
Comprehensive Seminar

POLS 459, Spring 2025

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Table of Contents

Overview of the Course

[Hello, Seniors!](#)

[Canvas](#)

[What does a Final Paper look like?](#)

The Comps Process

[Writing](#)

[Advisor Sessions](#)

[Declaring Honors](#)

[Brown Bag Sessions](#)

[Key Dates and Deadlines](#)

Grades

[Breakdown](#)

[Participation](#)

[Components](#)

[Final Paper](#)

Format and Citation Style

Required Materials

Schedule

Policies and Resources

[Statement of the Shared Academic Integrity Commitment](#)

[Student Academic and Health Support Resources](#)

[Emmons Health and Counseling Center](#)

[Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation](#)

[Title IX \(Link to Title IX\)](#)

[Special Accommodations/Learning Differences \(Link to Disability Services\)](#)

[Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience \(Link to the policy in Catalog\)](#)

[Land Acknowledgement](#)

[Lived name policy](#)

[Intercultural Community Center](#)

Overview of the Course

Hello, Seniors!

Welcome to the culmination of the Politics major! POLS 495 is designed to guide you through the process of researching and writing your senior thesis. Step-by-step, you will experience the scholarly research and writing process while developing a supportive intellectual community amongst department seniors. This course and your project form a serious capstone of your academic study of Politics.

POLS 495 is a 4-credit course, which means that you should be devoting at least 12 hours per week to this class. By the **Final Paper** deadline late in the semester, you will have produced a piece of original scholarship. For most, **Final Papers** will be between **25 and 30 pages**. If you are going for Honors—3.25 GPA overall, 3.5 in Department, both as of December 31, 2024—it is expected that your paper will be longer and more developed. All papers must be guided by a research question grounded firmly in the political science literature and discipline.

Canvas

Canvas will be a central component of this seminar. Our Canvas Homepage includes a Google calendar with all relevant dates and deadlines. It also houses crucial resources, any documents and materials (i.e., past slides, peer review worksheets, checklists, this syllabus, etc.). In addition, **all assignments – including paper components and your Final Comps document– should be submitted via the Assignments page on Canvas.**

What does a Final Paper look like?

We have provided a detailed checklist for each section of your Final Paper [here](#).

(Open the Google Sheet and make a copy for your own files.) But broadly, a **Final Paper** should show:

- ☐ A clear and concise thesis that explains how or why an outcome in politics occurs;
- ☐ Familiarity with and analysis of the political science literature relevant to the question;
- ☐ Primary research, which will vary depending on the topic but may include analysis of primary sources, field research (i.e., interviews or surveys), or compiling and analyzing an original dataset;
- ☐ Evidence gathered from primary research, presented in an organized manner, and adequately analyzed throughout the paper;

- ☐ Conclusions drawn in support of the thesis, including claims that go beyond opinion or summary of secondary sources; and
- ☐ Implications for politics or international affairs.

If confused on where to even begin, you can start with your Research Proposal submitted in the Fall of 2024! (That is, in fact, step 1 of your first assignment.) But you can also peruse the Department's collection of outstanding comps projects here: [Exemplary Politics Comps](#). These examples demonstrate what the successful execution of each stage of the Final Paper – from the literature review to the conclusion—should look like. Feel free to use these papers as your guides as you work on the components of your own comps.

The Comps Process

In practice, this semester-long process can be broken down into three parts:

1. **Writing**
2. **Advisor Sessions**
3. **Brown Bag Sessions**

See the descriptions below!

Writing


You will submit early work for feedback from your comps advisor and your peers. The deadlines for those paper components are below in the [Key Dates and Deadlines](#) section. Unless otherwise specified in the syllabus or by the comps advisor, all due dates are firm. These deadlines are set for **Mondays before our Tuesday seminar sessions**– this is to ensure that you can get feedback from your peers during Tuesday sessions (if your comps advisor does active peer review).

As we move through the semester, you will be expected to rewrite earlier drafts and to demonstrate significant progress between drafts. It is encouraged for you to schedule meetings with your comps advisor to go over peer review sessions, advisor comments, or ongoing revisions.

Again, you can use the **Final Paper** checklist [here](#) to guide you in writing the components and meeting the deadlines listed below.

Advisor Sessions

While the first two seminar sessions will be run by Professors Arellano, Hale, and Wiener together, the remaining seminar sessions will be dedicated to 1:1 meetings with your advisors. **This is required time for you to check in, receive feedback and guidance, and**



maintain accountability. Each advisor will likely schedule and structure these sessions differently. In addition, if your advisor feels like it is necessary or important to your progress, you might need to schedule additional 1:1 time for office hours to ensure you can be successful.

Declaring Honors

Each year, several students choose early on to pursue an Honors comps. Papers awarded Honors stand out for their robust and advanced theoretical exploration, thorough data collection and analysis, and sophisticated case study applications—exceeding the expectations for even above-average work. While Honors papers are longer, their true distinction lies in their depth of analysis, strength of argument, and polished composition.

Unlike standard comps, which are graded solely by your advisor, Honors comps are evaluated by independent readers within the department to determine whether they meet the elevated standard. You can explore examples of past Honors comps [here](#).

If you're interested in pursuing Honors, you must declare your intent by the February deadline. It is not possible to decide later in the semester to submit your paper for Honors if you miss the declaration deadline. However, there is no penalty if you declare your intent and later decide not to follow through with the Honors track.

In short, if you are considering Honors, declare by the deadline. While you're free to change your mind afterward, you won't have the option to pursue Honors if you wait too long.

Brown Bag Sessions

You will also see in the [Key Dates and Deadlines](#) section below that we will be holding three **Brown Bag Sessions** for the group together. **Brown Bag Sessions** are a commonplace in academia—scholars come together, usually during a meal time, and give short presentations on their ongoing research to receive questions and feedback.

Our sessions will take place during the usual seminar block, but dinner will be provided to create a more informal setting.¹ You will be divided into smaller groups with one advisor—but these groups will be different from your usual peer review groups/advisor. You'll give a short presentation on your progress, offering opportunities for questions and feedback.

These sessions will often take place a week after a paper component draft has been due (and peer review has taken place). This gives you a chance to revise your work and present it for continued progress. **Dates for Brown Bag Sessions are also listed below in the Key Dates and Deadlines section.**

Key Dates and Deadlines

¹ They're also called "Brown Bag" sessions because scholars usually bring their own food—in brown paper bags. But as stated, food will be provided.

- **Revised Research Proposal:** Jan 27, 2025
- **IRB Submission:** (If applicable) Feb 3, 2025
- **Declare Intent to Pursue Honors:** Feb 4, 2025
- **Theory and Lit Review Sections:** Feb 10, 2025
- **Brown Bag Session #1:** Feb 18, 2025
- **Research Design and Methods Section:** Feb 24, 2025
- **Brown Bag Session #2:** Mar 4, 2025
- **Results and Analysis Section:** Mar 17, 2025
- **Brown Bag Session #3:** Mar 25, 2025
- **HONORS TRACK Final Comps Deadline:** Apr 7, 2025
- **Final Comps Deadline:** Apr 15, 2025

Grades

Breakdown

1. Participation 15%
2. Components 20%
3. Final Paper 65%

Participation

Your participation can be demonstrated by attending all required comps sessions; making steady progress on your comps each week; discussing and adopting where appropriate the changes recommended by your advisor; supporting and encouraging your peers; actively and critically engaging the ideas you encounter in your work and the work of others; and striving to continually improve your work.

Components

Grades on the four components are not assigned letter grades but are assessed on a check/check+/check-/0 grading scheme. If you do not turn in a component by 2 weeks past the deadline on Canvas, you will receive a 0. Otherwise, you can follow these guidelines for grading:

Check+

Requirements:

- Fully complete with proper in-text citations and a matching, formatted bibliography.

- Meets all the corresponding criteria from the final comps checklist ([link to checklist](#)).
- Incorporates feedback from previous advisor meetings and comments.
- Demonstrates clear, cohesive critical thinking and shows how concepts connect and develop.
- Clearly explains the contribution of the research and accurately applies and interprets relevant concepts and empirical analyses.

Note: Submissions more than 2 days late are not eligible for a Check+.

Check

Requirements:

- Meets most (but not necessarily all) of the above requirements, or shows enough progress to indicate that the work is moving in the right direction.
- Demonstrates that you are steadily working through the process.

Check-

Requirements:

- The component is incomplete, missing citations, or fails to incorporate advisor feedback (unless otherwise discussed).

Note: Submissions more than 10 days late will receive a Check-.

Final Paper

Your comps advisor will assign a letter grade to your final comps submission, which will determine whether you Pass (between C- and B+), Pass with Distinction (A- or above) or Fail (<C-) the comps. Honors is a determination separate from the letter grade. For students seeking Honors, their comps advisor plus one other comps advisor will make a collective determination whether the Final Paper also receives Honors. If these two faculty cannot agree, additional opinions are sought. Said another way, at least two faculty must agree to convey the merit of Honors. Students seeking Honors must confirm their intention with their comps advisor by January 23.

Format and Citation Style

Guidance for citations in all drafts and the Final Paper can be found in the [American Political Science Association's style manual here](#). APSA uses Chicago Style so you should as well.

We also encourage students to use Zotero to keep track of and properly cite sources. The library has a helpful [Zotero Resource Page](#).

You may not use MLA. This rule is firm. Stop using MLA right now. Components submitted using MLA may reduce the components grade.

Required Materials

The Department has chosen sections of a helpful book: Lisa Baglione, Writing a Research Paper in Political Science. All students are expected to use the chapters to guide their own research and writing process.

Baglione, Lisa A., Writing a Research Paper in Political Science 2nd Edition (Los Angeles, CA: Sage/CQ Press, 2012). (selected chapters)

Additionally, each student will develop their own reading list, which will be reflected in their paper's literature review and the bibliography of their Final Paper.


Schedule

Group meetings: All four comps advisors and all comps students will meet as a group for the **first two Tuesdays at 7:15 pm**.

- **January 21:** Class introduction.
 - In class: Introduction to the course; student's brief 3-minute introduction to their comps topic.
- **January 28:** Revised research proposal (Due on January 27 by 5 pm)
 - In class: peer review of revised proposal within each cohort (when you are done, send it to your peer and comps advisor)
- **Cohort meetings:** Each comps advisor will provide their cohorts with expectations and meeting times.
- **February 18:** Brown Bag Session #1
- **March 3:** Brown Bag Session #2
- **March 25:** Brown Bag Session #3

Policies and Resources

Statement of the Shared Academic Integrity Commitment



Academic Integrity is a shared community value. It is built around trust and respect between members of the Occidental Community, and embodies a commitment to honesty and integrity in every aspect of one's academic life.

All members of the Occidental community are committed to uphold the highest degree of academic integrity. Unless stipulated otherwise, the academic work done for all assignments is expected to be the student's own, and students give proper credit to the ideas and work of others.

Signing the Academic Integrity Commitment at matriculation and at the beginning of every semester represents a student's affirmation to uphold the shared values of honesty and integrity. When signing the Integrity Commitment associated with work in a course, students are affirming that they have not cheated, plagiarized, fabricated, or falsified information; nor assisted others in these actions.

[Link to Student Handbook \(which includes the framing of the commitment, definitions of Academic Ethics, and Process for alleged violations of the commitment\)](#)

Student Academic and Health Support Resources

The College has a wide range of Student Academic Support Resources.

If you'd like to take advantage of the College's Academic Coaching resource, which offers one-on-one sessions focused on supporting your time management skills, online learning strategies, and other study skills, you may schedule an academic coaching meeting by sending an email to academiccoaching@oxy.edu. Share what you'd like to work on, and an academic coach will schedule an appointment with you within a few days.

The Library's Teaching, Learning, and Research Support (TLRS) offers [library research consultations](#). We also offer peer-to-peer [support for learning technologies](#) from Moodle and Zoom to Adobe, app making, and ProTools.

Peer Tutors are available to assist students on [discipline-specific peer tutoring](#) for coursework, and content review and study skills support in a variety of academic departments. Information about tutoring for all subject, including languages, can found at: <https://www.oxy.edu/academics/student-success/peer-learning>

The Writing Center offers opportunities to work on all forms of writing for any class or other writing tasks such as personal statements, proposals, senior comprehensives, etc. We offer peer-to-peer consultations with knowledgeable Writing Advisers and sessions with Faculty Writing Specialists. We are located on the ground floor of the Academic Commons. See the [Writing Center website](#) for more information about our hours and how to sign up for appointments. Please contact the Writing Center Director, Prof. Prebel



(jprebel@oxy.edu; x1307) for more information on how the Writing Center can work with you.

Emmons Health and Counseling Center

The Emmons Health and Counseling Center provides support for issues of stress, medical and mental health. www.departments.oxy.edu/emmons

Your health and well-being has always impacted learning and academic success, and this reality is only heightened as we enter a new season of the pandemic and transition back to campus. Symptoms such as anxiety, depression, loss of motivation, difficulty concentrating, strained relationships, and feelings of not belonging can occur. Emmons Counseling staff are committed to supporting the mental health needs of our students. Due to the nature of our work and the safety for all, Emmons counseling services will continue via teletherapy. Emmons will provide ongoing individual therapy, walk-ins, support groups and consultations through a virtual platform. Emmons staff will also support students with finding local therapy referrals. In case of an emergency or a crisis, there will be counselors onsite to assist the Oxy community. All students continue to have access to the 24/7 confidential hotline at (323) 341-4141. To get connected to any of the free, confidential services at Emmons call (323) 259-2657 or schedule an appointment online at <https://myhealth.oxy.edu> using your Oxy login credentials.

Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation


[\(Link to the College's policy here\)](#)

Inclusivity is of chief concern to your professors and advisors in this course. We seek to maintain an environment of mutual respect among all members of our community. Please come to any one of us with concerns that you may have.

Additionally, you are free to utilize [this Flag Pole link](#). (You can find this on the Moodle Homepage as well.) As the title of the form suggests, this is a place for you to raise a flag should you have concerns, feedback, or just generally something you feel the need to share. It is anonymous (unless you'd like to provide your name), and makes as little demand on you as possible-- feedback on any changes to professor or advisor behavior is completely optional. We are simply providing you a safe space to voice your perspective.

Title IX ([Link to Title IX](#))

In the event that you choose to write or speak about having experienced sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual



exploitation or any other form of sexual and/or gender-based harassment, as a designated Responsible Employee, I must notify the Title IX Office. They will contact you to let you know about accommodations and support services at Oxy and reporting options both on and off-campus. You have no obligation to respond to the Title IX Office or to meet with them to discuss support services and reporting options.

If you do not want the Title IX Office notified, instead of disclosing this information to your instructor, either through conversation or a class assignment, you can speak confidentially with the following people on campus:

- Oxy's Survivor Advocate, Project SAFE (survivoradvocate@oxy.edu)
- Emmons Counseling (For appointments, call: 323-259-2657)
- Rev. Dr. Susan Young, Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (young@oxy.edu)

The sexual misconduct policy, along with additional resources, can be found at: <http://www.oxy.edu/sexual-respect-title-ix/policies-procedures>. If you would like to contact the Title IX Office directly, you can email Title IX Coordinator Alexandra Fulcher at afulcher@oxy.edu or call 323-259-1338.


Special Accommodations/Learning Differences ([Link to Disability Services](#))

Students with documented disabilities and learning differences who are registered with Disability Services are required to present their accommodation letter to the instructor at the beginning of each semester, or as soon as possible thereafter. Any student who has, or thinks they may have, a physical, learning, or psychological disability may contact Disability Services at accessibility@oxy.edu to learn about available services and support.

Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience ([Link to the policy in Catalog](#))

Consistent with Occidental College's commitment to creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that students should be excused from class for reasons of faith and conscience without academic consequence. While it is not feasible to schedule coursework around all days of conviction for a class as a whole, faculty will honor requests from individual students to reschedule coursework, to be absent from classes that conflict with the identified days. Information about this process is available on the ORSL website: <https://www.oxy.edu/office-religious-spiritual-life>

Land Acknowledgement



Occidental College sits on the traditional, unceded territory and homelands of the **Tongva people**. Please click through to read more about the [Gabrielino-Tongva tribe](#) and about the practice of [land acknowledgement](#).

Lived name policy

Occidental College seeks to provide an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment by making it possible for students to use a lived first name and pronouns on college records when a legal name is not required. Students are encouraged to use Zoom to display their lived name and pronouns. These can be set at <https://occidental.zoom.us/profile>.

Intercultural Community Center

The Intercultural Community Center (ICC) seeks to uplift and support the experiences of students who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, low income or first generation college students. The ICC also aims to reduce institutional barriers for minoritized groups through intersectional programming, identity-specific services and structural resources. To learn more, contact icc@oxy.edu, or reach out directly to Chris Arguedas, at carguedas@oxy.edu.