

## GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT HONORS PROGRAM APPLICATION

Each fall, a small number of highly qualified seniors enter the Government Honors Program. The Program is open to Government majors who have excelled in their studies, and who want to devote a substantial part of their senior year to independent research and the writing of a thesis.

### Prerequisites.

Applicants must have a minimum grade point average of 3.5 in the Government Major. They are also strongly encouraged to complete coursework in the relevant subfield, including courses directly applicable to the topic, before filing an application.

### Submitting an Application

Applications must be received from juniors completing their second semester must be submitted on or before 4:00PM March 1, 2021. Students applying for admission into the Program should bear in mind that they might not be admitted if the topic formulation or prior course work are not adequate, or there is no adviser in the department with expertise in the topic area. About 75% of applicants were accepted for the 2020-2021 honors class.

**(Note:** If you have already pre-enrolled and are at your maximum credits per semester, you must either petition your Advising Dean to go over hours, or drop a course to make room for the fall honors research class).

**Government Department Honors Application**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENT ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

CAMPUS ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Admission is restricted to students who are in the **second** semester of their **Junior** year, and who have made good progress towards completion of the Government Major.

EXPECTED GRADUATION: \_\_\_\_\_ MAJOR ADVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_

COURSES YOU HAVE ALREADY COMPLETED FOR THE GOVERNMENT MAJOR:  
(INCLUDE STUDY ABROAD AND CORNELL-IN-WASHINGTON COURSES)

---

---

---

CURRENT GOVERNMENT COURSES (INCLUDE CORNELL-IN-WASHINGTON COURSES AND STUDY ABROAD):

---

---

---

CUMULATIVE GPA (all courses): \_\_\_\_\_

CUMULATIVE GPA (GOVT courses only, omitting FWS): \_\_\_\_\_

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED HONORS THESIS RESEARCH QUESTION (ONE OR TWO SENTENCES):

---

LIST OF COURSEWORK THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED THAT IS RELEVANT TO YOUR PROPOSAL:

---

---

---

Please give the names of one or two government professors who you feel best know you and your work.

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please include the following supporting materials with your application.**

1) Your Statement of Interest. Discuss the topic that you propose to explore in your honors thesis. Your proposal should be approximately 250 words in length. The topic must be specific and focused enough to represent a plausible research project, and must be located in, or relate to, the field of political science, broadly defined. (See the attached Tips on Writing a Proposal)

2) A copy of the best essay (preferably 10 or more pages in length) that you have written for a Government Department course.

3) A copy of your Cornell transcript and, if you are a transfer student, a copy of the transcript from your original college/university.

**Application Procedure and Deadline.**

Please submit your application electronically to the Government Undergraduate Field Coordinator at [cu\\_govt\\_undergrad@cornell.edu](mailto:cu_govt_undergrad@cornell.edu). Applications must be received on or before 4:00PM March 1st, 2021.

The application can be found online at [Government Honors 2021 Application](#).

**Notification.**

Students will be notified about admission to the Honors Program before spring semester pre-enrollment.

## Tips on Writing a Proposal For Your Application to the Government Honors Program

### 1. Topic

The basic requirement when selecting a topic is to that the proposed research is relevant to the study of politics -- that is, it must have some bearing on the question of power relations, the operation of political institutions, and/or the relationship between the State and the citizen.

Say, for example, that the student is interested in ethnic politics in the United States. This general area is of course highly relevant to various political questions. But it is too broadly defined at this initial stage. The student might decide to narrow it to the treatment of Asian Americans by the United States government. Doing more reading to give the topic sharper focus, the student might encounter texts written by Ron Takaki (*A Different Mirror: a History of Multicultural America*), and Rogers Smith. (*Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History*). Reading these two works, the student becomes interested in the specific case of the internment of the Japanese during World War II, its causes and outcomes, and what it might tell us about the treatment of minorities in times of war or other crisis.

He or she might, for example, decide to investigate the extent to which the Japanese internment case illustrates a general tendency of the Executive branch to expand its war-time powers in such a manner that the normal checks and balances fail, citizens' civil liberties are endangered, and racial/ethnic minorities and foreigners become particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. Chances are that the full development of this argument during the thesis-writing year will require at least some comparison with other war-time decisions made by the Executive branch, and their reception by Congress, the courts, and the public at large. The student will eventually have to become familiar with the theories of politics scholars on this question, and, in the final version of the thesis, make a convincing argument for his or her own theory in contrast to the existing theories in the politics literature. A Government thesis does not simply require that the student select a political topic and amass information about it; the thesis will only be successful to the extent that the student demonstrates that he or she has learned to think like a student of politics, to develop hypotheses and marshal evidence to test them.

2. But I don't have a topic, let alone a question. How can I submit a proposal with my application?

If you are unsure of a topic, you may wish to take a step back and ask yourself if writing an honors thesis is the most valuable and productive use of your time and resources. If the answer is "yes," here are some suggestions for getting started:

**Your Favorite Course.** At the time of writing the application, the student should have taken, or should be taking, courses that are relevant to the thesis. Go back to the course syllabi, pick one or more of your favorite courses, find a set of readings and questions proposed that seem fruitful, and look for further reading, seeking advice from your

professors. You will have to go beyond the course syllabi in your thesis project, but this is one good way to begin your work.

Most Interesting Author/professor. Do a library catalogue and on-line journal or citation search to find the works that have been published by a favorite author or professor in the politics field, and then study his or her texts. Be careful though: the goal is certainly not to transform yourself into a "clone" of your chosen writer. The point is, instead, to delve into a set of texts dealing with politics from a scholarly perspective and develop your own insights. (Many theses have in fact arisen from scepticism about something a student heard or read in a government class).

Sub-fields, Journals and Conferences. It might also be thought-provoking to browse in the leading academic journals in a specific Government sub-field (American politics, comparative politics, international relations or political theory.) Have a look at recent journals and note which articles strike you as most appealing. Follow up by reading some of the sources cited in the most interesting articles, to build an understanding of the problem in question. You could also look up the proceedings of the last annual conference of the American Political Science Association -- or any other professional academic association devoted to the study of politics -- and skim the paper titles. See which papers catch your eye, and search for further work by the authors or do subject searches related to the topics of the papers.

3. But isn't my honors thesis supposed to be an original work?

Absolutely. For one thing, plagiarism is strictly forbidden and severely punished. And the successful honors thesis will need to break new ground, perhaps by using newer, more extensive, or different empirical data to test a proposition from an existing body of research, or developing a creative interpretation of a theoretical concept and then pursuing evidence. You will only be able to develop a truly original viewpoint in a scholarly manner once you have mastered the alternative views of other scholars. To borrow an insight from Bourdieu, (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*), originality is like a jazz musician's solo -- it is a form of structured improvisation on an established theme that respects the special rules of composition even as it finds new ways to bend them.

4. I know exactly what I want to do. Just let me get to work.

If this is case, you have an impressive ability to focus, but we would remind you that writing a thesis is a dialogical process, rather than a personal memoir. A department cannot supervise every possible thesis topic. If you are accepted into the Honors Program, we may have to ask you to work with us in shaping your project such that you will find a suitable "match" with one of our faculty members. We may also suggest that your project actually belongs in a different subfield. And of course you will need to demonstrate your ability to think like a student of politics in your research and writing -- and that might involve some significant changes in direction on your part. At the proposal stage, then, one should not get "locked into" a strictly defined topic, question or way of thinking. Leave some room for dialogue with your professors and honors classmates.

5. Can I just expand the paper that I wrote for another Government course?

You cannot submit the same work for two courses for academic credit. Thus, the only honest way to handle this situation is to submit to the Director of Undergraduate Studies and your thesis advisor every paper that you have already written on your chosen topic and submitted for an academic grade in other courses at the very beginning of your research project. (And, while you are writing the thesis itself, you ought to discuss, in advance, any paper that you might want to submit in another course with your course instructors if it is related in any way to your thesis work). But this is not to say that all aspects of work you have done on this or a similar topic in another course are strictly off limits. What we will ask you to do is to produce a new and distinct piece of work that represents a senior-level research effort conducted over two semesters. Perhaps we will ask you to work on a contiguous problem, to reconceptualise your theory or approach, or to greatly expand and update the data collected.

6. Can I just choose a thesis advisor first and then ask her or him what to write about?

You are certainly welcome to correspond with faculty members as you develop your thesis topics. But please note that we only begin the process of matching honors thesis writers with faculty advisors once we have completed the admission process. In most cases, we do match students with their preferred thesis advisor. However, accepted students may have to be a bit flexible as we sort out the faculty-student matches. At the application stage, then, feel free to consult professors for advice on your proposal. But you should not expect that a professor will tell you what to do. We will try to teach you how to think about politics, to ask you some leading questions, and to suggest specific texts. And remember you will always get much more out of a meeting with a professor if you do advance work on your own.