

Gulnara Ibraeva, Associate Professor
Email: ibraeva@gmail.com **Class meets:** T.: 10.50, Room 129
Office hours: by appointment

*Soc 480 Senior Thesis Seminar I
 American University of Central Asia
 Department of Sociology
 Fall 2011 Syllabus¹*

The Pre-Thesis Seminar and the Senior Seminar are "capstone" courses which have two purposes: to provide guidance and assistance in the writing of the senior thesis; and to provide a general review of the theories, methods and substantive conclusions covered in Sociology courses.

The fall semester pre-thesis course helps students settle on a thesis topic and to refine that topic as much as possible within the limits of the short time available. The spring semester Senior Seminar provides an intensive research and writing environment so that the students can develop a senior thesis that is both theoretically-driven and empirically-based. The senior thesis experience gives the graduating sociology major an opportunity to bring together course work, internships, volunteer work, and other experiences in a final academic product.

Importantly, students must conform to the schedule established in this syllabus. Failure to attend and actively participate in the seminars will result in the student being dropped from the Senior Thesis Program. The program coordinator, students' supervisors and students' faculty departments all reserve the right to drop students from the Senior Thesis Program at the end of the first semester, if the student has failed to make sufficient progress, and is unlikely to produce a satisfactory research work. The decision to allow the students to join and continue to participate in the Senior Thesis Program is made by the appropriate department in each student's case. Students should be aware that different departments might set different criteria.

There will be several lecturers making presentations on various topics.

Course Readings

SOC480: Senior Thesis Seminar: Fall Semester Course Reader (Department of Sociology, American University – Central Asia, 2005)
Surviving Your Senior Thesis: Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Diploma Work (The American University in Kyrgyzstan, 2001)

Additional readings will be handed out in class. Note that there are several research books available in the library, and you are required to consult them.

Becker, H. (1986) *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
 Hart, C. (2007) *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
 Levin, P. (2005) *Student Friendly Guides: Excellent Dissertations!* London: Open University Press.
 Walliman, N. (2006) *Your Undergraduate Dissertation: The Essential Guide for Success*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications.

FALL SEMESTER Tentative Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Discussion Themes</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
Week 1, 2:	Introductions: aims of the course, assignments and deadlines. How do I get started? What is it all about?	Check out Textbooks

¹ Syllabus was developed by colleagues Baliyar Sanghera and Medina Aitieva – see in details: http://uk.geocities.com/baliyar_sanghera/thesis.html

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Week 3: Week 4	Can I believe what I see? Do I see what I believe? The philosophy of social research. Positivism. Relativism. Induction and Deduction (Becker , Ch 1: “Freshman English for Graduate Students,” pp. 1-25). <i>Additional: Williams and May</i> , Chs 3&4, pp. 47-106	Check out Becker in the Main Library Progress reports/ presentations DUE: reflection on research interests & questions
Week 5:	Designing social research. Research questions and objectives (Blaikie , Chs 2&3, pp. 12-84) How to narrow down the topic and research? Doing a literature review: Reviewing and the research imagination (Hart , Ch 2, pp. 26-43). <i>Additional: Booth, Colomb and Williams</i> , Chs 4-5, pp. 56-88; Locke, Spirduso and Silverman , pp. 41-62	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 6:	How do I write my proposal? (Bryman , Ch 23, pp. 460-474) Classifying and reading research (Hart , Ch 3, pp. 43-78)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 7:	How do I work and plan my time? (Bryman , Ch 25, pp. 488-499) Research design and semi-structured interviews – designing the research and preparing interviews (Bryman , Ch 5, pp. 106-126; May , Ch 6, pp. 120-145)	Progress reports/ presentations Confirmation of supervisor
Week 8:	Where do I get hold of all the necessary background information? How can I manage all the notes? (Becker , Ch 3: “One Right Way,” pp. 43-67)	DUE: Outline of Proposal
Fall Break: 18-22 October		
NB: Your research should not hope for fall or spring breaks! This is the time when you are most active on your research proposal using the free time to write up, to revise, and finalize your methodologies and methods.		
Week 9:	Why do I need arguments? (Becker , Ch. 8: “Terrorized by the Literature,” pp. 135-149). What is Annotated Bibliography? (Locke, Spirduso and Silverman , pp.313-329)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 10:	Research Ethics. Acknowledging other people’s work. Respect for people. Scientific honesty and subjectivity (Bryman , Ch 24, pp. 476-486; May , Ch 3, pp. 46-68; Locke, Spirduso and Silverman , pp. 331-337)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 11:	What sorts of data will I find? Social statistics (Bryman , Chs 10&11, pp. 196-238; May , Ch 4, pp. 71-87; Becker , Ch 5: “Learning to Write as a Professional,” pp.90-107)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 12:	Sample Research Designs (Blaikie , Ch 8, pp. 277-309; Locke, Spirduso and Silverman , pp. 313-330)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 13:	Social surveys and questionnaires (Bryman , Chs 4-6, pp. 84-139) Focus groups (Bryman , Ch 16, pp. 336-351; Becker , Ch 7: “Getting It out the Door,” pp. 121-134)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 14:	Ethnography, Participant Observations and Field Research (Bryman , Ch 14, pp. 290-310; May , Ch 7, pp. 146-174)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 14:	Writing a Thesis: Drafting, Revising, and Proofreading Presentations (Becker , Ch 9: “Friction and Word Processors,” pp. 150-163)	Progress reports/ presentations
Week 15:	Presentations	Submission of preliminary thesis proposal

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Fall Semester: Assessment and Grading Structure

50% Thesis proposal (3,500-5,000 words) – due on December 13

20% Annotated bibliography – due on December 13

30% Seminar participation/attendance and progress report presentations

Students must conform to the deadlines established in the syllabus. Students must conform to the schedule established in this syllabus. Failure to do so (i.e., missing deadlines or not submitting satisfactory work) will result in the student being dropped from the Senior Thesis Program. Students are expected to attend all seminars, and to be well prepared. Please note that the instructor reserves the right to change the schedule of the meetings and topics as and when necessary.

Thesis

A thesis is an independent piece of research into a particular research question or problem that you have set yourself in consultation with your supervisor.

Research based theses must involve some form of data or empirical research methods analysis. Other theses may involve data analysis or may be more theoretically or literature review based. All students will be allocated a thesis supervisor, and must also meet regularly with their supervisor to plan and discuss the progress of their thesis. The precise structure of the thesis will depend a great deal on the nature of the problem you are investigating but the topic must be approved by the supervisor. This protects you from attempting research that is over-ambitious or otherwise infeasible. Whatever empirical or non-empirical topic you choose to investigate, you should include the following elements.

1. You should start with a **short abstract of 100-200 words**.
2. The opening will almost certainly include a clear account of the problem that you have chosen to investigate, and why you thought that it was important, interesting, and researchable.
3. There should be a proper literature review that also indicates the significance of your thesis to this literature. This review will serve to locate your research in an appropriate social scientific context, sociological or otherwise, which will certainly vary with the substantive course with which the thesis is linked. It will generally refer to the key concepts and theoretical approaches relevant to the research problem as well as to the research strategies and methods previously associated with work on this problem. It may also be appropriate to refer to alternative lay explanations of the problem.
4. If you do an empirical project there will need to be a substantial discussion of your overall research. There will be a substantial discussion of your overall research strategy, methods, and techniques. This should justify the research strategy in terms of the research problem and clearly describe and justify the methods and techniques you have chosen. You should explain why you rejected other possible alternatives, how you have tried to apply the methods and techniques chosen, how you have operationalized the key variables in your research (where relevant), and what you have done to avoid possible difficulties. You will not be penalized for admitting to difficulties if things did not work out as expected. However, you may lose marks if it is not clear to examiners why you adopted a particular strategy or if you exclude a crucial piece of information about the methods or techniques used (e.g. how a sample was selected).
5. For an empirical project you will need a summary of the main findings. A summary of the main findings of the evidence you gathered for the research (or the difficulties that, in the event, led to your findings being unsatisfactory).
6. A summary and discussion of the significance of your research in relation to the literature review. It is important to link your arguments back to the evidence you have gathered. You should also

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explain what you have learnt from undertaking the research. You may also want to make some suggestions for future research.

7. A bibliography of works or sources cited.
8. An appendix, if required. This might, for example, include details such as a questionnaire, which do not form a part of the main argument, but to which it might be appropriate to refer.
9. You are reminded that if you don't submit your thesis, or submit it late without an extension, you will fail the course.

Other Points about Theses

1. Your thesis should be 10,000-12,000 words (not including bibliography and appendices).
2. Remember that this is a thesis in sociology. We define this broadly. But you must seek to establish this linkage and may be penalized for not attempting to do so. You should always be careful to connect your arguments with the evidence you have gathered on the basis of reading and your own research. Remember that the examiners are looking for evidence of your theoretical, methodological and empirical sociological skills. The guidelines that are used for marking thesis are given above.
3. In some contexts it may be appropriate to comment on the implications of your analysis to social, public, or civic policy issues. Where your research raises ethical issues, these should be noted; and you should also explain how you dealt with these issues.
4. In some contexts it may also be appropriate to comment on how your approach differs from that of other disciplines or modes of inquiry. Likewise it may be appropriate to refer to one or more competing lay explanations for the phenomena you have chosen to study.
5. In presenting empirical findings, if any, you should not include large quantities of 'raw' data unless it serves a particular purpose in the overall research design. The examiners do not need to see all your completed questionnaires or interview transcripts, as you should have tabulated or summarized the results in the text.
6. Notes at the bottom of each page (footnotes) should be avoided. If you need to use notes, group them at the end of each chapter as 'endnotes' and keep them to a bare minimum.
7. There should be a table of contents listing chapters, appendices, tables, figures, illustrations, and so on.

Thesis should be typed or word-processed. Use A4 paper, 1.5 – 2 spacing between lines, and left and right margins of at least 1 inch. Make sure that you put your name, the title of the thesis, and a word count of the main body of the material (excluding appendices) on the front cover.

Bibliography and References

A bibliography must be included with all written work. Only include those works that you have actually read or referred to.

There are different systems for presenting bibliographies. Whatever system you use should be consistent within the report and it should always include author, date, and title with either the place of publication and publisher for books, chapters (plus page numbers), pamphlets, etc., or journal or serial title, volume and part number (or issue number where a volume and part number system is not used), and pages for journals or other serials.

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Guide to thesis marking

Below you will find our guidelines for evaluating thesis. Please note that these are *guidelines*.

Statement of Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a very serious offence and is considered as cheating under University rules. Plagiarism includes the following:

- Submission of work that is identical or substantially similar for assessment in more than one course, whether in the same department or in other departments.
- Passing off work as yours that is really the work of others (whether other students, text from a web page you have found or from a published source).
- Duplicating sentences or paragraphs from other works in whole or in part without accurate citation of the text being quoted and proper referencing of the source in the bibliography.

In other words, the only time you should use the words of somebody else in your work is in the form of a direct quote. This should be either indented or should clearly be in quotation marks and should include a direct reference immediately after the quote ends (name, date: page number) e.g. (Harvey, 1989: 64). Direct quotes are accepted academic practice but should be used sparingly in your work. The reference from which the quote comes should then appear in your bibliography. e.g. Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Plagiarism does not include:

- Summarizing the arguments of someone else in your own words and citing them as a reference
- Using published academic work to help you develop your own argument

In each case, though, you should still include a reference in your text to the things that you have read at the end of the relevant sentence or paragraph if you are referring directly to their work e.g. (Harvey, 1989).

Penalties for Plagiarism

First offence, minor (a few unconnected sentences). The lecturer will confront the student with the evidence and if an adequate explanation is not forthcoming they will deduct some marks (to be decided by the lecturer but normally up to 10% overall) from the piece of work in question and a note will be put on the student's file recording they have been caught plagiarizing.

First offence, major (substantial plagiarism of more than a few isolated sentences). The lecturer will confront the student with the evidence and if an adequate explanation is not forthcoming the matter will be referred to the Head of Department for action. This will normally result in the piece of work in question being given a mark of zero. A note will be put on the student's file explaining the actions taken and the reasons for them.

Second or further offence. Once evidence has been presented the matter will be referred to the Head of Department for disciplinary action to be taken under University Rules.

Fail (F)

Inadequate work in most relevant aspects, with many very serious weaknesses

- The thesis has no introduction and no coherent structure throughout;
- There is no understanding of relevant approaches, the thesis is incoherent on major themes and shows no understanding of the question;
- There is no understandable argument or proper synthesis;

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- Structure is non-existent, the thesis is very short, unclear and wholly lacking in conclusions;
- There is no supporting data, or an entirely inappropriate methodology has been used;
- No bibliography is presented

Poor (F)

Inadequate work in most relevant respects, with many very serious weaknesses

- The thesis has a weak introduction, if any, providing little or no frame for the thesis as a whole;
- There is little mention or understanding of relevant approaches so that they are presented in a highly restricted and unclear manner and/or with no sense of context;
- The relevant arguments and evidence are scarcely related together, and there is no proper synthesis;
- The thesis lacks structure, is too short, is unclear, and conclusions are lacking or inadequate and ungrounded;
- No data, irrelevant data, or otherwise flawed data with inadequate rationales, if any, for data selection and overall methodology (applies where empirical analysis is required);
- The bibliography is non-existent or minimal and/or entirely unclear and inadequately presented.

Marginal / bare pass (D-)

EITHER generally unsatisfactory, inadequately planned and presented, with no or poor understanding but with some redeeming features OR properly organized but more or less wholly irrelevant. In the former case, the work would have the following features:

- the introduction is very weak, barely providing a frame for the thesis as a whole;
- there is some mention of relevant literatures or approaches, but this outline is very patchy, unclear, and/or very inadequately placed in context with the result that the thesis reveals little or no knowledge of their significance and fails to engage in critical discussion;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are not properly related together, resulting in an unsystematic approach, significant weaknesses in understanding and rigor, and no attempt at synthesis;
- the thesis is poorly organized, with little or no structure, serious weaknesses in clarity, and little or no attempt to draw conclusions;
- limited ability to gather and summarize relevant data and other material or to interpret it (applies where empirical analysis is involved);
- The bibliography is very limited and/or unclear and poorly presented.

Not very satisfactory (D and D+)

Limited work in most relevant respects, with several significant weaknesses

- The introduction is weak, providing only a limited frame for the thesis as a whole;
- Some relevant literatures are outlined, but this is limited, patchy, unclear, and/or not adequately contextualised so that, although some major points are brought out, there are significant gaps, misunderstandings, and/or little grasp of detail or subtlety;
- The relevant arguments and evidence are related together in a weak manner and thus the thesis conveys neither a critical understanding nor a reasonable synthesis;
- The thesis is poorly organized, with a poor balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis but some attempt is made to draw conclusions ;
- There are significant problems with methodology for gathering material and its interpretation (applies where empirical analysis is required);
- The bibliography is limited and/or unclear and poorly presented.

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Satisfactory (C- to C+)

A competent thesis that shows understanding of material and presents it satisfactorily. There is a coherent argument throughout and an adequate conclusion. In short, it is an acceptable work in most relevant respects, but with some significant weaknesses.

- the introduction is adequate, providing a reasonable frame for the thesis as a whole;
- the major approaches are outlined and adequately contextualized so that the major points are reasonably brought out and interrelated to reveal an adequate grasp of the topic but with a relatively unsystematic approach and some weaknesses in understanding and rigor;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are related together adequately, there is some attempt at synthesis but no originality, and there are some weaknesses in terms of the clarity of argument;
- the thesis is adequately organized, achieving some balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis, with broadly satisfactory conclusions;
- weak rationale for gathering data and materials, some problems with actual data and other material collection and its interpretation (where empirical analysis is required)
- the bibliography is adequate, reasonably clear, and well-presented.

Good (B- to B+)

Shows a firm grasp of material and contextualizes it, has good research and presentation skills, argues well and effectively, is able to criticize and evaluate material convincingly and appropriately. In short, good to very good work in most relevant respects, with few weaknesses.

- the introduction is good, clearly and appropriately framing the thesis as a whole;
- the most important literatures are outlined and soundly located in an appropriate context with few serious omissions so that the thesis presents a sound critical discussion of the topic based on a good overall grasp of the chosen readings;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are related together in a clear manner that achieves a good overall synthesis without being original;
- the thesis is well organized, achieving a good balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis with valid conclusions grounded in evidence;
- generally competent rationale and use of data collection methodology and good use of data, including specialized resources and/or some original data (empirical analysis is required);
- the bibliography is quite extensive and well presented.

Very Good (A-)

Very good understanding of material and contextualizes it well; shows facility in the handling of ideas/theories/concepts/data; communicates clearly and effectively; shows insight and perceptiveness, a well-developed critical faculty and good judgment. A fresh and original, unusual or substantial contribution to the debate. Therefore, excellent work in all relevant respects, with only marginal weaknesses.

- the introduction is excellent, clearly and appropriately framing the thesis as a whole;
- extensive and relevant readings are identified, outlined and located in an appropriate context with no serious omissions so that the essential points are identified and interrelated in a very good overall grasp of the topic in question and very good command of both the detail and the subtlety of the arguments;
- the relevant arguments and evidence are related together in a clear and critical manner that achieves a convincing overall synthesis, and also reveals elements of originality;
- the thesis is very well organized, achieving an excellent balance between context, literatures, discussion, and synthesis, with convincing and well-argued conclusions;

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- sound rationale for collecting data and other material, including use of specialized resources and/or gathering of original data; very good use of the data and material (where empirical analysis is required);
- the bibliography is extensive and well-presented.

Outstanding (A)

- A mark in this range is given for an accomplished piece of work that offers a thorough, imaginative or highly original but appropriate answer to the question;
- Reading is demonstrated to be comprehensive and going beyond standard course material, bibliography is comprehensive;
- The thesis is written in faultless prose with a convincing argument, structure and synthesis;
- A high degree of originality is shown in argument, methodology or presentation of data;
- The answer is imaginative and offers a novel and effective interpretation of the question;
- In rare cases where a thesis makes an original contribution to sociological knowledge and is written to a publishable standard, recognition of outstanding distinction will be given.

Fall Semester: Grading Guidelines for Seminar Participation

Active participation means that students are ready to articulate and explain their ideas, and listen and respond to others' ideas. A *schedule of progress report presentations* will be assigned during our first meeting. Each student will report at least twice throughout the semester on the progress you have made on your thesis proposal. Although we meet once a week, you should dedicate your second 80 minutes meeting with department faculty members, researching the libraries, actually reading and writing that you need to plan autonomously.

- ‘A’ – Students attend each seminar with questions about the seminars. In engaged dialogues, they raise these questions for other students to discuss, and listen to contrary opinions. They initiate and develop critical issues concerning the seminar activities. They are well structured and well organized for the completion of their research projects. Present their progress reports as scheduled that are well organized and prepared for.
- ‘B’ – Students complete their readings, but do not always reflect on the questions and issues raised during the seminars. Though they articulate their own views, they passively wait for others to initiate interesting issues. They are reasonably well organized for their own projects.
- ‘C’ – Students attend, prepare and listen attentively, but rarely enter into discussions. They are adequately prepared for their own projects.
- ‘D’ – Students are inconsistent in their attendance and preparations. They do not respect others' contributions. They are also poorly prepared for their own projects.
- ‘F’ – Students are consistently ill-prepared and have poor attendance. They are rude and disruptive. They also fail to show any signs of organizing their own projects.

Supervision

Each student will be obliged to find an American University of Central Asia (AUCA) faculty member, who is willing to supervise the thesis. Students are free to change their supervisors without penalty. Students are welcome to consult with faculty or relevant professionals outside AUCA, with the departmental approval, however, their primary supervisor should be an AUCA faculty member. Supervisors reserve the right to establish deadlines that are earlier than those listed above – it is the students' responsibility to meet those deadlines set by their supervisor.

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Final Thesis Proposal Checklist

Due date: 13 December

These are general comments and suggestions for revising your second draft. Before submitting your final version of the thesis proposal you need to make sure that the following requirements have been fulfilled. Noncompliance leads to a poor evaluation of your work, which in turn affects your final grade for the course.

<i>Check</i>	<i>Tasks</i>
	Submit the third draft of your proposal to your <u>supervisor</u> and/or <u>second reader</u> at least a week in advance.
	Meet with your supervisor and discuss her/his comments. You need to understand marks, comments, and questions raised in the draft.
	Revise the third draft. When you are done, make sure it consists of the following:
	It has an introduction where you familiarize the reader with thesis topic (what do I study), lead to research questions (what exactly do I want to know), and discuss your work's importance or social relevance (reasons for why is it important).
	It has a section that reviews/analyzes existing literature related to your topic, which once more justifies importance of your thesis work and which makes a transition to the next section. (past or present tense)
	It has research methods section that discusses what is (are) the method(s) that you are planning to use in investigating stated research questions. (future tense)
	It describes who the research subjects/participants are.
	It tells how the data will be gathered.
	What is the research instrument?
	What are the measurements? Records a preliminary list of questions.
	It suggests the kind of analyses to be conducted.
	It has a timetable or a plan of action for January – May (defense date) that illustrates what follows what.
	The timetable indicates major data collection stages.
	It indicates data collection places.
	It indicates how much time it takes to accomplish each task.
	It shows when you start data analysis.
	It shows when you start the writing process.
	It has annotated bibliography of cited works.
	It has appendices if available.
	The paper has been spellchecked and revised by supervisor/second reader if necessary.

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American University of Central Asia
Department of Sociology
Honors Senior Thesis Evaluation Form

The below is the form that your opponent will fill out after reading your thesis. Please note the criteria with which one will be expected to assess.

Opponent: (Please indicate your academic degree.)	
Institution:	
Student:	
Master Thesis Topic:	
Grade:	

This senior thesis evaluation sheet is produced with the purpose to guide an opponent (scholar who provides a critical evaluation of a senior thesis) in thesis evaluation. Please use the general criteria below. The format of your evaluation is up to your choice (you can either enter your comments in the table or attach your evaluation with this form).

Criteria	Evaluation comments
Choice of research topic	
Structure: focus, relevance, coherence, argumentation and logic	
Analysis: depth and development of discussion	
Research: adequacy of research design and execution, consistency of interpretation	
Bibliography and ability to incorporate research data	
Presentation: writing, expression, style, coherence and unity, grammar, spelling, punctuation	
Overall Assessment	
Comments:	

Opponent's signature:
Date: