Advice on Writing an Honors Thesis

Preparing your Précis

This précis is intended to get you thinking about how you will answer your research question. It also provides members of the Politics Department with the opportunity to determine whether your project is appropriate to proceed in pursuit of honors and to offer you feedback should you continue with your thesis. If you invest time at this stage, your précis can be a good basis for the initial sections of your thesis.

The précis should include a discussion of your research question, an explanation of the methodology of your project, and a substantial preliminary bibliography.

In your précis, clearly state the concrete problem, puzzle, or question your paper will address, its relevance to politics, your specific argument or hypothesis (e.g. your preliminary answer to the puzzle), how your argument fits into the existing literature on the topic, and the method you will use to gather evidence to support your argument. This assignment should be turned in (to your advisor, second reader, and the Politics chair) **no later than Sept. 5**.

As you consider your honors thesis project, think through the following questions:

1. What are you trying to explain and why? What is your dependent variable?

2. What is your argument? In one or two sentences, what is your central hypothesis? (This is your thesis statement.)
    a. Ask yourself the following:
        i. Can this statement be refuted?
        ii. What logic led you to this educated guess?

2. Identify potential rival explanations of the puzzle.

3. If your hypothesis is true, what would you expect to see? What would you not expect to see? List as many observable implications of your hypothesis as you can think of.

4. What evidence would you need in order to decide which of the contending explanations you've identified (in questions 2 and 3) is/are best? In other words how will you know if you are right or wrong?

5. What other scholarly attempts have been made to explain your dependent variable or solve your puzzle? Consider how your hypothesis is informed by these works. How will your thesis build on (or refute) this existing research? What will your contribution be? This should be an <u>analytical</u> summary of the existing attempts to explain your dependent variable or solve your puzzle. Do <u>not</u> catalog a "he said-she said" chronology; <u>synthesize</u> the existing literature.

See the *Determining Your Research Strategy* handout for ideas for how you might gather data and evidence to test your hypotheses.