



Public Policy and Governance Program
St. Francis Xavier University

2330 Notre Dame Avenue | Antigonish, NS | Canada B2G 2W5

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Antigonish, Nova Scotia

Honours Thesis Handbook

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PGOV Honours Thesis Handbook

As a fourth-year Honours student in Public Policy and Governance (PGOV), your major project will be your thesis. You should register in PGOV 490, a six-credit course, in your senior year. As with any other course, your mark for 490 reflects not just the “paper” (the thesis) but the whole year’s research and writing effort. Therefore, fulfilling the deadlines, meeting regularly with your advisor and regularly submitting chapters for comment are all factors in the final grade. It is important to think of the thesis project as a full year endeavor, beginning at the end of your third year and culminating at the end of your senior year. In fact, one of the keys to success is to **spread your efforts across all twelve months**. The discussion below will sketch out the various stages of work involved and give you a calendar of key dates. Samples of theses may be provided if you wish – please ask your advisor, the coordinator, or the program’s administrative assistant.

What is a thesis and how does it differ from a conventional research paper?

An Honours Thesis is an exploration of a more complex topic than can normally be handled in a research paper. Inevitably, this leads to a more extended study. The suggested overall length is 12,000 to 18,000 words, or 50 to 75 pages. But more than length alone, the thesis is distinguished by the need for a disciplined, multi-stage investigation of a subject. A thesis is composed of a series of chapters, each addressing an element of the total picture. Once your overall approach has been settled, you might think of thesis work as a series of related research papers to be completed over the academic term.

How to settle on a topic and find a supervisor?

During your third year, you should feel free to drop in on any members of the PGOV program to discuss potential thesis ideas. You may have some areas of interest, or you may be looking for suggestions. This is an informal process: talk to as many faculty members as you wish, ask for suggestions about topics and possible supervisors. This will also help you visualize how a “topic” can be transformed into a researchable thesis question. If in doubt, the program coordinator will point you toward potential supervisors in different subject areas. **It is important that you sort out your thesis topic and advisor before leaving the campus at the end of your**



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third year, especially if you must prepare and submit a draft thesis proposal to the Program Research Ethics Committee (REC). Ultimately, the program coordinator will confirm with you who your supervisor will be, either before the end of your junior year or early in your senior year.

First Steps

By the end of April in your junior year, you should have settled on a topic and a supervisor. The next step is to prepare a draft thesis proposal (following discussions with your supervisor), which outlines a preliminary plan for your subject, approach, proposed chapters and content, a short preliminary bibliography, and a research ethics statement. There are two stages to proposal submission: a draft proposal to clear research ethics requirements and a final proposal. The draft proposal is due by mid-May, to be submitted to the program coordinator and your advisor by email. The draft proposal can be more informal than the final proposal but should amount to a workable thesis plan that reflects your discussions with the thesis supervisor.

Ethics Approval

In accordance with Tri-Council policy, all honours students' research with human participants must be approved by the University Research Ethics Board.

1. Honours students must download the [STFX Research Ethics Board \(REB\)](#) application form, complete it, and submit it to the chair of the PGOV Research Ethics Committee (Peter Kikkert – pkikkert@stfx.ca).
2. Once the student has applied any feedback from PGOV Research Ethics Committee, they will submit the approved and signed ethics application to the university REB through the [ROMEО Researcher Portal](#).
3. Once REB review is completed, the approved protocol and approval letter will be made accessible to both the student and supervisor in ROMEО.

Please be aware of the [due dates](#) set by the university REB when drafting your application for submission – make sure you give the PGOV Research Ethics Committee time to review the initial draft of your application and provide feedback.



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If you have any questions or concerns, please discuss this ethics process with your supervisor and/or the coordinator. Students can access past examples of student ethics applications.

Final Thesis Proposal

This is your first attempt to define a topic, an approach, and a set of stages for the inquiry (chapters). After discussions with your supervisor, you need to set down a preliminary statement of the project. This is useful for a number of reasons. It provides you with an ongoing guideline for the sequence of activities to be tackled. It also gives you a standard against which you can measure your progress through the year. Furthermore, it can be a useful reminder of the “big picture” at times when you are immersed in the fine detail of researching or writing any one chapter. Preparing the bibliography offers useful information about those materials which are available locally, as opposed to those that must be obtained through InterLibrary Loan. Since it is wise to allow at least two weeks between ILL orders and receipts of material, the bibliography will help you schedule these orders to best advantage. Obviously, the structure of the thesis may evolve over the course of the year, as you and your supervisor discuss the draft results. But this does not take away the crucial role of this early planning exercise.

Final Thesis Proposal Format

1. Your name and student number

2. The name of your thesis supervisor

3. Proposed title of thesis

This is your suggested working title. It is often difficult to find the exact phrase to reflect the subject, but wrestling with this problem can be very profitable in clarifying your intentions.

4. Statement of topic

Identify the subject, the question, or the problem you seek to explore, and your proposed approach. In a paragraph or two, outline your objectives for the thesis and sketch out the relevant dimensions.



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5. Proposed table of contents

In a paragraph each, map out the purpose and the subject matter for each proposed chapter. This divides your project into a series of stages, whose sequence will guide the discussion from beginning to end. It may be helpful to think of each chapter as the equivalent of a research paper (approx. 10-15 pages). Please include tentative chapter titles.

4. Bibliography

Compile a preliminary bibliography, listing relevant books, articles, government publications, internet sources, etc. Update and expand your bibliography as the work progresses.

A final thesis proposal, revised based on your supervisor's feedback, is due for submission to both your supervisor and the coordinator by the middle of September.

Designation of Second Reader

The student and supervisor should decide on a second reader for the thesis in the fall term. The second reader should have some expertise in the field of study that is the focus of the thesis. As well as contributing to evaluation of the thesis and the determination of a final grade, the second reader will have the option of providing comments to the supervisor and student. The supervisor will decide upon and convey the final grade assessment to the student.

January Progress Report

This is a short (500 words maximum) progress update for the PGOV coordinator and thesis supervisor due by mid-January. The report gives you the opportunity to reflect on where you stand in terms of thesis completion. It should summarize what you have accomplished so far and explain what additional steps you need to take in order to bring the thesis to a successful completion.

The progress report should include the following:

1. Your name and the name of your supervisor



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2. Proposed title of the thesis
3. A brief description of the thesis topic and argument
4. A summary of what you've accomplished so far (which chapters were completed, which other information you gathered for which other chapters)
5. A summary of what you plan to do during the Winter term (which chapters still require your attention).

Managing the Workload

Given the nature of the thesis as a year-long project, it is imperative that you manage your time wisely and efficiently, so as to ensure that your workload is spread out relatively evenly throughout the year rather than tilting heavily toward the second term. There is more to your thesis than just researching your topic and writing your initial drafts. Equally important are the revisions that you will need to make, based on your supervisor's feedback and comments, to improve your thesis and bring it to its final version. This process of revision can be highly time-consuming, requiring your focused attention and sometimes even a fundamental rethinking of your plan for the thesis. In order to allow time for this in the second term, it would be best to have a **draft version of the first two chapters** of your thesis completed and submitted to your supervisor by the end of the fall term. A draft of the full thesis is due for submission in mid-March.

Assessment

Honours theses should demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the literature, critical thinking and analytical skill, familiarity with library and other research tools, writing ability, and ability to organize a large block of material to earn at least a 75 in a 400 level PGOV course. Besides your supervisor, your thesis will be examined by the second reader who will meet with your supervisor to discuss the final grade, which is submitted to the university along with other final



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grades. **The thesis mark represents an evaluation of the complete research and writing effort.**

Thesis Presentations

Near the end of the second term, the program coordinator will convene a meeting to enable thesis writers to present the results of their work to faculty and their fellow students. Traditionally these sessions have been quite informal, aimed at giving thesis writers an opportunity to take 20 minutes to describe the topic, approach, key findings, and conclusions. Remember, this oral presentation is not included in the grading process.

Final Steps

Following the grading process, your draft thesis will be returned to you. Any corrections or revisions can be done at this time. A **final hard copy** must be submitted to the program's administrative assistant along with an **electronic copy** that is editable. This will be bound and placed in the program's collection of honours theses. The electronic version should consist of one single PDF file which includes the cover page as well as an alphabetically ordered bibliography.

The PGOV Thesis Timeline

Initial Meeting of Honours Students & Coordinator	March-April of Student's 3 rd Year
Draft Thesis Proposal to Coordinator & Supervisor for REC	End of May
Final Thesis Proposal to Coordinator & Supervisor	Mid-September
Draft First Chapter to Supervisor	End of October
Draft Second Chapter to Supervisor	End of December
Progress Report to Coordinator & Supervisor	Mid-January
Draft of Remaining Chapter(s) to Supervisor	End of February
Complete Draft to Supervisor	25 March
Oral Presentation of Thesis	End of March / Early April
Final Version of Thesis	Mid-April



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