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

SSCI 594z, Master's Thesis

Syllabus

Units: 2

Term — Day — Time: Summer 2020, Online

Location: Online

Instructor: COL [R] Steven Fleming, PhD
Office: Remote from California or Florida
Office Hours: As coordinated between student and Dr. Fleming. Please contact the Instructor via email in advance to ensure they will be online. Instructors are also available most days and times by appointment.
Contact Info: s.fleming@usc.edu
Zoom Meeting Room: https://usc.zoom.us/j/2033177375
Meeting ID: 203 317 7375

Library Help: Andy Rutkowski
Office: VKC 36B
Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. PT and Thursday 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. PT
Contact Info: 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, 213-821-4415

Course Description

This course and its prerequisite, SSCI 594a/b, are required for the Master of Science degree in the 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 that they are master practitioners. Based upon the thesis proposal and analytical work completed in SSCI 594a/b, and with the approval of the Spatial Sciences Institute faculty, students should be undertaking SSCI 594z to complete their project (technical) work, write their thesis manuscript, 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 unambiguously, 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 an appropriate word processing software and a bibliographic reference manager to produce documents that meet M.S. in GIST Program requirements.
- Describe their master's research clearly and succinctly, in written and oral forms, to faculty, mentors, and potential sponsors.

Prerequisite(s): SSCI 594a/b
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.

After completing SSCI 594a/b, students are expected to have a well-vetted version of a draft of the first half of their thesis- the Abstract, Introduction, Background, and Methodology (the "thesis proposal"). Some students come into the course having already begun technical work, while others are just beginning their technical work.

This course requires individual effort that is overseen by the course instructor, the thesis advisor. Students begin by establishing a timeline for their completion process. Once the timeline is agreed upon by the student and the advisor, weekly meetings are held to discuss progress, problem solve, and review submitted documents. Mid-semester, once project work has been completed, students will update their committee on their progress and receive feedback. From there, individual thesis chapters are written and revised iteratively until the student and advisor agree that the document is ready for submission to the Thesis Committee.

Students should be prepared to submit a final manuscript well in advance of the final deadline to account for revisions, scheduling, and other potential challenges. After the committee reviews the thesis document, an oral defense of the thesis is held. There are two components of this culminating event- the presentation and the thesis document itself. The possible outcomes of the thesis defense are "fail" the oral defense with no opportunity to repeat it, "fail" the oral defense with need to revise the manuscript and repeat the oral defense, "pass" the oral defense with revisions required to the manuscript, or "pass" the oral defense with approval for immediate upload of the manuscript to the thesis center. Should the student "pass" the oral defense yet need revisions to the manuscript, it will be under the guidance of the thesis advisor, though committee members may request to review the manuscript again. Upon successful completion of the thesis, the In-Progress (IP) grade received in SSCI 594a/b will be converted to Passing (P), and students also will receive a Passing (P) grade for SSCI 594z.

Successful students in this course exercise initiative and exhibit strong communication skills in working with their advisors and committee members. This process is fast-paced, and students are expected to have a high level of self-motivation.

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.
- At least one up-to-date web browser.

Blackboard – While students will complete their work independently, a course Blackboard site is available to provide guidance as to 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 with other thesis students. However Blackboard is typically used less in this course than in previous courses the student may have taken while enrolled in the GIST M.S. Program. 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.

The student and advisor will agree on their preferred way of communicating and sharing documents, which can include Blackboard, email, and third-party document sharing sites.

SSI server and tech support **–** Students in this course will utilize the Spatial Sciences Institute Server for independent thesis work as needed. If a student is unable to connect to the server or experiences 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.

Zoom – Zoom 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 individual meetings and presentations. To use Zoom, 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 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. Students should read as soon as possible all email sent from Blackboard or from the instructor.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Students will continue to refer to the textbooks that were required in SSCI 594z. No new textbooks need to be purchased unless required for the students' particular thesis topic.

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*. 9th 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 advisor and the committee. As every research project is different, there are no formal, standardized assignments in this course. Students will rely heavily on the GIST Thesis Style Guide and GIST Thesis Formatting Template. In consultation with the course instructor (the thesis advisor), students develop a work schedule with specified deliverables. Weekly individual meetings will be held either by phone or via Zoom to discuss deliverables and revise the work plan as needed.

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

Grading Breakdown

Since there are no assignments, there are 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 work progresses.

There are two possible schedules to follow in this course. Option 1 is very aggressive and requires that most or all of the technical project work has already been completed in advance of the beginning of the semester. Much of the writing should also be completed. Thus, the work in 594z 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 another 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. The M.S. Degree will be dated at the end of the semester.

Date	Tasks
Week 1 (or earlier)	Prepare work schedule. Meet with advisor and committee. Continue work on thesis draft.
Week 2-4	Write full thesis draft. Iteratively submit sections to advisor for review.
Weeks 5	Submit draft to committee.
Week 6	Give defense.
Week 7	Final revisions, committee approval.
Weeks 8	Upload final thesis.

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

Date	Tasks
Week 1 (or earlier)	Prepare work schedule. Meet with advisor and committee.
Week 2	Committee meeting. Begin technical work.
Weeks 3 to 6	Complete technical work.
Weeks 7 to 10	Write full thesis draft. Iteratively submit sections to advisor for review.
Week 11	Give defense.
Weeks 12	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 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.

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

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 Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.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, 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

Non-emergency assistance or information.