



SSCI 594b (Section 35797D), Master's Thesis

Syllabus

Units: 2

Term-Day-Time: Summer, 2015, Online

Location: Online

Instructor: John P. Wilson, Ph.D.

Office: AHF B55E

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:00-6:00 p.m.
PT

Contact Info: jpwilson@usc.edu, +1-213-740-1908

BlueJeans: <https://bluejeans.com/2208823893>

IT Help: Richard Tsung

Hours of Service: Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. PT

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Course Description

This course and its prerequisite, SSCI 594a, are required for the Master of Science degree in Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIST) Program; they are not applicable to the GIST Graduate Certificate programs. The purpose of these courses is to accomplish a project demonstrating ability (PDA) in the spatial sciences, culminating the student's experience in the M.S. in GIST Program and validating them as a master practitioner.

Based upon the thesis prospectus or thesis proposal completed in SSCI 594a and with the approval of the Spatial Sciences Institute faculty, students should be undertaking SSCI 594b prepared to complete their thesis writing and successfully defend their thesis.

Learning Objectives

On completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Distinguish different styles and qualities of writing, critically evaluate your own and others' writing, and write better yourself.
- Understand the research process, be aware of research obligations and pitfalls, and design a credible, meaningful research project for yourself.
- Utilize the Microsoft Office™ software suite and a bibliographic reference manager competently and efficiently to produce documents that meet M.S. in GIST Program requirements and show your work to advantage.
- Understand the competencies that must be demonstrated in the form of a master's thesis manuscript in the M.S. in GIST Program.
- Describe your master's PDA succinctly, in written and oral forms, to faculty, mentors, and potential sponsors.

Prerequisite(s): SSCI 594a

Co-Requisite (s): None

Concurrent Enrollment: None

Recommended Preparation: Students must be enrolled in the M.S. in GIST Program and have an approved thesis prospectus or proposal, with an advisor and committee members assigned.

Course Notes

The preparation and defense of your master's thesis is the culminating experience in the M.S. in GIST Program. Students are expected to work with a high level of self-motivation. Successful students exercise initiative and exhibit strong communication skills in working with their advisors and committee members.

Upon successful completion of the thesis, the In-Progress (IP) grade received in SSCI 594a will be converted to Passing (P), and students also will receive a Passing (P) grade for SSCI 594b.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Every student must satisfy the following technology requirements:

- A computer with a fast Internet connection.
- A functional webcam and a microphone for use whenever a presentation or meeting is scheduled.
- A modern web browser, Firefox recommended, to access the GIST Server.

GIST server and tech support – Unlike other courses in the GIST Program, students in this course will utilize the Spatial Sciences Institute GIST Server, which is a virtual desktop, only for independent thesis work (e.g. to explore datasets and perform initial analysis). Even then, relative to other courses in the program, work on ArcGIS on the server is not expected to be a major component of activity in this course. You can access the GIST Server at: <https://gistonline.usc.edu/>. If you are unable to connect to the server or experience any type of technical issues, send an email to GIST Tech Support at gistsupport@dornsife.usc.edu and make sure to copy (cc) me on the email. GIST Tech Support is available Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. PT. Please be sure to be specific with respect the problem you are experiencing as whatever work is required on will be unique to each thesis project.

Live meetings, recorded meetings, and presentations (including defenses) – Bluejeans is a browser-based service that facilitates synchronous, interactive sessions with voice/video and shared desktop capabilities between two or more people; this is the primary forum for our group discussions and presentations. In our experience, BlueJeans works best if you have both a phone (mobile or land line) and a computer with a fast Internet connection available during our live meetings.

Individual meetings – For one-on-one meetings, we generally find it easier to use the free VOIP and chat technology, Skype (<http://www.skype.com/>) or Bluejeans (to set up an account, visit <http://dornsife.usc.edu/bluejeanshelp>) for individual chats.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Students will continue to refer to the textbooks which were required in SSCI 594a:

1. Strunk, William Jr. and Elwyn B. White. 2000. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
2. Turabian Kate L, Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2013. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 8th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
3. Montello, Daniel R. and Paul C. Sutton 2013. *An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography and Environmental Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Number	% of Grade
Chapter 1	≥1	15
Chapter 2	≥1	15
Chapter 3	≥1	15
Chapter 4	≥1	15
Chapter 5	≥1	15
Presentation Slides	1	5
Defense	1	15
Thesis Upload	1	5
TOTALS	≥8	100

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will be submitted for grading via Blackboard using the due dates specified in one of the two Course Schedules below. The first schedule (i.e. Option #1) would lead to a successful defense and upload of your thesis document ahead of the 7/1/15 Summer 2015 thesis submission deadline whereas the second schedule (i.e. Option #2) would lead to a successful defense and upload of your thesis document ahead of the 9/11/15 Fall 2015 Last Day to Register and Add Classes deadline. Option 1 is required for you to be counted as a Summer 2015 graduate and Option 2 uses the whole of the Summer semester and would allow you to be counted as a Fall 2015 graduate without the need to register and pay additional tuition in Fall 2015. And finally, it is important to note from the outset that: (1) late postings and assignments will be docked one grade and no grade will be given for postings or assignments turned in more than one week late; and (2) no written work will be accepted for grading after 5:00 p.m. PT on the last day of classes (i.e. 8/14/15). These grades are important because students who fail to make consistent and measurable progress and who do not earn a grade of at least 60% and who fail to complete at least first drafts of all five chapters will not be permitted to enroll in subsequent SSCI 594z sections in subsequent semesters.

Additional Policies

Communications – This is a distance learning course, so most of our interactions will be asynchronous (not at the same time). All materials to be handed in will be submitted via Blackboard or via email. Please be sure that you read as soon as possible all email sent from Blackboard or from me. Check now to make sure that mail sent from both the USC Blackboard accounts and my private domain (jpwilson@usc.edu) does not go into your junk mail!

Tentative Course Schedule: Option 1 – A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics / Daily Activities	Deliverables / Due Dates
Week 1 5/20	Meet with advisor and determine committee members. Complete <i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i> and <i>Chapter 2: Related Work</i> send to advisor. Begin work on <i>Chapter 3: Methods and Data Sources</i> .	Create user profile on the Graduate School Thesis Center website and send Appointment of Committee form and Chapters 1-2 to advisor. Upload complete Appointment of Committee form to the Thesis Center website.
Week 2 5/26	Complete <i>Chapter 3: Methods and Data Sources</i> and send to advisor. Complete Chapters 1-3 revisions and send to advisor. Prepare methods presentation to full committee.	Send Chapter 3 to advisor (first) and Chapters 1-3 revision to advisor (second).
Week 3 6/1	Present methods to full committee with Chapters 1-3 completed. Complete <i>Chapter 4: Results</i> and <i>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions</i> and send to advisor. Begin work to revise Chapters 4-5.	Send chapters 1-3 to full committee, present methods to full committee, and send Chapters 4-5 to advisor.
Week 4 6/8	Complete Chapters 4-5 revision and send to advisor. Begin work to revise full draft of thesis. Complete full thesis draft and send to advisor.	Send full draft revision to advisor (first) and then send full draft to full committee and schedule defense date (second).
Week 5 6/15	Revise full thesis draft and send to advisor. Send full draft to full committee and schedule defense date.	Send Chapters 4-5 revision to advisor (first) and send full draft to advisor (second)
Week 6 6/22	Prepare presentation slides for defense. Conduct defense. Following defense, complete final revisions and collect signatures on Approval to Submit form.	Prepare presentation slides, conduct defense, complete revisions, and upload Approval to Submit form.
Week 7 6/29	Upload thesis in Graduate School Thesis Center. Make revisions if and as requested by the Graduate School.	Upload final version of thesis.

My Thoughts on Option #1: This is a very aggressive schedule for both you (the student) and myself (the thesis advisor) but of course one could aim for this outcome and settle for Option #2 if for some reason you fall behind. I completed my M.S. thesis following the kind of schedule listed here 36 years ago so I can offer first-hand advice about the intensity of the commitment that would be needed to succeed with such a plan!

Tentative Course Schedule: Option #2 – A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics / Daily Activities	Deliverables / Due Dates
Week 1 5/20	Meet with advisor and determine committee members. Begin work on <i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i> and <i>Chapter 2: Related Work</i> .	Create user profile on the Graduate School Thesis Center website and send Appointment of Committee form to advisor.
Week 2 5/26	Complete <i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i> and <i>Chapter 2: Related Work</i> and send both to advisor. Begin work on <i>Chapter 3: Methods and Data Sources</i> .	Upload complete Appointment of Committee form to the Thesis Center website and send Chapters 1 and 2 to advisor.
Week 3 6/1	Complete <i>Chapter 3: Methods and Data Sources</i> and send to advisor. Revise the working Chapters 1-3 draft.	Send Chapter 3 to advisor.
Week 4 6/8	Complete Chapters 1-3 revisions and send to advisor. Prepare methods presentation for full committee.	Send Chapters 1-3 revision to advisor.
Week 5 6/15	Present methods to full committee with Chapters 1-3 completed. Complete <i>Chapter 4: Results</i> and send to advisor. Begin work on <i>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions</i> .	Send chapters 1-3 to full committee, present methods to full committee, and send Chapter 4 to advisor.
Week 6 6/22	Complete <i>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions</i> and send to advisor. Begin work to revise Chapters 4-5.	Send Chapter 5 to advisor.
Week 7 6/29	Complete Chapters 4-5 revision and send to advisor. Begin work to revise full draft of thesis.	Send Chapters 4-5 revision to advisor.
Week 8 7/6	Complete full thesis draft and send to advisor.	Send full draft to advisor.
Week 9 7/13	Revise full thesis draft and send to advisor.	Send full draft revision to advisor.
Week 10 7/20	Send full draft to full committee and schedule defense date.	Send full draft to full committee and schedule defense date.
Week 11 7/27	Prepare presentation slides for defense.	Prepare presentation slides.
Week 12 8/3	Conduct defense. Following defense, complete final revisions and collect signatures on Approval to Submit form.	Conduct defense, complete revisions, and upload Approval to Submit form.
Week 13 8/10	Upload thesis in Graduate School Thesis Center. Make revisions if and as requested by the Graduate School.	Upload final version of thesis.

My Thoughts on Option #2: This is a bold schedule as well but one we expect and anticipate that the vast majority (>95%) of our M.S. thesis candidates will satisfy. There is a little cushion built into this schedule as well because you could still avoid Fall 2015 registration so long as you upload ahead of the 9/11/15 Last Day to Register and Add Classes deadline. The best advice is to aim for the 8/14/15 completion date and to settle for the 9/11/15 date as a matter of last resort.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.