



# Closure Exercise Guidelines

In order to complete the Political Science Master's Degree, a student must complete the closure exercise. A student may choose one of three types of closure exercises: a **thesis**, a **comprehensive examination**, a **participant/observer case study**. A student should begin thinking about their closure exercise early in their degree program, and should discuss the closure exercise options with their faculty advisor in some of their first advising meetings. Students should not anticipate starting and completing their closure exercise in one semester.

## I. Common Components of the Closure Exercise Options

Each of the three closure exercises must include: a closure committee, a written proposal, registration in the PSC 590: Closure Exercise Course, and an Oral Defense. All closure exercises must comply with the formatting guidelines outlined below. All closure exercises are graded as credit or no credit.

### A. The Closure Committee

1. A closure committee is required for all three closure exercise types.
2. A closure committee must consist of two members, one who will be the closure committee chair. The closure committee chair must be a member of the Political Science Department faculty. For a thesis committee, a third closure committee member is required and must be a faculty member from outside the Political Science Department. For a comprehensive examination committee, the other closure committee member must be a faculty member from inside the Political Science Department. For a participant/observer case study committee, the other closure committee member may be a faculty member from the Political Science Department or outside the Political Science Department.
3. A student is responsible for requesting faculty participation and formulating their closure committee. If a student is uncertain which Political Science faculty members would be best suited to supervise their area of interest, the student should discuss potential closure committee members with their faculty advisor or other professors he/she gets to know in classes.

### B. The Written Proposal

A written proposal is required for each type of closure exercise. All written proposals must follow the formatting guidelines listed below. Specific proposal information is detailed below for each closure exercise option.

### C. The Course - PSC 590: Closure Exercise

A student cannot complete the closure exercise without registering for and successfully completing the course PSC 590: Closure Exercise.

#### 1. When to Register for PSC 590

A student should register for the course PSC 590: Closure Exercise after they:

- Have an approved written proposal (*A student's proposal must be written and approved by their committee chair prior to registering for PSC 590.*)
- Have completed 32 credit hours towards their Political Science Master's Degree (*Exceptions to this requirement require a petition signed by the student's advisor and the Political Science Chair.*)

#### 2. How to Register for PSC 590

After they meet the requirements to register for PSC 590, a student should contact their closure chair and request permission to register for PSC 590.

- When contacting their closure committee chair a student should specify whether or not they plan to complete their closure exercise in one semester (registering for four credit hours) or over more than one semester.
- Students in the 100% Online Political Science Master's Degree Program need to remind their Closure Chair that their PSC 590 course needs to be classified as a 100% online course
- Once a student has received permission to register for PSC 590, they will be contacted by the Department and informed when they can register for PSC 590 in the UIS Student Self Service System (<https://apps.uillinois.edu/selfservice/>).

### **3. Continuing in the Closure Exercise – PSC 591: Closure Exercise Continuing Enrollment**

- If a student registers for four credit hours of PSC 590, but needs additional time to complete their closure exercise, he or she must continue to enroll for one credit hour of PSC 591: Closure Exercise Continuing Enrollment each fall and spring semester until they complete their closure exercise.

#### **D. The Oral Defense**

The oral defense is an integral portion of the closure exercise. It is not a formality. Committee members will withhold evaluative judgment on the written component until after the oral defense. The oral component will allow the student to clarify and amplify the written component. Inadequate oral responses to questions may cause members to question student mastery of their subject matter. The committee may request further revision of the closure exercise based on the oral defense.

#### **E. Formatting**

All written components of the closure exercise must:

- Be written in standard English
- Double-spaced
- Page-numbered
- Formatted in 12-point, Times New Roman font
- Follow citation and reference guidelines in the latest edition of the American Political Science Style Manual for Political Science (APSA). (The APSA Style Manual for Political Science can be accessed at: <https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>).
- Be submitted electronically as a Microsoft Word Document

#### **F. Grading**

All closure exercises are graded as credit or no credit. The final grade (CR/NC) is based on the student's performance on the student's closure exercise performance and the oral defense. All committee members must approve the closure exercise in writing, using the standard UIS Master's Closure Approval Form.

## **II. The Thesis Option**

### **A. An Overview of the Thesis Option**

The thesis should address a question in political science, demonstrate the ability to conduct independent research, reflect the ability to engage in critical and analytical thinking, and exhibit knowledge gained from substantive coursework and research methods classes taken in the program. The thesis may serve to create new findings or analyze an existing body of knowledge. The idea for the thesis may originate from coursework, the student's personal or professional interest, or from discussions with a faculty member.

The topic, proposal, and writing of the thesis should be done in close consultation with the committee chair. Other committee members shall be consulted as necessary. There are no specific page-length requirements or minimum number of bibliographic entries, however the thesis is considered a major exercise and the bibliographic references should reflect a thorough reading of the literature surrounding the research question. Traditionally, thesis texts of about 30-40 pages have been acceptable in the program, although page-length is dependent on the nature of the question and type of research design utilized. Examples of successful political science theses may be accessed by contacting your Political Science faculty advisor or the UIS Brookens Library.

## **B. The Thesis Proposal**

A thesis proposal is required. It is expected that the thesis proposal will be written, defended, and approved by the committee chair prior to the semester the student enrolls for PSC 590. A student's closure committee chair must approve the thesis proposal before a student is given permission to register for PSC 590.

The thesis proposal should include a:

1. Title Page: including student's name, thesis title, and names of committee members.
2. Statement of research problem or question
3. Research objectives
4. Theoretical foundation
5. Research approach, design, and methodology
6. Expected results and potential significance
7. Initial list of references

## **C. The Thesis Outline**

The following outline is a guide for the structure of a thesis. It is not mandated that each thesis follow this exact structure. Structure formatting should be discussed with the committee chair.

1. Chapter 1: Purpose and Significance of the Study
2. Chapter 2: Review of the Literature
3. Chapter 3: Methodology
4. Chapter 4: Findings
5. Chapter 5: Discussion

## **III. The Comprehensive Examination Option**

### **A. An Overview of the Comprehensive Examination Option**

The comprehensive exam consists of four components: the proposal, the annotated bibliography, the written exam, and the oral defense. All four components are essential, and the final grade will be based on the performance in total.

### **B. The Comprehensive Examination Proposal**

A comprehensive examination proposal is required. It is expected that the proposal will be written, defended, and approved by the committee prior to the semester the student enrolls for PSC 590.

The comprehensive examination proposal should include a:

1. Title Page; including student's name, exam title, and names of committee members.
2. Statement of research problem or question
3. Initial list of references

### **C. The Comprehensive Examination Outline**

The comprehensive examination will consist of an annotated bibliography and a written exam. The written exam is usually given over a weekend, Friday at 8:00 am to Monday at 5 pm. If other arrangements are made, they should approximate this length in time. The oral defense should take place after the committee members have reviewed the bibliography and read the written exam.

#### **1. Annotated Bibliography**

The annotated bibliography must be turned in to the committee prior to the taking of the written examination. If the bibliography is viewed as inadequate, the student is allowed to revise it.

The annotated bibliography will consist of a significant number of citations (books, articles, and documents), that cover the breadth of the exam topic. The total number of citations may vary depending on the epistemological approach and the nature of the literature surrounding the question. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph. The purpose of the annotation is to

inform the reader of the relevance of the material to the exam topic. The format must follow the style manual of the APSA.

## 2. Written Exam

The written exam is usually given over a weekend, Friday at 8:00 a.m. to Monday at 5:00 p.m. If other arrangements are made, they should approximate this length in time. The oral defense should take place after the committee members have reviewed the bibliography and read the written exam. If the student fails to receive a passing grade on a single question of the exam, they may be offered an opportunity to re-take that part of the exam or to write a response to another question. That response is graded and defended just as the responses for the original exam. Students who receive a failing grade on more than one component have failed the exam in total. If the student fails the exam in total on the first attempt, they will need to re-take PSC 590 if they wish to graduate. No student is allowed to take the exam more than twice. Failure to pass on the second round requires the student to retake PSC 590 under another closure option.

The written exam will consist of multiple essay questions; usually with a choice to the student (e.g. choose to answer 3 out of 5 questions).

The written exam answers should reflect the following considerations:

- What does the literature tell us? What do we know in the field?
- What are the theoretical perspectives and lines of thought in this literature?
- How do these pieces of research relate to one another?
- What do we not yet know in this field, and why do we need to know it?

The written exam will:

- Use in-text references, e.g.: "Some have argued that... (Smith 2003; Kingdon 1993)."
- Have references collected in a single "Reference" section for all essays, using APSA Style Manual for Political Science reference format
- Consist of approximately 30-45 pages

## IV. The Participant/Observer Case Study Option

### A. An Overview of the Participant/Observer Case Study Option

The participant/observer case study closure option is a variation of the thesis closure option which is available to students with extensive personal experience in some aspect of practical politics, i.e. political campaigns, legislative process, lobbying, administrative policy making. This is the least commonly used option for M.A. closures, and students who do not have appropriate experiences for this option should not select it.

***Appropriate Level of Experience:*** *Because the student's experiences and perceptions are a key part of the data which is being presented and analyzed in the case study, the level and amount of experience a student has should be more than a single internship experience or casual participation in a single political event. The key criterion is meaningful participation. In making a proposal to the supervising committee the student must make the case that their experience translates into practical, applied knowledge that can be presented in writing and subjected to rigorous analysis that seeks to either test theory or build theory.*

### B. The Participant/Observer Case Study Proposal

A participant/observer case study proposal is required. It is expected that the participant/observer case study proposal will be written, defended, and approved by the committee prior to the semester the student enrolls for PSC 590. A student's closure committee must approve the participant/observer case study proposal before a student is given permission to register for PSC 590.

The participant/observer case study proposal should include a:

1. Title Page: including student's name, thesis title, and names of committee members.
2. Statement of research problem or question
3. Research objectives

4. Theoretical foundation
5. Research approach, design, and methodology
6. Expected results and potential significance
7. Initial list of references

### **C. The Participant/Observer Case Study Outline**

The participant observer/case study can be presented either as theory testing or as theory building.

*The word theory is broadly construed here, and should be taken to include, but not limited to, positivist, post-positivist, constructivist, critical social theory, post-modern, and pragmatic research methodologies.*

#### **1. Theory Testing**

In this approach, the student will seek to test a theory based statement which is grounded in the political science literature. The development and presentation of the framing, literature review, and theory statement will be identical to a thesis project using quantitative data to test a theory-based hypothesis. The difference is that in this option the student will be testing theory by drawing theoretical inferences from a case study with an extensive experiential component which is personal. The student's knowledge is an essential part of the data which is being used to test the theory. Students should consult a text such as Yin's *Case Study Research*, (3rd ed.) for an explanation of the methodological foundation of this approach.

A theory testing participant observer/case study will have the following components:

- Theory Testing
- Introduction and problem statement
- Literature review and theory presentation
- Case Study
- Data Analysis and Conclusion
- Bibliography

#### **2. Theory Building**

In this approach, the student will develop a basic topic question appropriate to their experience, present the participant observer/case study, and then examine the literature of political science using the case study as a frame. The assumption is that the case study constitutes knowledge. The questions then become (1) are there models or theories that help the student conceptualize or better understand what they know or (2) does the student's experiences suggest that modifications or elaborations of existing models or theories would make those models or theories more powerful or more comprehensive? This approach is well within the standard methodology of qualitative approaches to behavioral science research. Students should consult a text such as Creswell's *Research Design* (2nd ed.) for an explanation of the methodological foundation of this approach.

- Theory Building
- Introduction and problem statement
- Case Study
- Literature review and theory presentation
- Application of theory to case study and/or
- Application of case study to theory
- Bibliography