Developing Student-Scholars: Roundtable on Undergraduate Research in Political Science
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Undergraduate Research: Preparing for The Senior Thesis

The University of Illinois offers research training and mentoring in support of a Senior Thesis. This program is designed to assist students in the initial stages of writing a senior thesis and conducting original research generally. Too often, even talented students seeking to write a thesis start too late or lack the tools to write an effective thesis. The net effect is that many quit before completing the thesis or turn in a final product that is lower in quality than their capabilities or prior academic record would suggest. To address this, students, participate in a course that lays the groundwork for students to develop a proposal (actually about half of the actual thesis) that can then be completed during the spring semester under the direction of a Political Science faculty member. At the end of the course, students are expected to have the necessary skills and guidelines to carry out the remaining portions of their senior theses during the spring semester.

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Undergraduate Research: The TCU Distinction Program

The TCU Political Science Distinction Program is designed for Political Science majors who seek academic challenges. The program offers small honors-level classes, weekly meetings with political science faculty in an informal seminar setting, and participation in exclusive meetings and lunches with esteemed campus visitors. Students are required to take a capstone course which also serves as a research design course for their senior thesis. During the senior year, multiple opportunities are provided for the participants to practice PowerPoint presentations of their research and findings, in preparation for the formal presentation of their work at a public event on campus. Our best undergraduate scholars have also presented their research findings at regional, national, and international conferences, and some have journal publications as a result. The program also requires students to gain some applied experience in public service and/or politics or to participate in a study abroad program. Our goals are to help
students learn how to undertake original research on their own, challenge them to produce their best work, hone their professional skills, and develop in them a deeper understanding of political science subject matter. As a result, many of these students have gone on to law, graduate, and other professional schools.

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Undergraduate Research: The OSU Summer Research Experience for Undergraduates Program.

The OSU Summer Research Experience for Undergraduates focuses on the impact of democracy on international politics. Student participants work with a team of faculty members to develop and complete independent projects in three issue areas: Foreign Policy in a Democracy, Democratization and Democracy Promotion, or Democracy and Conflict. Under the one-on-one direction and guidance of project mentors, each student designs a project, gathers and analyzes data, and produces a scholarly paper reporting their findings. Supporting activities include a sequence of research methods seminars that guide students through formulating a research question and research design; theory development; data collection and analysis; paper preparation; and dissemination of results. A series of visiting scholars offer training seminars, project development workshops, and a research colloquium for their own work. Student participation culminates in a research presentation at OSU at the end of the summer program and subsequent presentation of papers at the International Studies Association Annual Conference or other comparable conference (if accepted) the following spring. Students then are encouraged to submit revised papers to suitable journals for review and possible publication.