



Dana and David Dornsife  
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences  
*Spatial Sciences Institute*

## SSCI 594b/z – Master's Thesis

**Units: 3**

**Term — Day — Time:** Fall, 2016, Online

**Location:** Online

**Instructor:** COL [R] Steven D. Fleming, Ph.D.

**Office:** AHF B55

**Regular Office Hours:** Monday (9:00-10:00) and Wednesdays (10:00-11:00) PST, and by appointment at other times. I am always available asynchronously via email. I am also available for synchronous chats via phone, IM text, and audio/video conferences on most days and times *by prior arrangement* via email.

**Contact Info:** [s.fleming@usc.edu](mailto:s.fleming@usc.edu), 213-740-7144

**Adobe Connect:**

<http://usccollege.adobeconnect.com/stevendf/>

**BlueJeans:** <https://bluejeans.com/2507438970>

**Library Help:** Katharin Peter

**Office:** VKC B40A

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Contact Info:** [kpeter@usc.edu](mailto:kpeter@usc.edu), 213-740-1700 (office)

**IT Help:** Richard Tsung

**Office:** AHF 145D

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Contact Info:** [ctsung@usc.edu](mailto: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. The purpose of these courses is to complete a major 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 completed in SSCI 594a and with the approval of the Spatial Sciences Institute faculty, students should be undertaking SSCI 594b to make substantial progress on their thesis research with the intention of completing their thesis writing and successfully defending their thesis in this or the subsequent SSCI 594z semester.

## **Learning Objectives**

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

- Design and undertake a meaningful research project that demonstrates spatial thinking and use of spatial evidence, using the knowledge and skills of Spatial Science learned while in the GIST Program.
- Describe the research process, research obligations and potential research 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.
- 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
- 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.

## **Course Structure**

This course requires individual effort that is overseen by me, your Thesis Advisor. Weekly or biweekly 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, can be uploaded.

## **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* – This course will utilize the SSI Servers to provide you with your own virtual desktop. You can access the SSI Server at: <http://spatial.usc.edu/index.php/software/>. If you are unable to connect to the server or experience any type of technical issues, send an email to SSI Tech Support at [spatial\\_support@usc.edu](mailto:spatial_support@usc.edu) and make sure to copy (cc) me on the email. SSI Tech Support is available Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PST. A variety of geospatial software platforms (ArcGIS, e-Cognition, Idrisi, etc.) are provided online via the SSI Server; hence, you do not need to install it on your own computer. Instead, every student must satisfy the following technology requirements: (1) a computer with a fast Internet connection; (2) a functional webcam and a microphone for use whenever a presentation or meeting is scheduled; and (3) a modern web browser, Firefox recommended, to access the SSI Server (in the event you want or need to).

*Presentations (including defenses)* - will usually be held online using Blue Jeans. See my meeting address above.

*Individual meetings* – You will meet with me, your Thesis Advisor, on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule to discuss your deliverables and progress. These meetings will usually be held using the web conferencing system Blue Jeans. See my meeting address under Contact Info above.

## Required Textbooks

The main textbooks used in SSCI 594a provide the necessary guidance in 594b as well. These are:

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*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

This book provides a detailed reference to the Chicago 16<sup>th</sup> 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 me, 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 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. Upon successful completion of the thesis, the In-Progress (IP) grade received in SSCI 594a and 594b (and 594z if needed) will be converted to Passing (P).

## Course Schedule

In consultation with me, each student will develop his or her own work schedule for the course. An example of such a schedule follows. Yours is likely to vary from this model.

Date	Tasks
Week 1 - 4	Prepare work schedule Meet with advisor. Committee meeting Begin technical work
Weeks 5 to 6	Complete technical work

Weeks 7 to 10	Prepare thesis draft
Weeks 11 to 12	Revise thesis draft
Week 13	Defense
Weeks 14-15	Final revisions
Week 16	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://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/departments/departments-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.