

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

**Units:** 2

**Term-Day-Time:** Summer, 2016, Online

**Location:** Online

**Instructor:** John P. Wilson, Ph.D.

**Office:** AHF B55F

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 5-6 p.m. and Thursdays, 7-8 p.m. PT, and by 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!

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**Library Help:** Katharin Peter

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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 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 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 thesis.

## 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 in your GIST graduate courses.
- Understand the research process, 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.
- Understand the competencies that must be demonstrated in the form of a master's thesis in the M.S. in GIST Program.
- 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.

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.

*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 forums and threads 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.

*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 GIST 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](mailto:gistsupport@dornsife.usc.edu) and make sure to copy (cc) me on the email. 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 that will be 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, W. Jr. and E.B. White. (2000). *The Elements of Style*. 4<sup>rd</sup> ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
2. Turabian, K.L, W.C. Booth, G.G. Colomb, and J.M. Williams. (2013). *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
3. Montello, D.R. and P.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
Resume Assignment	1	2
Chapter 1	1-5	15
Chapter 2	1-5	15
Chapter 3	1-5	15
Chapter 4	1-4	15
Chapter 5	1-3	15
Presentation Slides	1	2
Defense	1	20
Thesis Upload	1	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>9-26</b>	<b>100</b>

### 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 2016 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 9/9/16 Fall 2016 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 2016 graduate without the need to register and pay additional tuition in Fall 2015. The grades listed in the Grading Breakdown give some guidance to the relative effort that will be needed to complete various parts of the thesis process. Students are expected to make substantial progress whilst enrolled in SSCI 594b and those 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 SSCI 594z 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!

## Schedule: Option 1 – A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics / Daily Activities	Deliverables / Due Dates
<b>Week 1</b> 5/18* *Class starts on Wednesday, 5/18	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.
<b>Week 2</b> 5/23	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).
<b>Week 3</b> 5/31* *Monday, 5/30 is a university holiday	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.
<b>Week 4</b> 6/6	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).
<b>Week 5</b> 6/13	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)
<b>Week 6</b> 6/20	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.
<b>Week 7</b> 6/27	Upload thesis in Graduate School Thesis Center. Make revisions if and as requested by the Graduate School.	Upload final version of thesis before 7/1/ due date.

**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. Several students who enrolled in SSCI 594b in Spring Semester 2016 successfully defended and uploaded their theses ahead of this deadline in Spring so we know that it is possible.

**Course Schedule: Option 2 – A Weekly Breakdown**

	<b>Topics / Daily Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables / Due Dates</b>
<b>Week 1</b> 5/18* *Class starts on Wednesday, 5/18	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.
<b>Week 2</b> 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.
<b>Week 3</b> 5/31* * Monday, 5/31 is a university holiday	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.
<b>Week 4</b> 6/6	Complete Chapters 1-3 revisions and send to advisor. Prepare methods presentation for full committee.	Send Chapters 1-3 revision to advisor.
<b>Week 5</b> 6/13	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.
<b>Week 6</b> 6/20	Complete <i>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions</i> and send to advisor. Begin work to revise Chapters 4-5.	Send Chapter 5 to advisor.
<b>Week 7</b> 6/27	Complete Chapters 4-5 revision and send to advisor. Begin work to revise full draft of thesis.	Send Chapters 4-5 revision to advisor.
<b>Week 8</b> 7/5* *Monday, 7/4 is a university holiday	Complete full thesis draft and send to advisor.	Send full draft to advisor.
<b>Week 9</b> 7/11	Revise full thesis draft and send to advisor.	Send full draft revision to advisor.
<b>Week 10</b> 7/18	Send full draft to full committee and schedule defense date.	Send full draft to full committee and schedule defense date.

<b>Week 11</b> 7/25	Prepare presentation slides for defense.	Prepare presentation slides.
<b>Week 12</b> 8/1	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.
<b>Week 13</b> 8/8	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 9/8/16 Last Day to Register and Add Classes deadline. The best advice is to aim for the 8/12/16 completion date and to settle for the 9/9/16 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://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 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](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 GIST 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 <http://libguides.usc.edu/distancelearning>. This includes instructional videos, remote access to university resources, and other key contact information for distance students.