

Dissertation Seminar

Time: Fridays 12:00pm-1:50pm

Location: 711 International Affairs Building

Macartan Humphreys
701 IAB

mh2245@columbia.edu

Telephone: 212 854 7431

Office Hours: Friday, 2:00-4:00

Anna Stilitz

as3113@columbia.edu

Office Hours:

Overview

This yearlong course is intended to for students in their third or fourth years. The purpose is to take students from a point at which they have general ideas about their dissertation topic through the development of a solid structure, research strategy and drafting of framing chapters. In the fall semester students will prepare concept papers outlining key features of their dissertation which will then be discussed in class. Students are then expected to revise their concept notes over the course of the fall term, submitting a revised strategy by the end of term. The chief task for the Spring term is to draft complete framing chapters, giving a full description of the motivation for the project and the research strategy. These chapters will be the subject of class discussion over the course of the Spring term. The class will meet every second Friday and in some cases every Friday, depending on enrollment.

The success of this class will depend to a large extent on the extent to which we can build a community of researchers that are able and willing to support each other in the development of research plans over the coming year. To do so we will require that students think hard throughout the course of term not only about their own projects but also about those of their colleagues. A strength and challenge of this course will be that research projects from all sub-fields of political science will be represented in the course; in some cases then active engagement will then involve thinking about issues far from your own specialties. For this reason we recommend that when presenting work in the fall term students provide alongside their own write ups a key article on the topic from their subfield that will help other students get up to speed on the section of the literature.

Week 1: 7 September

General introductions, course description, assignment of week 2 presentations, assignment of term slots.

Week 2: 14 September

Individual Assignment Due: You should hand in a 1 page description of your thesis thoughts. This should describe **briefly** (a) what the general question is (b) why the question is important (c) what literatures it most closely connects with and (d) what approach you expect to use to tackle the question.

Paired team Assignments: In week 2 we will discuss a set of up to 6 “model” dissertations. These are dissertations that have won major awards and prizes or that have been signaled out by faculty in the department as being of outstanding quality. With few exceptions these are all dissertations that have been produced in the last few years. The listing is given in **Annex A** of this syllabus. Note that (almost) all of these dissertations can be accessed in full text online though <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/databases/2554991.html>.

All students should read the framing chapters of the introductory chapters of all dissertations. In addition, teams of 2-3 students will be asked to give a presentation on each dissertation. These presentations should report: (a) what the overall purpose and strategy of the dissertation; where appropriate identify the key dependent and independent variables and the universe of rival explanations (b) in what consists the originality or genius of the dissertation, how much inspiration and how much perspiration (c) backwards engineering: if you were to undertake this research project from scratch, what would a research strategy look like.

Weeks 3, 5, 7, 9, 11

Assignment: Presenters should turn in their 5-7 page memos by Tuesday evening prior to their presentation. In addition presenters have rights to assign one article length background reading; this should be assigned at least one week prior to class. In the event that the reading is not available online, assigners are asked to make photocopies of the reading available to the class. It is required that all students read all memos *and think about them* prior to the class meetings. There is no doubt that you could get away without doing this but, unlike other classes, doing so is just free riding on your colleagues.

.

ANNEX A. SAMPLE MODEL DISSERTATIONS

AMERICAN

1. **Sean Farhang (Columbia 2006)**

The litigation state: Public regulation and private lawsuits in the American separation of powers system

ABSTRACT: This dissertation explores the ways in which legislators make choices in constructing statutes that determine the extent to which private litigants will enforce them, and it probes the causes and consequences of those choices. In the first part of the dissertation I ...

2. **Greg Shaw (Columbia, William Ansewron Award)**

Public Opinion and Welfare in the United States.

ABSTRACT This dissertation investigates the role of public opinion in shaping the income and medical assistance programs of the American states from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. The research explores the thesis that mass political opinions and public policies typically cohere, that the latter tends to move in directions generally compatible with public preferences over time

3. **Adria Gallup-Black's. (Columbia 1998).**

Federalism, policy innovation, and welfare reform in the American states.

ABSTRACT The primary argument in favor of devolution of welfare policy from the federal to the state level is that if states are given the authority, they will innovate better solutions to the welfare problem than anything created by the federal government. Therein lie two underlying assumptions: first...

4. **Robert W. Mickey , (2006 E.E. Schattschneider Award)**

Paths out of Dixie: The decay of authoritarian enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944—1972.

ABSTRACT. This dissertation seeks to explain why similar Deep South states navigated the turbulent 1960s in starkly different ways. In doing so, it frames the eleven southern states of the old Confederacy as subnational authoritarian enclaves undergoing transitions to democratic rule. Drawing on comparative historical analysis, archival materials, and a range of other data, the study charts...

5. **Michael M. Franz, Bowdoin College (2007 E.E. Schattschneider Award).**

Choices and Changes: Interest Groups in the Electoral Process

ABSTRACT. What explains the dramatic rise in interest group electioneering in the mid-1990s? Why did interest groups contribute millions in unlimited soft money to political parties, fund thousands of "issue advocacy" advertisements, and sponsor hundreds of organizations outside the reach of the Federal Election Commission? This is puzzling in that...

COMPARATIVE

1. **Graeme Robertson. (Columbia 2004)**

All they need is someone to organize it: Protest and politics in post-Communist Russia.

ABSTRACT. This is a study of collective action in an electoral authoritarian regime. I show how a combination of weak institutions, the absence of the rule of law, and an inherited institutional architecture in which leaders of popular sector organizations share common interests with local elites can generate elite manipulation of popular protest for narrow ends ...

2. **Matthew Kocher, University of Chicago (2006 Gabriel Almond Award)**

Human ecology and civil war.

ABSTRACT It is well established in the literature on political violence that civil war is associated with a lack of societal modernization. Yet, there is widespread disagreement about the pathways and mechanisms that account for this pattern....

3. **Joon Suk Kim, University of Chicago. (William Anderson Award)**

Making states federatively: Alternative routes of state formation in late medieval and early modern Europe.

ABSTRACT In this dissertation, I inquire into alternative state formation in late medieval and early modern Europe. Dominant narratives on state formation have focused on the modern state...

4. **Laurence, Jonathan Ari, (Harold D. Lasswell Award)**

Managing transnational religion: Muslims and the state in Western Europe (1974--2004).

ABSTRACT The period from 1989-2004 has seen the reassertion of nation state sovereignty over the informal influence of international religious NGOs and foreign embassies. In this "de-transnationalization" phase of Muslim incorporation, governments have tried to undo the arrangement of the 1970s and 1980s...

5. **Nandita Aras. Columbia 2000.**

The social bases of support for Hindu nationalism and Hindu nationalist parties.

ABSTRACT This study evaluates the extent to which some of the important theories in the ethnicity and nationalism literature can explain the magnitude and variation in popular support for Hindu nationalism and Hindu nationalist parties, the BJP and the Shiv Sena, in India. The theories that are evaluated have been classified ...

6. **Emmanuel J. Teitelbaum, The George Washington University (Almond Award 2007)**

"Mobilizing Restraint: Unions and the Politics of Economic Development in South Asia"

ABSTRACT While many studies examine the relationship between labor repression and economic development, few address the developmental implications of state-labor relations in democratic countries. Yet the rapid spread of democracy through the developing world highlights the need for such an investigation ...

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. **George Gavrilis. Columbia 2004.**

Border guards and high states: Toward a theory of boundary regimes.

ABSTRACT This project aims to explain why, in the face of otherwise similar types of threats and disputes, some borders become well-organized institutions that provide security to contiguous states and populations living in border areas while other boundaries remain sites of escalation, tension, and mal-administration. Border conflict today is less about affixing the location of sovereign territory and more about...

2. **Tim Crawford. Columbia University, 2001,**

Pivotal deterrence and peacemaking: Bargaining, leverage, and third party statecraft

ABSTRACT How can states deter wars between other states without choosing sides? When will they try? When will they succeed? States sometimes do try to deter both sides in a rivalry. I call them "pivot-states," and the policy "pivotal deterrence." Using a deductive model I first identify the conditions in which pivotal deterrence makes sense. Then I put forward a theory that explains how it works: that is, how a policy of pivotal deterrence...

3. **Hafner-Burton, Emilie Marie, (2005 Helen Dwight Reid Award) - Madison, 2003**

Globalizing human rights? How international trade agreements shape government repression.

ABSTRACT This dissertation brings together scholarly insights in the fields of international political economy and human rights to answer one very controversial question, namely to what extent and in what ways do international trade agreements influence government observance of human rights? My principle claim is a simple one: international trade agreements have become one of the most important forces transforming government observance of human rights today

4. **Downes, Alexander B., (2006 Helen Dwight Reid Award)**

Targeting civilians in war

ABSTRACT Why do governments commit civilian victimization in war--military policies or strategies that target noncombatants intentionally with deadly force, or which use force in an indiscriminate way such that the deaths of large numbers of civilians is a foreseeable consequence? Are some types of states more or less prone to choose such strategies? In particular, are liberal democracies less likely than autocracies to victimize civilians during wars? My answer, based on an investigation of interstate and colonial wars in the last two centuries, is that...

5. **Rob Trager (Columbia 2006). [Info coming soon]**

THEORY

1. **Bryan Garsten, Harvard University, 2003.**

Saving persuasion: Rhetoric and judgment in political thought.

ABSTRACT Persuasion is a central activity of democratic politics, yet in both theory and practice today the conventional wisdom is that studied persuasion, or rhetoric, tends to corrupt serious political deliberations. This dissertation explores the roots of the modern suspicion of rhetoric, challenges its philosophical basis and points the way towards a conception of deliberation that is friendlier to rhetoric...

2. **Jennifer Pitts, (Harvard 2000).**

Nation, rights, and progress: The emergence of liberal imperialism, 1780—1850.

ABSTRACT Standard interpretations of the liberal tradition's position on empire make the mistake of believing that there is something about the structure of rights language, universalism, or the idea of progress that leads liberalism as such to produce a theory and politics of empire. In different times and under diverse circumstances in the history of the liberal tradition, however...

3. **Patchen Markell, (Harvard 1999)**

Bound by recognition: The politics of identity after Hegel.

ABSTRACT The concept of "recognition" lies at the intersection between contemporary identity politics and the philosophy of Hegel. While Hegel's philosophy is often invoked to provide normative grounding for political projects devoted to overcoming misrecognition, Hegel's analysis of recognition actually supports an immanent critique of such politics...

4. **Christina Tarnopolsky, Chicago 2002.**

Plato and the politics of shame

ABSTRACT Shame is a peculiar phenomenon. It can fracture our social ties in the very instance that it reveals them. John Rawls argues that shame threatens the mutual respect necessary for democratic deliberation by diminishing a person in the eyes of his audience or even in his own eyes, thus causing this person to withdraw from the discussion. Alternatively theorists of civility,

5. **Lars Tønder. 2006. (2007 Leo Strauss Award)**

Experiences of tolerance: Immanence, transcendence, hilaritas.

ABSTRACT The objective of this study is to think the intersection of tolerance and toleration. By tolerance I mean the disposition of embodied agents to endure circuits of pain and suffering. By toleration I mean the institutional framework by which a government, in the name of neutrality or reasonableness, seeks to accommodate minority groups. Most liberal political theorists either overlook or deface the distinction and relation between these practices...

ANNEX B: Guidelines for Fall 2007 Student Presentations in Political Theory

1. Overview

Your initial dissertation presentation should be brief, about 5-8 pages in length. The main task is to provide us some information on the structure of the project, so that we can give you comments and feedback on the dissertation as a whole. Your presentation should provide the following bits of information:

- What is your research question?
- What literature already exists on this research question and what are its weaknesses?
- What strategy do you propose to use for answering the research question?
- What is your preliminary argument (or working research hypothesis)?
- A outline of projected chapters

2. Research Question

In formulating the research question, it is important to go beyond simply pointing to an general area of interest or a set of broadly connected themes. You need to try and formulate a clear and specific question (or set of questions) that this dissertation is designed to answer. For example, framed at the broadest level, your research question might be:

- When (if ever) is secession justified?
- Why did German Romantic philosophers articulate an ideal of cultural nationalism in the wake of the French Revolution?
- What do liberal theories of rights have to say about immigration policy?

Of course, in order to be adequately answered, all of these research questions would need to be disaggregated into a range of sub-questions. But thinking of the task as oriented to answering a broad and general question in this way will help you to narrow your focus and to formulate a more precise plan for disaggregating and attacking the sub-questions.

In presenting your research question, you will want to explain to the reader in clear and jargon-free prose why it is an interesting and meaningful topic. This can be hard to do early in the dissertation process, but it is important to try to be accessible and easy to follow—if nothing else, it will help you organize your thoughts. Also, in explaining why the topic is interesting and important, it is not enough merely to offer some citations to other scholars who have written about it before; instead, you need to make the case yourself. For example, in approaching the secession question above, I might try to convince the reader it is interesting by pointing to the increase in secessionist movements in the post-1989 period. I would also note that theorists in the past have had almost nothing to say about secession, and I would explain how, when we think carefully about the issue, secession cuts to the heart of some very great difficulties in liberal democratic theory, including: how to determine the boundaries of the unit in which a binding democratic vote can be taken, how to justify state rights to regulate and administer territory, and how to weigh claims to the preservation of minority cultures. Therefore investigating secession, I might argue, can help us to understand difficult problems in liberal theory more generally.

3. Literature Review

This should be quite brief, for a short project description of this kind. You will want to indicate who the major figures working on your question are, and (if you know this already) perhaps indicate in the briefest outline what the two or three most important positions are, as well as what motivates you to intervene in the debate. Perhaps no one is writing on your topic; you will want to say that as well, and justify why someone *should* write about it. There is no need to go through an exhaustive discussion and critique of the various arguments at this stage, though.

4. What strategy do you propose for answering the research question?

In an empirical project, this would be the “methods” section. In normative political theory, justifying the method is also an important task, but it will take a different form. You will want to tell us what kind of tools you plan to use to answer your question, and why you think these are the most appropriate tools for a project of this kind. Some tools political theorists commonly use are: close reading of primary texts, conceptual analysis, genealogical reconstruction of a concept over time, analytical or deductive theory construction from widely accepted principles, case studies of empirical or historical examples. Depending on your project, you may also want to borrow the tools of formal theory or quantitative analysis from other subfields of political science, or tools from law, philosophy, psychology, or sociology.

It is quite important to do some reflecting early on about why this method is the most appropriate one for answering the question at hand. A number of different methods may be possible with respect to the same question. For example, in the secession case, I might offer a deductive normative theory of when secession is just, and apply it to several empirical cases. Or I might engage in a historical reconstruction of how the right to self-determination evolved over time in international law. These would result in quite different dissertations. If I am most interested in the question of “what could (normatively) justify secession?,” the latter project might be not fully answer that question. If I am most interested in questions of (say) possible reforms in positive international law, the former project might not have much to say about that. So you need to explain why your method is best suited to your question.

5. Preliminary Argument or Research Hypothesis

You will most likely have an “angle” on the question that you are considering defending—an early version of your argument—although many of its details have yet to be nailed down. For example, I may want to argue that the principle of self-determination justifies secession by bare majority vote in any existing administrative unit, under any circumstances. Although it may sound overly positivist to call this a “research hypothesis” in a normative project, that is essentially what it is. You will want to present your hypothesis, and also outline some of the possible challenges to it. In my secession case, I would need to think about a number of alternative arguments or challenges. Is secession justifiable even when no rights violations or cultural preservation issues are at stake? What are likely to be the practical consequences of this proposal? What about regions that secede and take precious natural resources with them? What about economically prosperous regions that secede to evade redistribution? What about cultural minorities within the seceding subunit? What about regional democratic majorities that fluctuate over time? To defend my argument, I will need to have persuasive answers to all these challenges and more.

You may not be able to answer all the potential objections at this stage, but you will want to think about what they might be. It will be important to respond to alternative theories as you develop your argument, and thinking about this early may help you to develop an overall structure for the dissertation.

6. Chapter Outline

You should present a brief annotated table of contents. Don't just provide chapter titles; tell us what you envision doing in the chapter, and why it is necessary to write that chapter in order to answer your general research question. You may want to cite the relevant sources, literature, or data that will need to be discussed in the chapter. You will want to say enough to justify to the reader why you saw fit to divide the task up in this way.

ANNEX C: Guidelines for Fall 2007 Student Presentations in Other Subfields

Read the guide in Annex B as many of the ideas presented there are relevant for all dissertations. For empirical dissertations in the subfields of comparative, American and IR your memo should contain sections covering the following:

1. A description of the puzzle. What is the overall question you are trying to answer? This can be either a thematic (“Why are small states more likely to liberalize?”) or a “historical” question (“Why are there so few international wars in Africa?”). The phrasing of your question is quite important since it already points to the universe of possible answers. “Is..” or “Does..” questions often admit Yes/No answers and are more closed than “Why does...”, “when does...” and “How does..” questions. Avoid “what” questions of the form “What is the relationship between A and B.” In any event the form of the question determines a universe of possible answers. In some cases the overarching question is phrased in terms of dependent and independent variables. A question tied to dependent variable (what explains X?) is typically more manageable than a question tied to an independent variable (what does X explain?).
2. Motivation. Tell us why you care. It is useful to provide motivations driven both by substantive and disciplinary concerns. For disciplinary motivations the goal is to link the question to wider agendas: how will this make us rethink things we thought we knew. The worst motivation is “to fill a gap in the literature.” Filling a gap might be a necessary condition for an interesting topic but it is certainly not a sufficient one.
3. A description of the universe of possible answers. Enumerate what the set of possible answers might look like. Your literature review comes here. Your review of the literature should be included only insofar as it helps shed light on past attempts to answer the question. Literature reviews should never be used just to show you have read stuff. Emanating from the universe of answers should be a set of hypotheses. Strong hypotheses distinguish between rival answers, weak hypotheses may be consistent with many.
4. Theory. It is quite possible that theoretical work can help distinguish between plausible and implausible answers or help in setting up clear tests between rival hypotheses; if so you will likely need a theoretical chapter and you should outline here what the goals of the theoretical chapter are: what logical propositions would you like to be able to establish from a theoretical enquiry. Like the dissertation as a whole the purpose of a model shouldn’t just be to model an unmodelled phenomenon or even to demonstrate an intuition but rather to answer a question that you don’t know the answer to.
5. Your empirical methodology or methodologies. Describe the methods you expect to use. What are the cases? What is the key source of variation? What is your identification strategy? What method will you use: interviews, archives, econometric, experimental, field experimental, other... Provide a case for why this method is appropriate to the context. If you use multiple methods explain how these will complement each other. Identify now what skills you will need but do not yet have!
6. A table of contents (as per Annex B)

Annex D: Useful Resources

Gary King: how to write a publishable paper <http://gking.harvard.edu/files/paperspub.pdf>

William Thomson: *A Guide for the Young Economist*, <http://www.amazon.com/Guide-Young-Economist-William-Thomson/dp/0262700794>

Hal R. Varian, “How to Build an Economic Model in Your Spare Time.”
<http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~hal/Papers/how.pdf>

Doing Economics: A Guide to Understanding and Carrying Out Economic Research Steven A. Greenlaw http://www.amazon.com/Doing-Economics-Understanding-Carrying-Economic/dp/0618379835/ref=pd_sim_b_1/105-3017322-4065220

There are lots and lots of books on writing dissertations.

- Joan Bolker *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis* <http://www.amazon.com/s/105-3017322-4065220?ie=UTF8&tag=mozilla-20&index=blended&link%5Fcode=qs&field-keywords=write%20dissertation&sourceid=Mozilla-search>
- Kjell Erik Rudestam, Rae R. Newton *Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process* <http://www.amazon.com/s/105-3017322-4065220?ie=UTF8&tag=mozilla-20&index=blended&link%5Fcode=qs&field-keywords=write%20dissertation&sourceid=Mozilla-search>

Various pages with useful bits of advice and links:

- <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/dissertation.html>
- <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/student.services/phd/phd-advice/>
- <http://web.archive.org/web/20030203011257/www.citationonline.net/survdiss.htm>
- <http://www.cs.purdue.edu/homes/dec/essay.dissertation.html>