QMSS GR5999 Master’s Thesis

Fall 2018

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Course Overview and Objective

This course is designed to help you make consistent progress on your master’s thesis throughout the semester, as well as to provide structure during the writing process. The master’s thesis, upon completion, should answer a fundamental research question in the subject matter of your choice. It should be an academic paper based on data that you can acquire, clean, and analyze within a single semester, with an emphasis on clarity and policy relevance.

Remember that your thesis is not designed to be the crowning achievement of your career. If you find that the scale of your topic is too great, please choose a limited number of research questions to explore for the master’s thesis. Keep in mind that your time is limited!

Early semester homework: Selecting a topic of interest is often the most difficult part of writing an academic paper, but deciding on the data you will be using is a significant step towards completing a satisfactory dissertation project. We will discuss your data before exploring plausible research designs. If you have elected to change topics from the literature review you prepared for G4010, let me know and begin researching other ideas so that you are prepared to move quickly through the semester.

Course Requirements & Grading

All written work must be original and produced exclusively for this class. You are expected to follow the University’s guidelines for the submission of written work. All students are required to make an appointment with the Columbia Writing Center and attend a consulting session at some point during the semester. Please visit: columbia.mywconline.net

The final grade for the course will be based on your successful completion of each of the following requirements:

Assignments, Peer Reviews, and Class Participation (20%)

Throughout the semester, you will be required to complete five assignments that will contribute to your final thesis. All assignments are due by 6:00 pm on the due date. Regardless of when you plan to graduate (more on this below), you will be required to submit all five assignments by their respective due dates. Extensions will rarely be given, and will only be granted for unexpected emergencies. All assignments are due on the given due date, and one point will be docked off for every late day. Please upload the assignment as a word document on Courseworks. In addition to uploading the file, send a copy to your peer reviewer via email.

Peer reviewing will be an integral part of this course. Learning to edit and review others’ work is essential in social science research, and the process can teach you much about your own work as well. Peer reviewers will be assigned after the first class and will be responsible for helping you meet the requirements for all assignments in preparation for the final thesis submission.

All peer-reviewed assignments are due by 6 pm on the due date. Please upload the peer review assignment as a Word document on Courseworks. Reviewed papers must contain a minimum of five substantive comments or suggestions. The focus is less on grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors, but on clarity of ideas, suggestions for references or analytical techniques, and new ideas or suggested directions.
It is imperative that you send your assignment to your peer via email simultaneously with your submission on Coursework. Once you have made your edits and comments on your peer’s work (using Word’s tracked changes feature), please upload your peer’s assignment on Coursework, the deadline for submitting peer reviews are one week after the original assignment deadline.

Finally, class participation is very important for successful completion of your thesis. You will be required to present your thesis to others, to offer advice, comments, and ask thoughtful questions when others present, and to generally be available and active participant in discussions with your peers. All of these activities will help not only write your thesis but become a productive member of a research community.

**Final Thesis (80%)** – All course assignments will lead to your final thesis. Your final thesis should be between 40-45 pages in length (double-spaced, including all figures and tables). Half of your final thesis grade will be provided by your advisor, I will provide the other half.

### III. Class Meetings

**Session Group 1. Talking about your data**

Session 1  **September 6th**  
Session 2  **September 13th**

**ASSIGNMENT 1 (Data source and description), Due September 13th**  
**PEER REVIEW 1, Due September 20th**

**Session Group 2. Literature pertaining to your data**

Session 3  **September 20th**  
Session 4  **September 27th**

**ASSIGNMENT 2 (Literature Review and Concept Selection), Due September 27th**  
**PEER REVIEW 2, Due October 4th**

**Session Group 3. Your research design**

Session 5  **October 4th**  
Session 6  **October 11th**

**ASSIGNMENT 3 (Research Design), Due October 11th**  
**PEER REVIEW 3, Due October 18th**

**Session Group 4. The results of your research design/data analysis**

Session 7  **October 18th**  
Session 8  **October 25th**

**ASSIGNMENT 4 (Initial Data Analysis Results), Due October 25th**  
**PEER REVIEW 4, Due November 1st**

**Session Group 5. Presenting your thesis**

Session 9  **November 1st**, First group  
Session 10  **November 8th**, Second group  
Session 11  **November 15th**, Third group

*Thanksgiving is November 22nd! NO CLASS!*
ASSIGNMENT 5 (Discussion of the Findings), Due November 29th
PEER REVIEW 5, Due December 6th

1. Assignments
All of the assignments below are drafts that you will eventually rework when the time comes to put your thesis together!

NOTE: Please use the formatting guidelines in your Master’s Thesis Guide.

Assignment 1 (Due September 13th) – Data source and description
A brief summary of your data source, where you get it, how, and why. Include data showcases if available.

Assignment 2 (Due September 27th) – Literature Review and Concept Selection
This is could be a draft or a near-finished review, depending on how much you rely on G4010’s research design paper.

Assignment 3 (Due October 11th) – Research Design
This is a milestone assignment because now you are ready to present your research design to others. At this point you should know what you will be researching, why, and how. Combining and expanding on assignments 1 and 2, formulate a well-conceived research question; review what has been written on it; explain and defend your research method and data you propose to use; and discuss potential limitations. This should be a longer assignment, about 2500-3000 words, so it will weigh more for your final grade than others.

Assignment 4 (Due October 25th) – Data Analysis Results
This assignment will differ in scope and length across students depending on how far along they were able to get. Therefore, you shouldn’t worry too much if you feel that your results are not in yet. However, at the very least you should be able to present some descriptive statistics here.

Assignment 5 (Due November 29th) – (Discussion of the Findings) Results and Implications
Discuss the results of your analysis. Highlight the answers to your original research questions. Initial demonstration of your analysis results. This is a draft, not the final version that will go in your final thesis!

After all the assignments are due, you have several more weeks to finish your analysis, rework your drafts, put them together, and complete any outstanding tasks!

Master’s Thesis (Due 11:59pm Eastern Time on Monday, December 31st, 2018)

For students who choose to defer graduation:
You must notify Meghan McCarter and me by November 1st if you plan to defer your graduation. You will be expected to complete the first three assignments, attend all remaining class sessions, give and comment on presentations. You can submit the rest of your work until the end of April, 2019 for graduation in May,