Reform in California

Political Theory

- Are the politics of *South Park* libertarian?

- Are modern conservatives really conservatives?

- Can conservatives learn anything from Machiavelli about how to deal with having inherited a society they think isn't worth conserving?

- A philosophical investigation of eugenics for the 21st century

Law and Society

- Kelo v. City of New London: Public Use or Abuse?

- The constitutional right to same sex marriage

- Is capital punishment unconstitutional?

- Should a strict liability standard of fault be used for statutory rape?

- Is there still a need for an Equal Rights Amendment?

- Should the jury system be abolished?

- Is there a constitutional right to education?

Global Politics

- The psychological mechanisms for political radicalism

- Comparison of terrorism in post 9/11 U.S. and post-Soviet states

- Comparison of party system and legislative efficiency in U.S., U.K., Germany, and Japan

- Checks and balances in the Iranian political system

- Is capacity-building a viable solution of poverty alleviation in underdeveloped countries?

- California: The Epicenter of Eugenics in the United States.

- TRIPS: Creating International Society or Reinforcing Power Relations?

- Methane: An Acutely Undervalued Facet of Climate Change

- The Irony of World Hunger: Evaluating Causal Variables

- Assessing the Consequences of Geoengineering: Issues of Accountability in International Law

- Cultural Responses for Modernization: Child Sacrifice in Uganda

- Suppression of Falungong in China: A Multicultural Interpretation

Non-Paper Projects

- MTV's Rock the Vote Event in downtown SLO

- Educational video for students interested in entering the foreign service

- Documentary screening and panel on "Climate Refugees"

- Organization of Model United Nations for local High School students

- Development of a study abroad program

- Organization of a voter drive

- Development of an interdisciplinary course for Political Science

APPENDIX A

Senior Project Contract

CAL POLY
SAN LUIS OBISPO

Political Science Department
College of Liberal Arts

SENIOR PROJECT AGREEMENT/CONTRACT

Fill in all designated areas
Submit <u>two</u> signed copies to your Senior Project Faculty Advisor in the Department of Political Science.

1. Student Name:

2. Phone number:

3. Email:

4. Student ID number:

5. <u>Title</u> of project:

6. This Agreement/Contract, entered into between:

   Student:

   Faculty Member:

   is an agreement whereby grade and credit for (check those that apply):

   _____**POLS 461 Senior Project I (2 units) & 462 Senior Project II (2 units) - taken together**

   _____**POLS 461 Senior Project I (2 units) & 462 Senior Project II (2 units) - spread out over two consecutive quarters**

will be awarded in return for specified project efforts. These project efforts are set forth in this agreement.

It is agreed that all work described in this document will be completed as scheduled and within the parameters as noted below.

7. Research Question, Research Statement, or Problem Identification:
This section of the agreement will be used to "set the stage" for the project. Although this section will be brief and concise here, it must be expanded in the actual senior project. The purpose of this section in the Senior Project is to furnish the background research and information concerning relevant history, experience, state of research, and/or circumstances that provide justification for this project.

8. Describe the chosen Research Methods for the Project:
This section must be very specific. It is a description of the procedures that the student will use as well as the scope of the project. Describe what will actually occur.

9. Develop the <u>Plan and Schedule</u>:
Indicate the steps you expect to take to accomplish the work. These steps should be identified in logical sequence, from the first through to the last, in an orderly manner. Students should identify all of those tasks/steps that are significant along with time estimates and deadlines for accomplishing these tasks/steps. (Note: Normally, 30 hours of student work are required for each unit of credit granted, thus a Senior Project should occupy approximately 120 hours from start to finish).

10. Is this Senior Project an expanded version of a paper that was turned in for another course?
      _____Yes
      _____No

If the answer to #10 is Yes, please explain HOW and WHY this Senior Project expands upon the original paper. Be specific.

11. I understand that Senior Projects must be submitted on CD-ROM given to the faculty advisor. I further understand that submission of the Senior Project to the Library is optional (see CPSU Library for more information).

12. Approval: Obtain Signatures indicating approval of the following statements:

Student Statement: I fully understand the requirements outlined in this agreement/contract and agree to meet these requirements. I further agree to request, in writing, any significant changes, which may become necessary during the course of this senior project. I understand that any such request will only become valid and a part of this Agreement/Contract if accepted by my Faculty Advisor.

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Student Name (typed): _____

Faculty Member Statement: I approve this project proposal and accept the responsibilities of Faculty Advisor for this Senior Project Agreement/Contract.

Faculty Signature: _____

Date: _____

Faculty Name (typed): _____

APPENDIX B
Senior Project Grading Rubric

Senior Project Learning Objectives

(1) To formulate a clear research question
(2) To formulate an equally clear answer
(3) To defend that answer
(4) To write clearly, concisely, and fluidly
(5) To organize the paper effectively
(6) To understand and synthesize the literature that is relevant to your question
(7) To analyze carefully the data that you plan to use
(8) To build knowledge and conduct creative and/or original research

Objective	Superior (4)	Good (3)	Satisfactory (3)	Minimal/None (1)
CREATIVITY AND/OR ORIGINALITY (OBJECTIVE 8)				
Creative and/or Original Approach	The research is very creative and/or original in its questions, approach, methodology, and/or conclusions. The student exhibits a superior ability to come to his/her own conclusions based on his/her research	The research contains some creative and/or original elements in its questions, approach, methodology, and/or conclusions. The student shows the ability to come to his/her own conclusions based on his/her research.	The research is not entirely creative and/or original, but shows creativity and skill in its contributions to the existing literature. The student exhibits some signs of independent thinking, but largely fails to come to his/her own conclusions based on his/her research.	The research is not creative and/or original. The student does not exhibit the ability to come to his/her own conclusions based on his/her research.
CRITICAL THINKING (OBJECTIVES 1, 2, 3, 5 AND 7)				
Explanation of issue/research question	Issue/problem is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all information necessary for full understanding.	Issue/problem is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.	Issue/problem is stated, but description leave some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds	Issue/problem is stated without sufficient clarification or description.

				unknown.
Importance of issue/research question	Importance of the issue/problem is made clear in terms of the theoretical or practical contributions of the project.	Importance of issue/problem is addressed generally, but without specific discussion of theoretical or practical contributions of the project.	Importance of issue/problem is mentioned, but not further discussed.	Importance of issue/problem is not discussed.
Context and theoretical assumptions	Systematically/methodically analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts (e.g. historical, political, cultural, etc.)	Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting the issue/problem or relevant positions.	Questions some assumptions; identifies several relevant contexts for issue/problem or positions, but may be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).	Shows minimal or no awareness of assumptions and/or relevant contexts. But explores neither in great detail.
Student's thesis/hypothesis and/or perspective	The student's specific thesis/hypothesis and/or is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue; limits of position are acknowledged; others' points of view are synthesized within position.	The student's specific thesis/hypothesis and/or position takes into account the complexities of an issue; others' points of view are acknowledged.	The student's specific thesis/hypothesis and/or position acknowledges different sides of an issue.	The student's specific thesis/hypothesis and/or position is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.
Conclusions, implications, and consequences	Conclusions and implications are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed into priority order.	Conclusions and implications are logically tied to a range of information, incl. opposing viewpoints.	Conclusions and implications are logically tied to information (b/c information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion).	Conclusions and implications are inconsistently tied to the information discussed and are oversimplified.
LITERATURE REVIEW (OBJECTIVE 6)				
Knowledge base	Demonstrates a thorough grasp of the conceptual basis, scope, and significance of the issue/problem; uses terminology and	Demonstrates a good grasp of the conceptual basis, scope, and significance of the issue/problem, but	Demonstrates adequate understanding of the scope and significance of the problem and its	Demonstrates inadequate knowledge of significance or scope of the issue/problem;

	concepts appropriately	may miss some of the relevant information; uses terminology and concepts appropriately.	conceptual basis; uses appropriate terminology and concepts.	avoids using appropriate terminology and concepts.
Relevance	Only cites sources that are highly relevant to the issue/problem; identifies major schools of thought and authors in the field	Cites sources that are relevant to the issue/problem; identifies major schools of thought and authors in the field, but may miss important ones.	Cites some relevant sources and identifies related schools of thought and authors in the field, but shows significant gaps in the pertinent literature.	Cites resources that appear minimally or only generally relevant to defining the proposed issue/problem.
Scope of opinion and contrasting positions	Reveals spectrum of opinions among current researchers of this issue/problem, concisely summarizes these contrasting positions; explains own position in relation to them.	Largely reveals spectrum of opinions among current researchers of this issue/problem, summarizes them; generally addresses own position in relation to them.	Partially reveals spectrum of opinions among current researchers, but exhibits a fairly narrow focus; may not address own position in relation to them.	Extremely narrow focus obscures the scope of opinions for the current research on this issue/problem. Own position may or may not be addressed.
Theoretical implications	Demonstrates thorough understanding of the theoretical implications of cited research findings; establishes connections among them or with own research.	Generally understands theoretical implications of research findings in cited literature and established connections among them or with own research.	Understand some theoretical implications cited research findings, but may fail to do so comprehensively and may or may not establish connections.	Incompletely understands the theoretical implications of cited research; does not establish connections.
Organization	Summarizes sources into schools of thought and demonstrates the relationships among them; shows how cited literature helps to define or formulate the issue/problem, question, and hypothesis	Summarizes sources into schools of thought and demonstrates relationships among them.	Identifies incomplete schools of thought and weakly demonstrates relationships among them. Literature review resembles an annotated bibliography.	Presents an annotated bibliography without clearly demonstrating the relationships among cited sources.
Length/Scope	Uses appropriate	Uses appropriate	May use	Uses incomplete

	number of sources from largely peer-reviewed professional and academic sources.	number of sources from professional and academic sources.	inappropriate number of sources; may use largely non-peer reviewed sources.	number of sources of questionable origin.
Writing and Organization (OBJECTIVE 4)				
Purpose of project	Project's goals are clearly stated, though writer is not confined by them; fully controls thesis throughout the project and consistently considers the audience and meets its expectations.	Project's goals are addressed; thesis is identifiable throughout the project, but may stray off topic on occasion; seems aware of audience expectations.	Consistent effort to address project's goals; thesis is generally clear, but may be lost at times; considers audience, but with inconsistencies.	Does not consistently address project's goals; focus shifts frequently and is unaware of or fails to meet audience expectations.
Synthesis	Synthesizes texts/ideas with expertise and formulates a sophisticated, complex discussion of the topic; organization feels deliberate and compliments the topic	Synthesizes texts/ideas with some expertise and begins to formulate a cohesive discussion of the topic; lacks some sophistication; some missteps with organization.	Some attempts to synthesize complex texts/ideas, but cannot sustain the effort; global organization is clear, but local organization may stray.	Preliminary or no attempts to synthesize texts/ideas; discussion feels disorganized, making cohesion difficult or impossible.
Support	Makes fully developed assertions and/or draws logical conclusions that are supported by the evidence; consistently includes details, references, and examples that point to the complex nature of the topic.	Clear assertions/conclusions are backed up by effective use of evidence; some errors in logic; development aided by key details.	Assertions/conclusions are largely supported by evidence; some generalities persist.	Assertions/conclusions are difficult to identify and are not consistently supported by evidence; repetition frequently takes place of development.
Style	Evidence of consistent, deliberate, and refined stylistic presence on the page (e.g. appropriate tone, terminology, persuasiveness, transitions, etc.)	Writes with complex sentence structures and language; evidence of stylistic complexity.	Demonstrates some stylistic adeptness, but style lacks consistency and refinement.	Simple sentences and word choice; paragraphs break randomly and may lack focus.
Mechanics	The writing is near perfect with almost no grammatical, spelling, or formatting errors.	Minor errors are present, but not too distracting; content is clear.	Some errors impeded reading, but content is generally clear.	Errors are significant and detract from meaning; piece requires significant

				editing.
Formatting	Formatting meets all the specified requirements.	Formatting meets most of the specific requirements.	Formatting meets most specific requirements, but show gaps.	Disregard specific formatting requirements.

* = this rubric assumes that the submitted project meets the basic requirements (a 35-50 page paper or equivalent); projects not meeting those requirements will not receive a passing grade

Total Score:

      Originality Section Score: _____

      Critical Thinking Section Score: _____

      Literature Review Section Score: _____

      Writing/Organization Section Score: _____

      TOTAL SCORE: _____

PLEASE NOTE: The POLS faculty have agreed to use this rubric to assess senior projects. However each faculty member has discretion about how much weight to give the various sections of the rubric.