

SSCI 594b, Master's Thesis

Syllabus

Units: 2

Term — Day — Time: Summer 2017, Online

Location: Online

Instructor: John P. Wilson

Office: AHF B55F

Regular Office Hours: Tuesdays, 5-6 p.m. and Thursdays, 7-8 p.m., and via appointment at other times. I am always available asynchronously via email. I am also available for synchronous chats via BlueJeans or Skype, audio or video most days and times *by prior arrangement* via email. Just get in touch!

Contact Info: jpwilson@usc.edu, 213-740-1908 (office),
[jpwilson58](#) (Skype)

Library Help: Sherry Mosley

Office: VKC B40C

Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Info: smosley@usc.edu, 213-740-8810 (office)

IT Help: Richard Tsung

Office: AHF 145D

Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Info: ctsung@usc.edu, 213-821-4415 (office)

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 program or any other SSI programs. The purpose of these courses is to complete a capstone project in the spatial sciences, culminating students' experiences in the M.S. in GIST Program and validating them as master practitioners. Based upon the thesis proposal and thesis work 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 theses.

Learning Objectives

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

- Design and execute a meaningful research project that demonstrates spatial thinking and uses the knowledge and skills learned while in the GIST Program.
- Undertake the research process and be aware of research obligations and pitfalls.
- Articulate research or project objectives clearly, situate research within an academic or scholarly context, state claims and evidence clearly, assess validity of claims, evidence, outcomes, and results.
- 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.
- Narrate the research process clearly in the form of a formal multi-chapter master's thesis manuscript, structured according to the approved M.S. in GIST thesis style.
- Describe your master's research clearly and 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.

This course requires individual effort that is overseen by the course instructor, your Thesis Advisor. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings will be held to discuss progress and review submitted documents. Once the research and necessary analysis and results compilation are completed, then individual thesis chapters will be written and revised iteratively until we both agree that the document is ready for submission to the Thesis Committee. If the committee agrees, then a Defense of your thesis will be held. Following successful completion of the Defense, the manuscript is revised a final time and once approved, is uploaded to the Graduate School.

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 and Communication Requirements

Every student must have 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 current web browser - generally it is a good idea to have more than one installed on your computer as browser requirements are constantly evolving and their ability to work with various applications varies.

Blackboard – While each student will complete his or her work independently, a course Blackboard site is available to provide guidance about the required administrative processes and manuscript format. Links to necessary timetables, procedures and forms will be found here as well as discussion boards through which you can share ideas and support with other thesis students. During the first week of the semester, you should confirm that you can access the Blackboard site. Please read promptly all communications that are sent through it.

SSI server and tech support – Unlike other courses in the GIST Program, students in this course will utilize the Spatial Sciences Institute Server only for independent thesis work. If you are unable to connect to the server or experience any type of technical issue, send an email to SSI Tech Support at spatial_support@usc.edu and copy (cc) me on the email. Be sure to be specific in email sent to SSI Support with respect to the problem you are experiencing.

Meetings and presentations (including defenses) – Blue Jeans 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 individual meetings and presentations. To use Blue Jeans, you'll need a web cam on a computer with a fast internet connection. It is useful also to have a phone (mobile or landline) on hand in case there are issues with the web cam audio.

Communications – This is a distance learning course, so many 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 directly from my usc.edu account does not go into your junk mail!

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

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

1. Turabian K.L, W.C. Booth, G.G. Colomb, and J.M. Williams 2013. *A manual for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations*. 8th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

This book provides a detailed reference to the Chicago 16th edition reference and citation style that must be used to meet the SSI GIST thesis format requirements.

2. Montello, D.R. and P.C. Sutton 2013. *An introduction to scientific research methods in geography and environmental studies*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

This book provides guidance on the undertaking and design of research in Spatial Science.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

There are no formal assignments in this course. In consultation with the course instructor, your Thesis Advisor, students develop a personal work schedule with specified deliverables. Weekly or bi-weekly individual meetings will be held online to discuss submitted deliverables and revise the work plan if needed.

Grading Breakdown

Since there are no assignments, there is no assignment of grades in this course. Completion of this course is determined when each member of your Thesis Committee digitally signs the Approval to Upload form. This form is signed after successful completion of the oral defense and acceptance by each committee member of the thesis document.

Course Schedule

In consultation with the course instructor, each student will develop his or her own work schedule for the course. This schedule will be uploaded into Bb at the beginning of the semester and revised as needed as the work progresses.

There are two possible schedules to follow in this course. Option 1 is very aggressive and requires that all of the hands-on project work has already been completed by the beginning of this semester and much of the writing is also done. Thus, the work completed in this semester involves only finalizing, defending and revising the thesis document. If successful in this aggressive timetable, students will be able to upload by mid-semester and achieve a degree dated at the end of this semester.

Option 2 is the more commonly followed schedule, allowing time for the project work to be completed in addition to the thesis preparation, revision and defense. By uploading before the beginning of the following semester, students will avoid having to register and pay for 594z, though degrees will be dated at the end of the following semester.

Option 1 Basic Timetable – All work completed and final approved and defended thesis uploaded before the Graduate School’s deadline that falls, in this semester, during Week 6. Degree will be dated at the end of this semester.

Date	Tasks
Week 1 (or earlier)	Prepare work schedule Meet with advisor and committee Continue work on thesis draft
Week 2	Complete full thesis draft and submit to advisor
Week 3	Prepare final revision of thesis draft
Week 4	Submit draft to committee
Week 5	Defense
Week 6	Final revisions, committee approval
Week 7	Upload final thesis

Option 2 Basic Timetable – All work completed by the end of the semester. Registration in next semester not required, however your degree will be dated at the end of next semester.

Date	Tasks
Week 1 (or earlier)	Prepare work schedule Meet with advisor
Week 2	Committee meeting Begin technical work
Weeks 3 to 6	Complete technical work
Weeks 7 to 10	Prepare thesis draft
Weeks 11 to 12	Revise thesis draft
Week 13	Defense
1 st week after W13	Final revisions, committee approval
2 nd week after W13	Upload final thesis

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://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b/>. 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://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>. 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 Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services* <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/> 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.

Resources for Online Students

The Course Blackboard page and the SSI Community Blackboard page have many resources available for distance students enrolled in our graduate programs. In addition, all registered students can access electronic library resources through the link <https://libraries.usc.edu/>. Also, the USC Libraries have many important resources available for distance students through the link: <https://libraries.usc.edu/faculty-students/distance-learners>. This includes instructional videos, remote access to university resources, and other key contact information for distance students.