POL194H/IRE 194H offers students a rare opportunity to develop and undertake their own original research on a topic of their choosing. Because of the difficulty of doing this successfully, this is a two-quarter course intended for high achieving and motivated students.

During the first quarter students will focus on the development of a research prospectus. During the second quarter students will conduct their research and write their theses. All aspects of the thesis process will be supervised by a faculty member. This class is not a substitute for working with your advisor. Successful completion of a thesis depends on students investing substantial time and effort over the course of both quarters. Students who complete a thesis are eligible to graduate with “high” or “highest” honors.

Grading: This is a deferred grading course, with one grade given for the entire sequence upon completion of the honors thesis. Final grades are based on the thesis (70%), spring and fall quarter assignments (20%), and seminar participation (10%).

Readings: There are no required books to purchase for this course. Most of the readings will be posted to Smartsite (“Reading” folder in the “Resources” tab), or are easily available on JSTOR or Google Scholar.

Seminar Participation: Students are expected to complete all of the assigned reading before class and to actively participate in seminar discussions. In addition toward the end of the quarter we will increasingly be discussing students’ proposed research. I expect critical, but courteous and constructive, comments and discussion about your fellow students’ projects.

Getting into the Class: In order to be admitted into the class, you must meet the GPA requirements, complete an application – which includes the signature of a UC Davis faculty member who will advise you on your project – meet with me, and then receive my formal approval (& CRN). You should begin attending class (beginning on Day 1) even before you have received my approval. However, to get into the class, you must receive my approval prior to the third class session (Monday, October 10).
Assignments

Course material:
• There is little assigned reading in this class. You should be spending A LOT of time reading the appropriate literature on your potential topics and working through ideas for your topic.

Meetings with faculty advisors:
• The aim of the course is to help you develop a high-quality paper. To this end, it is essential that you get regular feedback from faculty advisors.

Written Assignment Format:
• All written assignments must be double-spaced and typed, have 1-inch margins (not the MS Word default). Please proofread carefully. (I have little patience for typos/missing words/poorly constructed sentences, nouns-pronouns that don’t match, etc.)
• Please make the electronic submission of the paper in either Word or PDF format.
• Use page numbers whenever you submit something longer than one page. (Papers without page numbers drive me insane.)
• Include a separate cover page with your name, course, assignment, and the date. This page should not have a page number on it and does not contribute to the total number of pages in the paper.

Final Paper/Prospectus: See the end of the syllabus for details on the paper/prospectus.
• Due by 11 am on Tuesday, December 6 in my mailbox & by email, but due to your advisor by whatever deadline (s)he sets.
• 7-15 pages (double-spaced) of text (not including tables / figures / appendices / bibliography, all of which should also be in the paper)
  o The final thesis (due at the end of Winter Quarter) should be 10-30 pages of text.
• Please note that the most important task here is NOT that you provide convincing evidence for your theory. Rather, your job is to put together a compelling research question that you address in a convincing way with a careful research design. You want to be intellectually careful and honest. In essence, you are being evaluated on your ability to compose a professional-style paper with a professional research design. So, of course null results (i.e., that don’t show a clear finding one way or another) are fine!
General Course Policies and Advice

Experiments
• Please talk to me early if you plan to do an experiment. If you plan to do an experiment for the class, there is substantial administrative approval that you will need to get. If you are going to do an experiment, we will need to start dealing with this ASAP.

No Laptops/Tablets/etc. in Class
• Electronic devices – laptops, tablets, phones – appear to be distracting in a seminar environment. Thus, I ask that you resort to old-school paper copies of journal articles and old-school pen-and-paper note taking. In other words, please do NOT use your laptop (or tablet or smartphone or any other electronic reading device) in class. If you have a particular learning style that is particularly benefitted by looking at articles on a screen or typing your notes, please feel free to talk with me and I will be happy to consider an exception. And please silence your phones.

General Advice
• Do not take critiques personally!!! The aim of the entire faculty is to help you constantly improve your work and create the best research that you can. To this end, we will repeatedly – and, at times, very bluntly – criticize your work. When confronted with these critiques, some students feel hurt and, at times, angry and defensive. I urge you not to fall into that camp. Critiques are part of research projects, and are designed to make you a better researcher!
• Work together: The thesis is not a competition! The more you all help each other, the more everyone’s work will improve.
Class Dates, Topics, and Assignments

***Warning: The class schedule is likely to change without much notice this quarter***

May adjust the schedule considerably depending on the # of students in the class

The reading listed for a given class session is the reading you should do prior to that day.

ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERY DAY: CHECK YOUR UCD EMAIL EVERY DAY SO THAT YOU WILL RECEIVE ANY UPDATES TO THE COURSE.

1. September 26: Intro & Organization
   - Read over the syllabus carefully before class.
   - Please ask questions about the course and all assignments. Be aware of upcoming assignments.
   - We will go over the requirements for writing an honors thesis and discuss writing a prospectus. Students will introduce themselves, their potential topic, and provide the name of their faculty advisor.
   - Please talk to me early if you plan to do an experiment. If you plan to do an experiment for the class, there is substantial administrative approval that you will need to get. If you are going to do an experiment, we will need to start dealing with this ASAP.
   - Start working on the assignment for Session 3: Prepare 2 short (roughly 1 page each) proposals that you discuss with your advisor. For general information, see “Project Proposal” listed at Smartsite and Professor Scheiner’s faculty webpage for the course.

2. October 3: Honing Your Topic
   Good research topics are manageable but also address some concern of larger importance. In this session, we will discuss how to find the right balance between a manageable topic and a topic that is important. To do this, we will read some examples of research articles. For the following articles, be prepared to discuss the following: (a) What is the main research question?, (b) What are the main hypotheses?, (c) How did the author research their question?. (d) What is the “Big Issue” the paper addresses?

   Reminder: to get into the class, you must receive Professor Scheiner’s approval by next class session (Monday, October 10).

The articles to read are:
2. “Honors Thesis 2014” (an honors thesis from a student in this course in 2014)

Focus on Items #1 and #2 for now. You should refer to his Lipson and Boydstun throughout the thesis process.
3. October 10: Defining Your Question, Political Theories, and Research Topics
Today, we will discuss the link between research questions, research topics, theories/models, and hypotheses. Note, also, the critical role of mechanisms and processes in theories.

Reminder: to get into the class, you must receive Professor Scheiner’s approval by today’s class session.

- **Assignment:** Prepare two project proposals (each 1-page, single-spaced) in writing (for general information, see “Project Proposal” listed at Smartsite and my faculty webpage for the course). Meet with your advisor to discuss the proposals. Report back in class and turn in the two proposals in class.

- **Reading:**

4. October 17: Research Design
Among other things, we will consider potential advantages and pitfalls of using a small number of cases and of using a large number of cases.

Also, think about Donald Rumsfeld’s (February 12, 2002) comment that “As we know, there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know.”

*What does that mean and how does that apply to doing social science research?*

- **Assignment:** Prepare a bibliography with at least 10 sources. Your advisor can be a big help in pointing you toward important research on your topic. I will create an “Assignment” at Smartsite where you can turn this in.

- **Reading:**
4. **October 24: Using/Discussing Previous Literature**
What is the purpose of presenting previous literature in research papers? What are the best ways to present previous literature? What should you include? What shouldn’t you include?

- **Assignment:** Meet with your advisor to finalize your topic and your research question. Report back in class.
- **Reading:** Note that these readings are designed for graduate students, but the lessons are the same for Honors Thesis undergraduates.
  - Caltech Rules
  - Stimson, “Professional Writing in Political Science: A Highly opinionated Essay”
  - Boydstun, “The Ten Elements of a Good Research Project”

6. **October 31: TBD (probably individual meetings)**
- **Assignment:** Provide a 4-page proposal of your research question and research design. **Due in hard-copy form in class and at the Assignment tab at Smartsite.** The proposal should answer the following questions:
  - What is your primary research question? What is your central hypothesis?
  - What methodology do you plan to use? Quantitative analysis, narrative analysis, case studies, textual analysis, etc.? How do you plan to use the evidence you collect?
  - What evidence would convince others that your hypothesis is true? What evidence would convince you that the hypothesis is false?

7. **November 7: TBD (probably individual meetings)**
- **Assignment:** Write a 4-page literature review based on at least 6 of the readings from your bibliography. **Due in hard-copy form in class and at the Assignment tab at Smartsite.** The literature review should answer the following questions:
  - How have other scholars tried to answer your research topic?
  - What are the competing schools of thought? Key disagreements? Debates?
  - According to scholars, what are the range of factors that shape the outcome you are studying?
8. November 14: TBD (probably in-class presentations of prospectus)
   • Assignment: Prepare a draft of your full proposal. Meet and discuss research proposal drafts with Prof. Scheiner and faculty advisors.

9. November 21: TBD

10. November 28: TBD (probably in-class presentations of prospectus)

   Final Prospectus due by 11am on Tuesday, December 6 in my mailbox & by email.

   But due to your advisor by whatever deadline (s)he sets.
Final paper/prospectus for POL/IRE194HB

Basic Logistics:
• Due by 11 am on Tuesday, December 6 in Professor Scheiner’s mailbox & by email, but due to your advisor by whatever deadline (s)he sets.
• 7-15 pages (double-spaced) of text (not including tables / figures / appendices / bibliography, all of which should also be in the paper)
  o The final thesis (due at the end of Winter Quarter) should be 10-30 pages of text.

Assignment:
The final paper for this class will be the “front-end” of your research paper that will be due at the end of POL/IRE194HB. It should be as if you were writing the paper for POL/IRE194HB and then decided to stop after setting up your hypotheses.

Please note: The most important task here is NOT that you provide convincing evidence for your model. Rather, your job is to put together a compelling research question that you address in a convincing way with a careful research design. You want to be intellectually careful and honest. In essence, you are being evaluated on your ability to compose a professional-style paper with a professional research design. So, of course null results are fine!

You should include:
• Introduction:
  o What is the research question?
  o Why is this research question interesting/important?
  o What is the puzzle?
  o What is your thesis?
  o How will you test it?
• Literature
  o What does the literature tell us about the research question?
  o Why is the literature insufficient?
• Theory
  o Explain your tentative model, which you are offering to answer your research question
  o Be sure to include clear step-by-step mechanisms
  o What justifies your model?
• Design & Hypotheses
  o What are observable/testable implications of your model?
  o What is your research design? How will you evaluate/test your model?
    ▪ Why is your research design helpful? What types of conclusions will it allow you to draw? Causation? Mechanisms? Generalizations?
  o What data you will use and how you will obtain the data?
    ▪ Describe the data clearly
      • What is the unit of analysis?
      • Time period?
      • Sample size?
• Probably include tables/figures with descriptive statistics
  ▪ Justify your choice of data (why these and not others?).
  ▪ What variables will you use and why? Why not others?
    o If doing quantitative analysis, what kind of techniques will you use? Why?
      Potential shortcomings with these techniques?
        ▪ What about potential measurement error, collinearity, omitted variables, selection, and other forms of bias and identification problems?
• Expectations
  o Indicate what you expect to find from your hypothesis tests (or, alternatively, explain what results you could get that would tell you that you were wrong).
  o Explain what different results would mean for your model.
    ▪ Would certain results offer evidence in support of your model?
    ▪ What would a null result suggest?
    ▪ What results would suggest that your model is wrong?
    ▪ Would certain results be indeterminate in terms of evaluating the accuracy of your model?
  o Might alternative models explain each of these results as well?
• Do you have any results to report at this time?
• Self-critiques & Other
  o Be sure to note potential concerns that readers might have with your design and your ability to draw conclusions from your results.
  o Can you do additional empirical tests for robustness purposes?
• Timeline
  o What is your timeline for the completion of this project? Please be aware that the final, final, totally complete draft of the paper is due in early March.