SSCI 594b, Master's Thesis

Syllabus

Units: 2

Term — Day — Time: Spring 2020, Online

Location: Online

Instructor: Darren Ruddell, Ph.D. GISP
Office: AHF B57F
Office Hours: Mondays, 11 am-12 pm and Thursdays, 8-9 am PT, and by appointment via email
Contact Info: ruddell@usc.edu, 213-740-0521

Library Help: Andy Rutkowski
Office: VKC 36B
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10 am-12 pm and Thursdays 4:30-5:30 pm PT
Contact Info: arutkows@usc.edu, 213-740-6390, http://bit.ly/andyhangout

IT Help: Richard Tsung
Office: AHF B57E
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Info: ctsung@usc.edu, 213-821-4415

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 thesis in the spatial sciences, culminating students' experiences in the M.S. in GIST Program and demonstrating them to be master practitioners. Based upon the thesis proposal and analytical 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 a meaningful research project that demonstrates spatial thinking and uses the knowledge and skills learned while in the GIST Program.
- Articulate research and/or project objectives clearly, situate research within its academic or scholarly context, state claims and evidence clearly, and assess the validity of claims, evidence, outcomes, and results.
- Author a document narrating the research process in the form of a formal, multi-chapter master's thesis manuscript, structured according to the approved M.S. in GIST thesis style.
- Utilize the Microsoft Office™ software suite and a bibliographic reference manager to produce documents that meet M.S. in GIST Program requirements.
- 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 Structure

The preparation and defense of the master's thesis is the culminating experience in the M.S. in GIST Program.

This course requires individual effort that is overseen by the course instructor, the thesis advisor. In general, students are expected to have well-vetted versions of the first half of their thesis- the Abstract, Introduction, Background, and Methodology. Some students come into the course having already begun analysis, while others are just beginning their analytical work. Once a timeline is established, weekly meetings are held to discuss progress and review submitted documents. Mid-semester, once analysis has been completed, students will update their committee on their progress. From there, individual thesis chapters are written and

revised iteratively until the student and adviser agree that the document is ready for submission to the Thesis Committee. After reviewing the document, should the committee agree, 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 to the thesis center.

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.

This process is fast-paced, and 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.

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 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*. 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 is only one "assignment" in this course- a completed thesis document that conforms to USC SSI guidelines and has been approved by both the thesis adviser and the committee. As every research project is different, there are no formal, standardized assignments. In consultation with the course instructor, the thesis advisor, students develop a personal work schedule with specified deliverables. Weekly individual meetings will be held either by phone or online to discuss deliverables and revise the work plan if needed. Students will rely heavily on the Thesis style guide.

Students will continue to work on their project presentation, typically a PowerPoint, that they began in 594a. They will present this to their committee at their first committee meeting, update and redistribute to the committee mid-semester, and present the full presentation formally at the thesis defense.

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 (or earlier)	Prepare work schedule. Meet with advisor and committee. Continue work on thesis draft.
Week 2-5	Write full thesis draft. 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. 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	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 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 Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" 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, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.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

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

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 and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

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

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

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

[dsp.usc.edu](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.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.usc.edu

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

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](dps.usc.edu), emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, 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](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.