SENIOR THESIS GUIDELINES

Students writing their senior thesis ought to have structured guidance to enable them to best demonstrate the theoretical and factual knowledge, and research and analytical skills, necessary to graduate in their chosen field of study.

FIRST READERS: students will choose their First and Second Reader during the semester prior to registering for senior thesis credit. First Readers should be expert enough in the area of their students' research to provide them meaningful guidance. Student and First Reader will agree on the research question for the thesis and decide on a schedule for researching and drafting the dissertation. Thesis students should meet their First Readers every two weeks to discuss their progress, ensure that they are following the schedule and address any problems as they emerge.

Students are required to submit the PL480 Registration form following their completion of PL460 in order to register for the Senior Thesis Course. The form requires the signatures of both the students' Readers and can be found here.

SECOND READERS: the role of the Second Reader is to evaluate the final thesis and discuss it with the First Reader. Second Readers may provide guidance to thesis students, but are not expected to meet regularly with them. They will be chosen at the same time as the First Reader. With the approval of the First Reader, a Second Reader may be chosen from outside of John Cabot University.

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT:

- The minimal text length of the thesis will be between 30-40 pages long, excluding the bibliography, table of contents, endnotes, abstract, graphs, figures and images.
- It will be based on a minimum of 20-30 scholarly sources (books and journal articles), at least 2/3 of which should be in English. Students are strongly encouraged to consult and cite Archives, Databases, Newspapers, Official Websites and other Primary Resources related to institutions and organizations clearly pertaining to the topic (e.g. UN, OECD, State Department, university libraries, etc.). The use of non-scholarly sources, such as "popular" websites, is strongly discouraged.
- It will be written in clear and grammatically accurate English and will respect academic writing conventions in the discipline.
- It will consistently apply the citation style most appropriate to the discipline. MLA citation style, for example, is not appropriate for Political Science research theses.
- It will include the following:
  - A clear and manageable research question
  - Abstract, table of contents, introduction, literature review, explanation of analytical framework and methodological approach, chapters presenting findings, conclusion, bibliography

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

At the end of the project, the student will be able to:

- Respect a structured research and writing schedule
- Use all the relevant methodological techniques necessary to answer their chosen research question in an informed and unbiased manner (including surveys/interviews, theory-building techniques, quantitative data analysis, content analysis, comparative political analysis, cost/benefit analysis etc. where relevant).
- Demonstrate knowledge acquired throughout their courses in their major and use that knowledge appropriately in addressing their research question.
- Punctually submit a thesis which demonstrates the ability to:
  - Clearly explain and critically analyze the topic
  - Contribute an original, substantive, creative and insightful perspective on the issue
  - Select appropriate scholarly sources and critically evaluate their argument and content
  - Organize their material and analysis in a logical and effective way, progressing from the introduction, to the development of the paper's theory, through the supporting material, to the conclusion
  - Use accurate English syntax, grammar, punctuation, spelling.
  - Apply appropriate style manuals and writing conventions

GRADING GUIDELINES

-ASSESSMENT METHODS:

Meetings with First Reader: 10%
Final thesis: 60% allocated by First Reader
                    30% allocated by Second Reader

-ASSESSMENT CRITERIA:

Outcome of Meetings with First Reader

These are graded according to the student's demonstrated ability to:
- Schedule regular meetings with their professor and attend them punctually
- Do the amount of reading and drafting previously agreed with the Professor
- Critically discuss the materials and any problems encountered
- Respond to feedback by integrating it in their subsequent work

Final Thesis

The following are guidelines for how First and Second Readers could weigh the different elements of the thesis when allocating their final grade:

- Overall Presentation (25%)
Organization and structure: 10%
Fulfilment of requirements (length, number of sources etc): 5%
Style, elegance, grammar and linguistic clarity: 10%

- Research (25%)
Selection and critical use of appropriate sources: 10%
Methodology and appropriate data gathering: 10%

Original attempt at investigation and exploration: 5%

- Content and Analysis (50%)

Depth of knowledge of the topic: 10%
Focused, realistic and relevant research question, investigated clearly and systematically throughout: 10%
Analysis: ability to evaluate information through an appropriate theoretical framework: 10%
Originality of insights and approach, engagement with the topic: 10%
Conclusions: analysis of the implications and limitations of the findings 10%

Letter grades and corresponding percentages for this class

94 – 100 points = A
90 – 93.99 pts = A-
87 – 89.99 = B+
83 – 86.99 = B
80 – 82.99 = B-
77 – 79.99 = C+
70 – 76.99 = C
60 – 69.99 = D
59.99 – 0 = F

Assessment Guidelines for assigning main letter grades: A, B, C,D, and F.

A: Work of this quality directly addresses the question or problem raised and provides a coherent argument displaying an extensive knowledge of relevant information or content. This type of work demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate concepts and theory and has an element of novelty and originality. There is clear evidence of a significant amount of reading beyond that required for the course.

B: This is highly competent level of performance and directly addresses the question or problem raised.

There is a demonstration of some ability to critically evaluate theory and concepts and relate them to practice. Discussions reflect the student's own arguments and are not simply a repetition of standard lecture and reference material. The work does not suffer from any major errors or omissions and provides evidence of reading beyond the required assignments.

C: This is an acceptable level of performance and provides answers that are clear but limited, reflecting the information offered in the lectures and reference readings.

D: This level of performances demonstrates that the student lacks a coherent grasp of the material.

Important information is omitted and irrelevant points included. In effect, the student has barely done enough to persuade the instructor that s/he should not fail.

F: This work fails to show any knowledge or understanding of the issues raised in the question. Most of the material in the answer is irrelevant.

-ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:
  Mandatory attendance at scheduled meetings with Professor.

INCOMPLETE GRADES:

The grade of INC (Incomplete) should be assigned only in cases where illness, hospitalization, death in the family, or other situations of similar gravity temporarily prevent completion of the required course work. Please note, that as the policy on making up major assignments states, such cases should be reported to the Dean's Office to request the granting of approval to make up the missed work. In addition, grades of INC should be granted only to students who have completed the majority of the course work with a grade of C- or better. A form (available on the MyJCU Intranet Resources Faculty page) describing the reasons for the non-completion, the work remaining to be completed and the expected date of completion, signed by the professor and by the student, must be submitted to the Registrar before the grade INC can be recorded. If this form is not filled out with a clear indication of the work remaining to complete the course, students will receive an F instead of an INC. Incomplete work must be completed by the end of the first regular semester (excluding summer sessions) immediately following that in which the INC was assigned. Otherwise, the grade will be administratively converted to an F.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

As stated in the university catalog, any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade on the work in which the dishonesty occurred. In addition, acts of academic dishonesty, irrespective of the weight of the assignment, may result in the student receiving a failing grade in the course. Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Academic Affairs. A student who is reported twice for academic dishonesty is subject to summary dismissal from the University. In such a case, the Academic Council will then make a recommendation to the President, who will make the final decision.

SCHEDULE

The session focus items are suggestions. The student and First Reader should complete the schedule during their first meeting.

Session	Session Focus	Reading Assignment	Drafting Assignment	Meeting Place
Last week preceding semester	Agree researching and drafting schedule for vacation and next semester			
Week 2	Submit draft first section of thesis and discuss progress so far			
Week 4	Submit draft second section of thesis and discuss corrections to first chapter			
Week 6	Submit draft third section of thesis and discuss corrections of second chapter. Midterm warning should be given if appropriate.			
Week 8	Submit draft introduction and conclusion, and remaining chapters. Discuss corrections to third chapter			
Week 10	Submit full draft thesis			
Week 12	Discuss full draft and suggested corrections			
Week 14	Submit completed thesis to First and Second Readers **by the end of Final Exams Week.**			