

## SSCI 594b, Master's Thesis

### *Syllabus*

**Units:** 2

**Term — Day — Time:** Fall 2019, Online

**Location:** Online

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

**Office:** AHF B57G

**Office Hours:** With this course necessitating routine yet un-forecasted meetings with student teams/individuals, all “office hours” will be viewed as “by appointment – when required.” In this, I am 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.

**Library Help:** Andy Rutkowski

**Office:** VKC 36B

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 10 am-12 pm PT and Thursdays 4:30-5:30 pm PT

**Contact Info:** [arutkows@usc.edu](mailto:arutkows@usc.edu), 213-740-6390,  
<http://bit.ly/andyhangout>

**IT Help:** Richard Tsung

**Office:** AHF 146

**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 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.
- 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 the 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 proposal, with an advisor and committee members assigned.

## Course Notes

The preparation and defense of the 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, the thesis advisor. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings will be held to discuss progress and review submitted documents. Once the research, including necessary analysis and results compilation are

completed, individual thesis chapters will be written and revised iteratively until it is agreed that the document is ready for submission to the Thesis Committee. If the committee agrees, then a Defense of the thesis will be held. Following successful completion of the Defense, the manuscript may be required to be revised a final time and once approved, can be uploaded.

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 one's computer, as browser requirements are constantly evolving and their ability to work with various applications varies.

*Blackboard* – While students will complete their 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 students can share ideas and support with other thesis students. During the first week of the semester, each student should confirm that they can access the Blackboard site. All communications that are sent through it should be read promptly.

*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 a student is unable to connect to the server or experiences any type of technical issues, an email should be sent to SSI Tech Support at [spatial\\_support@usc.edu](mailto:spatial_support@usc.edu) and the instructor should be copied (cc). The email sent to SSI Support should be specific with respect to the problem being experienced.

*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 individual meetings and presentations. To use BlueJeans, each student needs 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 interactions will be asynchronous (not at the same time). All materials to be handed in will be submitted via Blackboard or via email. Students should read as soon as possible all email sent from Blackboard or from the instructor. All students should check to make sure that mail sent from both the USC Blackboard accounts and directly the instructors usc.edu account does not go into 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*. 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 the course instructor, the 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 are no assignment grades in this course. Completion of this course is determined when each member of the 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 their 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 or most technical work is completed before the semester starts. The full thesis manuscript is written, defended, approved, and uploaded before the Graduate School’s deadline that normally falls during Week 10. Degree will be dated at the end of this semester.

| Date                   | Tasks  |
|------------------------|--|
| Week 1<br>(or earlier) | Prepare work schedule.<br>Meet with advisor and committee.<br>Continue work on thesis draft. |
| Week 2-5               | Write full thesis draft.<br>Iteratively submit sections to advisor for review.               |
| Weeks 6                | Prepare final revision of thesis draft.  |
| Week 7                 | Submit draft to committee.   |
| Week 8                 | Give defense.  |
| Weeks 9                | Final revisions, committee approval.   |
| Week 10                | Upload final thesis.   |

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

| Date           | Tasks  |
|----------------|--|
| Week 1         | Prepare work schedule.<br>Meet with advisor. |
| Week 2         | Committee meeting.<br>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        | Give defense.                                |
| Weeks 14-15    | Final revisions, committee approval.         |
| Exam week      | Upload final thesis.                         |

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### *Academic Conduct*

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as one’s own, either verbatim or recast in one’s own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Students should familiarize themselves with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/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>.

## **Support Systems**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

[equity.usc.edu\\_titleix.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu_titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support – (213) 740-2421*

[itleix.usc.edu/reporting-options/](http://itleix.usc.edu/reporting-options/)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs – (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC – (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety – - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

### ***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: <https://libraries.usc.edu/faculty-students/distance-learners>. These include instructional videos, remote access to university resources, and other key contact information for distance students.