

Junior Honors Seminar
V53.0912.01
M,W 9:30-10:45

Prof. Nathaniel Beck

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Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/classes/nbeck/junior_honors/junior_honors.html

Forum: jhonors (you should be subscribed automatically by being on class list)

Rm. 758, 726 Broadway

Office Hours: MW 10:45-12

Appointments for other times welcomed, please make appointment via email (or take a chance and come find me, I am around most days 10-4 or so, have another class MW afternoon and often have noon-time seminars)

This seminar has several purposes. Its primary purpose, of course, is to prepare you to write your Senior Honors Thesis. But it may also be useful to some in helping them figure out if they want to actually write a thesis. The Honors Thesis is a wonderful opportunity, and for most students is the high point of their academic career at NYU. It is important that students contemplating doing an Honors Thesis understand what this entails.

Regardless of how this seminar contributes to the thesis, it should be of great value for whatever your future holds in store, since you will get a lot of practice in both written and oral argument, as well as the logic of argumentation. It is hard to think of many professions that you might pursue that do not stress argument in some form, and it is hard to find employers or graduate programs that feel that students are adequately prepared in either written or oral argument.

We will also learn a lot about the process of doing social science (and related research). This process is great fun, and understanding it will benefit you regardless of whether you ultimately pursue a career in research. While very few go on to do formal Ph.D. research in social science, the skills relevant to such research are also the skills necessary to the pursuit of many other careers.

The seminar asks you to do a lot of short written projects and to make a number of short oral presentations. (or lead sessions). The final product of the seminar is a prospectus for your Honors Thesis. This will be a paper of approximately 15-20 pages (usual rules on what a page is) that has a given form:

- a) It states a research question, states why it is important, and what your contribution will
- b) It has a BRIEF literature review, keeping to the few really important things that you need to discuss.
- c) You will discuss your research design
- d) You will discuss what data you will get
- e) You will discuss how you will analyze the data (insofar as you can do that at this time)
- f) You will say "I hope the analysis shows this, but if it shows that, then"
- g) Every paper will look a bit different depending on your interests. Thus we will spend a long time discussing these in class, and I also expect to discuss the papers more than once with everyone in individual (or perhaps small group) meetings at my office.
- h) More details will be provided during the quarter and will be available on the course web site.

Ideally this will serve as the actual prospectus for your thesis. However, you will be learning a lot this year, and you do not formally write the thesis until your senior year. All thesis writers find out that their final product is rather different than what they expect it to be. Thus you do not need to rewrite your prospectus because your plans have slightly changed, and it is highly unlikely that your plans will not change somewhat. It is really important that you have a good idea of what your thesis is about so that you can do work on it over the summer, even if it is not possible to set it in stone by this December. During the spring semester you should stay in touch with your thesis advisor, and discuss any major changes you plan for the thesis with that person. At some point you have to commit to a specific thesis, but right now you still have some flexibility.

In addition to the written paper, each student will make an oral presentation of their research. AT PRESENT, the plan is that this presentation must be between 8 and 10 minutes long, with 5-7 minutes reserved for discussion. The last two weeks of the seminar are reserved for these presentations. Specific times will be assigned by lottery. I note "AT PRESENT" because it is possible we may decide to make better use of the last two weeks.

GRADING

Final Project: 50%, Class presentations and written assignments (other than final project): 40%. Seminar participation: 10%.

Since there are many kinds of theses, and I know more about some types than others, I have arranged for some Politics faculty to visit some meetings.

Specific reading assignments, as well as details of written assignments and oral presentations (and team formation where relevant) will be available on the class web site. Students should check this site at least once a week.

READINGS:

The following books have been ordered.

Booth, et al., *The Craft of Research* (Chicago, 2nd Ed)

Waller, *Critical Thinking* (Prentice Hall, 4th Ed.)

Katznelson and Milner, *Political Science, State of the Discipline* (Norton)

Grofman, *Political Science as Puzzle Solving* (Michigan)

King, et al. , *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton)

Other readings and handouts will be assigned. Handouts will be available on the class web site (as well as usually distributed in class). A very few readings are in a Course Packet (available at New University Copy, 11 Waverly Place). Other readings will be available electronically via the NYU Library or will be posted on the class web site).

ROUGH SCHEDULE

A rough outline of the course is as follows: (Please note: Based on the first two classes, I will have a better idea of the interest of seminar participants. I will try to devote more time to areas of high interest, and less time to areas where there seems to be no interest. Please let me know if it seems that YOUR meets are not being met. I have my own substantive interests, but I am the only person in the room not figuring out how to write an Honors Thesis!)

Wed Sept 3 – Introductory meeting, getting to know each other and what we do, my expectations, your expectations

Assignment 0: On ONE sheet of paper, write your name, its phonetic spelling, (and a nickname if that is how you prefer to be called). Attach to the sheet a recent photo (I am much better at faces than names).

Then list the following:

Second major or minor if you have

Politics courses you have already taken

Politics courses you are taking this semester

Whom you THINK you would like to advise your thesis

One paragraph on what you think your thesis might be or what area(s) interest you most

What you would like to do the year after you graduate from NYU?

What would you like to be doing five to ten years after you graduate from NYU?

This sheet should be dropped off AT MY OFFICE no later than Friday. This is to make sure you can find my office! You should knock on the door so perhaps we can chat for a few minutes.

Assignment 0': Send me email so I can add you to my class alias. This should also be done by Friday. Send from whatever mail account you read. Please avoid sending from places like yahoo or hotmail, since I block those for fear of spam.

I ask you to submit papers in both Adobe's Portable Document Format (pdf) (if possible, or Word if not), as well as hard copy. (Producing pdf requires a full version of Adobe Acrobat, which you may or may not have.) This is a good time to make sure you can produce and send .pdf, and also read it (since comments on papers and assignments will come back as yellow stickies on your pdf with additional comments in body of email). So write one paragraph about your background (no more), and turn it into .pdf and email it to me as part of Assignment 0'. If you have trouble creating pdf, first ask a friend or classmate (this assignment is not graded. One way to produce pdf using FREE software is available at <http://www.pdf995.com>. If you really cannot produce pdf (it just depends on what software you have), try to send me the requested document using Microsoft Word. If you use a similar product (say on a MAC), you could try to send me the file in rtf. (This is just a test to see if this method of communication works. So if it turns out you cannot send me the papers in any format, that is okay too. Just try.)

Assignment 0'': Go to the class forum (jhonors). Log in. By Friday, post a) what you think you want to do your thesis on and b) one or two paragraphs telling everyone a little about yourself.

(Assignments like the above are not graded, but failure to do them will count against your grade.)

Assignment 1: Spend between one and two hours trying to ascertain what an NYU Honors Thesis looks like. You must be ready on Monday to take part in a discussion of what you found out. On Monday you must submit a 1-2 page write-up of what an NYU Honors Thesis looks like (submit in class, and email to me by 4PM).

Note: both deadlines and page and time maxima must be strictly observed. For short assignments like this one, late papers are NOT accepted (other than for cause). One of my favorite maxims is "brevity is the soul of wit." 1-2 pages means DO NOT GIVE ME 3 pages (and keep normal margins, type fonts, etc.) You should get used to saying what you want in as economical manner as you can. Presentations will be timed with a stopwatch and only a brief amount of slippage will be allowed. (Longer papers may be turned in late, but with a penalty of the loss of one full grade for each day the paper is late.)

Mon. Sept. 8 – What does an NYU Honors Thesis look like – presentations and discussion. Assignment 1 due in class.

We will have a visitor today who will be knowledgeable about the NYU Politics Department Honors Program.

Wed. Sept. 10 - How do you choose a topic? Read Booth on how to choose a topic and how to write a brief statement on your topic.

Mon. Sept. 15. More on choosing a topic. the puzzle solving approach. For this class, each student must read one of the articles in the Grofman book and be prepared to discuss how the author chose his or her topic? Be prepared to discuss a puzzle that interests you, and how that might relate to your thesis.

Assignment 2: Each student will prepare a 1 page paper on what topic they plan to pursue in their Thesis. This must have the form as laid out in the Booth book, and should ideally tie the topic to a puzzle of interest. Note the page limit!

Do this assignment carefully, since everything in the seminar builds on your choice of topic. However, you may learn during the course of the semester (either in this seminar or outside it) that you really want to change your topic. This is fine; you will have a chance in the final paper to write a prospectus on the topic you prefer. If you make a major change in your topic please let me know, and please have all assignments subsequent to that change reflect that change. Do not worry about minor changes, we all make minor changes in our topics all the time. If you do not yet know your topic, fine! Just come up with what most interests you right now.

Wed. Sept. 17 – Discussion of choice of topic. We will discuss the topics of half the seminar (assigned randomly) today. Assignment 2 is due for these students today. Each student will make a three minute (maximum) presentation of their topic, with some discussion following.

Each student presenting today must post to the jhonors forum a draft of assignment 2 no later than noon on Tuesday, Sept. 16. I expect each member of the seminar to read all the drafts.

Mon. Sept. 22 – Same as Wednesday’s class for second group. Assignment 2 is due today for that group. For these students a draft of assignment 2 must be posted to the jhonors forum no later than noon on Friday, Sept. 19..

Wed. Sept. 24 – Making arguments. Reading assignment from Waller

Mon. Sept. 29 – Continuation on arguments. Reading assignment from Waller and Booth

Wed. Oct. 1 – More on arguments and symbolic logic. More reading from Waller..

Assignment 3 on argument (from Waller) assigned, due in class on Wednesday Oct. 8.

Mon. Oct. 6. What do political scientists (and related social scientists)? Reading from Katznelson and Milner. This section of the course will continue for 3 weeks. There will be written and oral presentations connected with this section of the course. In addition, various NYU faculty will be invited to discuss the kinds of theses relevant to their interests. Each student will be expected to lead the discussion on the portion of political science related to their thesis topic. Thus each student will be expected to have read at least three important works (articles or parts of books) related to their thesis, and be able to integrate those readings with the relevant portions of Katznelson and Milner. By the end of this section, each student will submit a 3-5 page literature review. Specifics on this assignment will be made in class with instructions on the web site. The web site will also contain the specific schedule of topics and lead discussants. Assignment 4, your literature review, is due in class on Mon., Oct. 27.

Wed. Oct. 8. Day 2 on what is political science?.

Mon. Oct. 13 – Day 3

Wed. Oct. 15.- Day 4

Mon. Oct. 20 - Day 5

Wed. Oct. 22 – Day 6

Mon. Oct. 27 - The logic of research. This section of the course will continue for 3 weeks. There will be written and oral presentations connected with this section of the course. For today, you should have read Lijphart and Stinchcombe in the Course Packet. You should come to class today and for the next five sessions being prepared to discuss how the issues in the reading relate to your thesis. (Please note that this section builds heavily on the arguments/logic section of the course, and discussion will be couched in the language of that section.

Assignment 5 is a research design for your thesis, using the tools and ideas discussed in this and the next five sessions. Specifics on the assignment will be made in class and on the web site. Assignment 5 is due, in class, on Mon., Nov. 24

Assignment 4 is due today.

Wed. Oct. 29 – Day 2 on research design. Begin reading King et al. You should come to these classes ready to discuss how the various issues raised in the reading relate to your thesis.

Mon. Nov. 3 – Day 3

Wed. Nov. 5 – Day 4

Mon. Nov. 10 – Day 5

Wed. Nov. 12. – Day 6

Mon. Nov. 17. Where do you find data and other nuts and bolts of doing a thesis. Read Booth, Pt. IV

Wed. Nov 19. Continuation of nuts and bolts discussion.

Mon. Nov. 24. Workshop on prospectuses, issues that have arisen.

Assignment 6 – NYU has a fund to support excellent undergraduate research. The details on how to apply to this fund are at: <http://www.nyu.edu/cas/Academic/4thUGResearch.html#DeansUGFund>. This assignment both gives you a chance to think about what resources you need for your thesis and to briefly summarize it for a wide audience. While I hope you actually use this assignment to submit to the Dean's Fund, this is between you and your advisor. Assignment 6 is due the day you make your final presentation (but those presenting on Nov. 26 may turn in this assignment on Dec. 1.)

Assignment 5 is due today.

Wed. Nov 26 – First 5 presentations (is it good or bad to go before Thanksgiving?) Each presentation should be 8-10 minutes (10 minute MAXIMUM), with about 15 minutes total devoted to each presentation. Obviously we need to be especially prompt for these sessions.

Mon. Dec. 1 – Presentations

Wed. Dec. 3 - Presentations

Mon. Dec. 8 – Last 5 presentations