I. PRELIMINARY THESIS PROPOSAL

NAME_____   POTENTIAL FACULTY ADVISOR_____

DATE _____

Please address the following questions in 2-3 double-spaced pages. If some of the questions seem difficult, don't despair. A conference with a faculty member will be of help in formulating your answers. What's more, we realize that you have not yet begun your research, and that your thinking about this topic is probably still in the formative stages. In short, we want to encourage you, not discourage you in your undertaking of a senior thesis.

1. What is the basic question your thesis will try to answer? For the sake of a manageable research with a clear direction, the question should be as focused as possible. For example:

    a.   Unfocused: "Is there bias in the news media?"

    b.   Better: "Is there a liberal, conservative, or centrist bias in *New York Times* coverage of the current presidential campaign?"

2. Why is this question important? If it is possible at this preliminary stage, briefly sketch the larger theoretical issues raised by your research question, and mention some of the sources of those theories – particular authors, books, or articles. (For example, the question of news bias might draw on the conservative theory of a "new class" of liberal elites dominating institutions like the media, versus the neo-Marxist theory of cultural hegemony, in which such institutions are
    dominated by the interests of capitalists.)

3. What areas of scholarly literature will you need to further inform your basic question? (For example, the news bias research would want you to begin by reading previous studies of news bias in general, election-campaign bias in particular, and perhaps discourses on new class and hegemony theory.) If there are particular works and authors you intend to read, please list them.

4. How will you try to answer the question you've proposed? (For example, one might try to answer the media bias question above by systematically analyzing the content of a sample of news media stories about the campaign.) At this point, you do not, of course, need to describe a fully developed research design. But you should begin thinking, with your advisor's help, about which methodology you might employ. Examples of some common social science methods are: elite and specialized interviewing, archival research, focus groups, statistical analysis, survey research, participant observation. As you think about methods, bear in mind that the Government Department has resources to support travel and other research expenses.