

Dear PLS Junior,

As you know, PLS requires a senior thesis for graduation. The senior thesis is a substantial piece of writing, typically an essay involving research, undertaken with the guidance and close supervision of a faculty director. Generally, senior theses range between 9,000 and 15,000 words (the equivalent of 35-60 double-spaced pages of 12-point font), with 40-45 pp. of double spaced text being the norm.

It is time now to start thinking about your thesis and about possible directors. All members of the regular PLS faculty in residence will direct theses, and you may also select a Notre Dame faculty member or postdoctoral fellow from outside the department. I urge you to explore ideas for senior essays with several members of the faculty.

The topic of your essay is less important than the experience of making a searching investigation and developing a sustained argument. Thus, it might be wise to tailor your thesis topic not only to your own interests but also to the strengths of the PLS faculty. My colleagues and I can be more effective directors in proportion to our knowledge of relevant primary and secondary sources.

To help you develop a topic for your senior thesis, we will be circulating a list of research profiles prepared by the faculty. These profiles might suggest to you possible areas of investigation, or help you to locate the faculty member(s) most competent to direct your essay. Please note: The faculty profiles include faculty who may not be in residence, but whose status is not yet certain. When you contact a potential director, please confirm that he/she will indeed be available to be a thesis advisor next fall.

You can begin contacting potential advisors now to discuss topics for your thesis and to develop one or more proposals. On or after **Monday, March 16th** you may ask a faculty member to approve your thesis proposal, thereby signaling his or her willingness to serve as your advisor. Once a faculty member has approved your proposal, you may submit it to the office along with the name of your advisor. (You can do this via e-mail, copying your advisor on the note to the office.)

Please note: you will not be able to register for your fall PLS classes until a faculty member has approved your thesis proposal and agreed to be your advisor. You may choose an advisor from outside of PLS but you must still submit your proposal to the office along with a letter from the outside director stating his/her willingness to serve as your advisor. Please also include a note explaining whether you will be taking the PLS senior thesis course or completing a similar course in another department.

Because each professor will be limited in the number of students he or she can take, you should soon begin to consult and to hone projects with the faculty. Those who take the initiative will probably have a better experience with the essay process.

The senior thesis that is judged the finest by a committee of Program faculty is awarded the Otto A. Bird prize, which is given each spring at the Senior Banquet. The recipient of this prize is also honored at the Arts and Letters Honors Convocation on graduation weekend.

Best wishes as you begin this important senior project.

Sincerely yours,
Thomas Stapleford
Associate Professor and Chair