

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

International and Global Studies  
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## Global Studies Distinction Project Guidelines for Faculty

### Introduction

Thank you on behalf of the faculty, staff, and students of the Global Studies program for being part of a distinction project committee for one of our majors. Through this independent research process our students will develop their skills and contribute to dialogues taking place in the academic and policy communities. This document provides an overview of the distinction process, the expectations for participating faculty, and a timeline of responsibilities.

This is an optional part of the major: not every student will have the focus, desire, and commitment to undertake a distinction project. The student that has requested your participation in this process is making a commitment to her/his intellectual growth above and beyond that required for their degree. Students are required to assemble a committee of two faculty members from different departments to advise their work, so you will be working with another faculty member. At every stage of this process the student is responsible for contacting faculty, arranging meetings, conducting academic research, and meeting deadlines for written work. The basic expectations for you are:

- participate in a proposal planning meeting early in the process;
- mentoring with suggested readings and advice regarding discipline-specific expectations, methodologies, or formats (as appropriate);
- provide timely and thoughtful feedback for student work via email or periodic meetings with the student and/or other committee member;
- make a joint recommendation for distinction with the other committee member on the final project.

### What is a Distinction Project?

A distinction project is an independent research paper that students produce as a capstone for their degree. As part of this process they will build content knowledge (by reviewing the literature), learn the basics of research design (through the proposal process), and gain valuable experience in generating data, applying research methodologies, and formal academic writing. Successful completion of the distinction project will require organization, discipline, and planning on their part.

The distinction project is an optional baccalaureate thesis that, upon successful completion, awards the graduation with distinction honor. Global Studies students are required to pursue a topic of research related to the courses they have chosen for their thematic area within the major. The distinction project can serve as a writing sample for future academic and professional applications, the foundation of a conference presentation, or be submitted for publication. The general expectations are high, although specific approaches and methods will vary based on the disciplinary “home” of the research content. This is primarily based on input from her/his committee members.

The entire project will take, at a minimum, one academic year although students are encouraged to begin their preliminary work earlier. In the past, students have also chosen to link their study abroad

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experience to their project by collecting data during that semester, although experience shows that this field research serves best to provide supplemental, rather than their entire, dataset. During their final semester students are required to register for two hours of LAS 494: Senior Project credit with their lead faculty member and one hour with their other committee member(s).

### **Distinction Project Components**

Students are expected, at a minimum, to include the following components (or equivalents) in their completed project. The order and length of each component will depend on their research question and methodology, but we expect that the final paper will be approximately 50 pages on average, including bibliography, appendices, and other relevant components.

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Formal research question/statement
- Problem statement or other placement of their work within the field
- Review of the relevant literature, including both contemporary as well as appropriate foundational works and cases
- Formulation and articulation of testable hypotheses
- Description of data and methodologies used
- Presentation of data and analysis as a test of hypotheses
- Analytical conclusion, including applicable policy recommendations
- Appropriate and consistent academic citation throughout
- Bibliography/Works Cited section

Research involving human subjects (through interviews or other data collection instruments) will require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Students will be responsible for initiating and completing this process on their own, although they may seek your advice on their applications. Work that involves human subjects and does not have the appropriate IRB approval cannot be approved for distinction.

### **Timeline of Responsibilities**

The following timeline is recommended, although some students may begin their projects earlier than the minimum required one academic year timeframe. It is the responsibility of the student to notify you of exact deadlines well in advance. These steps are explained in more detail in the following sections. Note that you will be advising and supporting the student in his/her research throughout this process.

- Senior year, first semester
  - Submit Intent to Pursue a Distinction Project form
    - At beginning of semester
    - Requires faculty signature
  - Proposal Planning meeting
    - Within first two months of semester
    - Faculty must attend this meeting
- Senior year, final semester
  - Student takes 2 hours of LAS 494 credit with Chair and 1 hour with other committee members
  - Final draft submitted for review
    - November 1 in fall, April 1 in spring

- Evaluated by faculty committee
- Recommendation for distinction
  - Before Thanksgiving break in fall, by April 20 in spring
  - Consensus among committee members required
- Sign Certification sheet for LAS
  - By end of semester
  - Student will provide sheet to sign

## **Detail of Responsibilities**

### Intent to Pursue Distinction Form

This requires the signature of all committee members and the Associate Director of Global Studies. This form is a declaration by the student that they intend to complete a distinction project, and serves as a contract between the faculty committee and student for advising and support. This can be submitted at any time prior to the beginning of their first senior semester.

### Proposal Planning Meeting

The planning meeting is an opportunity to have the student and their committee members meet with Associate Director Tim Wedig to discuss the proposed research project and set expectations for completion. The student is responsible for working with the Global Studies secretary, Carey Ann Cash, to schedule a meeting in the Global Studies conference room. Carey will contact you to arrange the specific time. All participants should have a copy of the proposal draft to review at least one week before the meeting takes place. This meeting should take place no later than the first two months of the next-to-last semester for the student, although it could take place earlier if the student is prepared.

In addition to general feedback on the proposed research, the following aspects will be discussed and agreed upon in this meeting:

- Agreement on standards for final project as relate to faculty disciplines (including citation format, use of data, methodological elements, etc.)
- Suggested resources, data sources, and literature
- Requirements for various levels of distinction
- Expectations for faculty advising and availability
- Timeline for completion

### LAS 494 credit

The student will enroll in at least two hours of LAS 494 with their Chair during their final semester and at least one with their other committee member(s). Carey Cash will assist the student in registering for these credits.

### Global Studies Annual Reception

All committee members will receive an invitation to the annual Global Studies reception in mid-February. This event features student poster presentations on their distinction work, and serves as a preliminary for the campus research symposium during the spring semester.

### Evaluation of the Final Paper

Committee members will evaluate the final project to determine the quality of the work and applicable level of distinction. At a minimum, the requirement is that the work contains the components listed above, represents original research and analysis (i.e. not just a literature review or summary of existing research), utilizes empirical methodology appropriate to the social sciences,

includes a multidisciplinary component, and meets proper citation and formatting guidelines. Specific requirements and formatting is generally based on the home discipline of the Chair, although some flexibility due to the interdisciplinary nature of the project is expected.

#### Recommendation for Distinction

Both committee members will discuss the student's work to arrive at a single distinction recommendation, which is sent to Associate Director Wedig. For each of these options, you have the option to require revisions (by a set deadline) as a condition of your final recommendation. If the student does not meet the minimum GPA requirement for the faculty-recommended level, they will receive the highest distinction level that their GPA qualifies for. The options are:

1. No distinction – project does not meet the minimum standards for recognition
2. Distinction - original research, contributes new interpretations and increases our understanding of the topic appropriate to its primary disciplinary home (minimum 3.25 major and cumulative GPA)
3. High Distinction – meets all requirements for distinction, also includes substantial original quantitative and/or qualitative analysis (minimum 3.5 major and cumulative GPA)
4. Highest Distinction – meets all requirements for high distinction, also includes original data collected and analyzed by the student and/or represents a graduate-level contribution to the field of study (minimum 3.75 major and cumulative GPA)

#### Certification of Distinction

Once all requirements and revisions have been completed, the student will need your signature on an official certification sheet for LAS. This sheet has a red border and will be used to certify to the College that all requirements have been met for graduation with distinction.