

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS HONORS SEMINAR

## MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ***Am I eligible?***

All **senior IR majors** with a GPA of 3.5 or higher in courses counted toward the major are eligible to enroll in the Honors Seminar. Any student who attains the cumulative grade point average required for Honors in the College of Letters and Science will receive Honors at graduation.<sup>1</sup> However, only students who are seniors, are eligible by grade point average, who enroll in IRE 194, complete the two-quarter sequence, and produce a thesis are eligible for High Honors and Highest Honors in International Relations.

### ***When does the seminar take place and how do I enroll?***

The IR Honors Seminar is a two-quarter sequence, taking place in the fall and winter quarters. Check the fall Class Schedule and Registration Guide to see when IRE 194HA is offered, and attend the first class.

### ***How will I be graded?***

Students must complete both quarters (4 units per quarter) in order to get credit for the Honors Seminar. Grading is "in-progress," meaning that your fall grade will be an IP, and when you complete the winter quarter, both your fall and winter quarter grades will convert to the letter grade you earned. Incompletes have been granted in only the most unusual of circumstances. It is not a good idea to take an incomplete, but if you do get approval from the instructor to do so, note that at the end of the following **fall** quarter, your IP will convert to an F unless the thesis has been turned in at least two weeks prior to the end of the quarter for the instructor to evaluate. It is the student's responsibility to make sure this deadline is met. Once the IP converts to an F, there is no recourse for changing the grade, except retaking the course, which is usually not practical.

Students receive a letter grade for the class, and if they have completed a thesis of sufficient quality, they will receive High Honors. Highest Honors is reserved for those theses that make innovative contributions, or that are of an exceptionally high level of analytical and methodological rigor. On average, in the past, one member of the seminar has received Highest Honors.

### ***What is the format of the class?***

The class is run in a seminar format. During fall quarter, it meets once a week for two hours. Students develop a highly detailed research design which will guide them as they conduct research and write up the thesis in the winter quarter. The instructor will provide a detailed set of tasks to aid in the development of a research design and with clear deadlines for completing each of these tasks. The goal is to produce a thesis that emulates research at the graduate level. The thesis is not simply a narrative, nor is it merely descriptive. It must be analytical, testing different theories with rigorous application of social scientific methods. It is likely this paper will be nothing like any paper you have written at the undergraduate level.

Throughout the fall quarter, students will photocopy their in-progress research designs, disseminate them to other members of the seminar before class meets, and then present those research designs to the rest of the class. All other seminar participants are responsible for reading their classmates' work ahead of time, writing a brief critique, bringing two copies of those critiques to the seminar (one for the author of the research design and one for the

instructor), and offering verbal feedback in the seminar. Students are encouraged to bring specific questions and problems they are having to the class for discussion and feedback.

During fall quarter, the seminar may be visited by other faculty members who will share their views on the research process, their experiences, problems they have encountered, and solutions they have devised. In the past, students have found the tips provided by faculty to be helpful.

By the end of fall quarter, students will have completed a well-developed research design. This will be a guide in the conduct of research and the writing of the thesis in the winter quarter. Students are encouraged to turn in their drafts in-progress, in whatever stage they are, at least every three weeks so that the instructor can provide feedback. Students are also strongly encouraged to seek advice and guidance from other faculty on campus with substantive expertise in their area. Getting regular feedback from several different people, including your peers in the seminar, is indispensable for writing a good thesis.

#### ***How much time does it take?***

Lots!!! The attrition rate is approximately 50% in the seminar, meaning usually half, or fewer than half, of the students who start out in fall quarter actually complete a thesis. Those who have completed the Honors sequence find it one of the most challenging experiences of their undergraduate career, yet also one of the most rewarding. Students must be willing to devote the time that it takes to produce a thesis. For those contemplating graduate school, the thesis will serve as an exemplary writing sample.

#### ***How long are the theses?***

They tend to average between 65 and 85 pages. Occasionally, a student will produce a thesis of 150 pages! *But more is not always better.* Usually it indicates a lack of rigorous focus. *Strive for quality, not quantity.*

#### ***What can I do NOW to prepare if I am interested in enrolling in the fall?***

Right now, you can begin to think of your topic. Of course, it must be **international** in orientation. Once you have the topic, begin generating questions that are do-able, meaning not too huge. After all, this is an undergraduate thesis. You want to complete it by the end of winter quarter, and you want to make sure you can get access to the information you need to conduct your research. Also, think in terms of “why” questions, meaning not *what* happened, but *why* it happened, that is, “What was [were] the cause[s]?” not “What was the problem?” Try to generate a half-dozen questions, and in the seminar we’ll talk about how to select a “good” question.

Once you have a topic area, begin doing background reading. Students are particularly encouraged to read relevant articles from social science journals to see how other scholars have tackled the topic and what theories they have used. This is a good way to get a handle on the theories that speak to your topic. If you do these tasks, you will be well set for fall quarter.

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1. The specific GPA required for Honors at graduation is calculated at the end of each winter quarter and varies according to the number of units taken at UC Davis. Please consult the General Catalog and the College of Letters and Science for details.