

Senior Seminar – Fall 2013

Emil Dzhuraev (dzhuraev_email.com)

Meetings: Tuesdays – 12:45pm, and Fridays, 12:45pm, in Room 109.

Office time: for you anytime, but preferably by a preliminary appointment by email or in person.

The Senior Seminar is a colloquium-style group exercise that is aimed at facilitating the work of students toward a graduation thesis. In the course of meetings, the seminar will aim to raise and discuss more general issues of academic research, various key theoretical debates, and particular sources/authors of interest for us. This seminar will be quite different from the usual courses you have taken so far. It will require a greater discipline on your part, greater commitment and understanding of the significance of the senior thesis project. The thesis should be seen as more than simply the last and biggest hurdle before your graduation. It needs to be seen as the most important intellectual challenge that you need to meet. In the course of work on the thesis, you will learn a lot – possibly more than in normal courses – and most of that learning will be done by you quite independently.

The meetings take place twice a week as scheduled, but with a modification. On Fridays, we all meet every week to discuss some general topics that are relevant to all of us and must be raised. These will resemble the normal discussion-heavy lectures that we usually have in courses. The Tuesday meetings will actually be small-group meetings. The whole class will divide into several smaller groups of common interest – 3-4 groups – who will come on alternating Tuesdays, one after another, to spend a class-time in a more focused discussion of common concerns, findings, resources, problems, etc. This small-group format is introduced in order to allow greater concentration on a specific topic without alienating a large number of class members in the process. These small groups will, as a result, meet every third or fourth Tuesday, depending on the number of groups.

By the end of the Fall Semester, the main material goal for us is to produce a very good **Thesis Proposal**. A good proposal is half-the-thesis. Write a good proposal during this semester, and your work will flow smoothly in the next semester. The details and requirements of the proposal will be discussed in classes – and a lot of our time will actually be spent on this question.

In this course, we do not work with a preset collection of readings. I will assign some readings now and then (mostly at the beginning), but generally, my thinking is that each of you has her own reading list – a long list – and they should concentrate on that. I don't consider some writing manuals and guidelines as "reading" material: those are easy and quick texts which are useful for some people and useless for others. I don't assign such materials as mandatory for everyone. But you definitely welcome to seek out such resources on your own. I will be posting some such materials on our e-course page when I find particularly interesting or useful ones.

Any reading material or other item intended for common use will be posted on our e-course page. Everyone must be registered on this page for ICP 400. Whenever I have any message to send to everyone, I will use e-course system of messaging (which basically sends emails to your address that is registered on e-course). So, make sure you have the right address registered there.

Expectations from you in this course:

1. Respect for each other (the rest of the class).
2. An honest attempt to take interest in other people's topics – and if you fail with this, at least do not be a disruptive and otherwise negative audience for others.
3. Open-mind (and open eyes, open ears, etc) – be always attentive to what you find or come across that may be useful for your work or for someone else's work. Share!
4. Keeping of adequate self-discipline. While I and your supervisor will do as much as we can to urge you to be active and disciplined with your project, it is ultimately mostly up to you. We cannot do very much in this kind of situation.
5. Be the least disruptive you can be. Come in on time, refrain from phone and computer work during class meetings, pay attention to others.

Tentative list of Main Topics of Weekly General Discussions

NOTE: Small group discussions will proceed independently of this schedule – and up to the topic and progress of each group.

Week One Introductions

Week Two Preliminary Discussion of Topics of each, and Division into Thematic Groups

Week Three – The work of academic research: The Idea, Ideal, the Rationale, Ethos (read Albert Hirschman article)

Week Four – Designing your Thesis (Research Design): the ins and outs of the process (read Chapters 1 and 3 of Charles Ragin's book)

Week Five – Your research question and hypotheses – what they are, what they do

Week Six – Theory and literature – their place in the thesis, and how to build them (A good guidance on Literature Review is posted on e-course)

Week Seven – Thinking about the methods and methodology (Chapter in Keith Punch)

Week Eight – Brainstorming, outlining, writing your thesis

Week Nine – Writing week

Submit a preliminary Literature Review!

Week Ten – Where we have come: taking stock of our work so far

Week Eleven – Designing the Thesis Proposal (Keith Punch chapter)

Week Twelve – The usefulness of various guidebooks, manuals, and inspirations. (The chapter from "Bird by bird")

Week Thirteen – Seeking feedback, working with feedback

Week Fourteen – Writing-up week

Week Fifteen – Submission of Thesis Proposals and planning the second Semester.