

USC Dornsife

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

SSCI 594b, Master's Thesis

Syllabus

Units: 2

Term — Day — Time: Fall 2024, Online

Instructor: Elisabeth Sedano, JD, PhD

Office Hours: Tues and Thurs 2 - 3 pm via Zoom. Also available by appointment via email.

Contact Info: sedano@usc.edu

Library Help: Andy Rutkowski

Office: LIPA B40-A

Office Hours: Thu 10 am-12 pm

Contact Info: arutkows@usc.edu

IT Help: Myron Medulla

Office: AHF 146

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course and its prerequisite, SSCI 594a, 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 and demonstrating that they are 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 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 M.S. in 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 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.

Students may vary in their competency levels on these abilities. Students can expect to acquire these abilities when course policies are honored, meetings are attended, and assigned work is completed.

Prerequisite(s): SSCI 594a

Co-Requisite(s): None

Concurrent Enrollment: None

Recommended Preparation: Students must be enrolled in the M.S. in GIST and have an approved thesis proposal, with an advisor and thesis guidance committee members assigned.

Class Conduct

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents

if the reporting student wants an investigation. The Title IX office is also responsible for coordinating supportive measures for transgender and nonbinary students such as faculty notifications, and more. If you need supportive accommodations you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly (titleix@usc.edu or 213-821-8298) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students (213-740-9355 (WELL); press 0 after hours)

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, 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 thesis guidance 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 guidance 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 thesis guidance 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 thesis guidance committee members may request to review the manuscript again. 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.

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

Technological and Communication Requirements

ArcGIS is provided online via the GIST Server; hence, you do not need to install it on your own computer. Instead, 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.
- An up-to-date web browser to access the Server

If a student does not have access to any of these, please speak with the instructor at the start of the semester. Also, see the USC ITS Student Toolkit here:

<https://keep-teaching.usc.edu/students/student-toolkit/>

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 D2L or via email. Students should check to make sure that mail sent from both the USC D2L 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 D2L or from the instructor.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Students will continue to refer to the textbooks that were required in SSCI 594a. 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 thesis guidelines and has been approved by both the thesis advisor and the thesis guidance 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 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. They will present this to their thesis guidance committee at their first thesis guidance committee meeting, update and redistribute to the thesis guidance committee mid-semester, and revise and give the full presentation formally at the thesis defense.

Grading Breakdown

Since there are no assignments, there are no grades in this course. Completion of this course is determined when each member of the thesis guidance committee digitally signs the “Approval to Upload” form. This form is signed after successful completion of the oral defense and acceptance by each thesis guidance committee member of the thesis document.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is prohibited. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which has been distributed to students or in any way has been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Learning Experience Evaluations

Please note Learning Experience Evaluations for the course take place at the end of the semester and are facilitated by the University. These evaluations provide an important review of student experiences in the course.

Course Schedule

In consultation with the course instructor, each student will develop their own work schedule for the course.

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 594b 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. 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 thesis guidance 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 thesis guidance committee.
Week 6	Give defense.
Week 7	Final revisions, thesis guidance committee approval.
Week 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 thesis guidance committee.
Week 2	Thesis guidance 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, thesis guidance committee approval.
Exam week	Upload final thesis.

The Early Submission Deadline is available in the Fall and Spring semesters. Students will be exempt from registering for 594 in a given semester if they have met the continuous enrollment requirement, completed all required checklist items by the Early Submission Checklist Submission deadline, and uploaded the manuscript to the Graduate School Thesis Center by the Early Submission Manuscript Submission deadline.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, comprises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

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

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

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

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

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

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Resources for Online Students

The Course D2L page and the SSI Student Hub on D2L 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.