



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, 0521  
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TO: Junior Majors in Political Science with a 3.6 Overall GPA

FROM: Gary Jacobson, Professor and Undergraduate Advisor

RE: Senior Honors Seminar

On behalf of the Department of Political Science faculty, I would like to congratulate you on your record of academic achievement at UCSD. I would also like to invite you to consider enrolling in the Department's Senior Honors Seminar, Political Science 191A-B.

The seminar, which is offered only during fall and winter quarters, is open to undergraduate majors with senior standing in the first quarter of the seminar, have a minimum GPA of 3.6 in political science, have completed all lower-division requirements including Political Science 30 and five upper-division courses. The seminar sequence provides the opportunity and structure for eligible majors to write a thesis with which they may qualify to graduate with departmental honors. (Majors may graduate with honors in their college without writing a thesis.)

Students who wish to write a senior honors thesis are required to have a member of the faculty as an advisor and who has read one of their papers, one which is a "substantial" piece of writing. This means a paper in which students have carefully developed an argument and systematically mustered evidence in support of it. This written work is intended to give students practice so that the 40-100-page thesis does not loom as an intimidating prospect. These papers may develop out of any of our upper division courses which require papers, any departmental seminars, or in conjunction with course work completed on EAP or OAP.

Students have much to gain from the experience of writing a thesis, beyond the possibility of graduating with departmental honors. First, the seminar provides a rare opportunity for students to define and develop an independent research project. Students begin in the fall with a research question or thesis which they refine in collaboration with a faculty advisor. The seminar coordinators and other members of the faculty are available to help students with suggestions on bibliography and case selection or data banks. A second benefit of the seminar is the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member. Students meet regularly with the thesis advisor in mini-tutorial sessions. These meetings encourage students to pursue theoretical and empirical questions further than is possible in lecture courses. A third benefit is that students who hope to go on to graduate school often acquire essential library and writing skills and self-disciplined work habits which are an enormous advantage in graduate school. Many past participants in the seminar have found that writing a thesis was very useful in helping them to evaluate graduate school options.

If you will qualify to enroll in the seminar in the fall, I encourage you to consider this opportunity carefully. The program is a demanding challenge, but worth the effort it requires from students. Think about a thesis topic and a possible advisor. Try to define a topic that builds on your interests, strengths, and course background. Discuss your topic with several faculty people from whom you have taken courses to assess the feasibility of the topic, the availability of sources, and the interest of faculty in advising such a thesis. You may wish to review theses which have been awarded honors in the past. They are available in the Political Science Department (SSB 301).