

WRITING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

PL SC 513

T 1:35 PM – 2:50 PM

311 Bouke Bldg.

Office Hours: TR 9:30-10:30 (And by Appointment)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is the second of two required professional development courses in the graduate program in political science. It is designed to help graduate students make the transition from coursework and exams to writing a dissertation and engaging in the many activities that constitute life as a professional political scientist. We will discuss strategies for preparing manuscripts for publication, writing and responding to manuscript reviews, working with the institutional review board, and writing grant proposals. We will also focus on making successful presentations of your research, communicating ideas effectively in writing, and preparing for and navigating the job market. Students will devote several weeks of the semester to revising an existing research paper with the aim of submitting it to a journal for possible publication. All members of the seminar will read and provide constructive comments on one another's work.

OBJECTIVES

At the completion of the course, students will be able to:

- (1) Describe the characteristics of a well-written social science journal article.
- (2) Explain the procedures and milestones characteristic of the Ph.D. program in political science.
- (3) Demonstrate the ability to communicate a research idea orally and in writing.
- (4) Compose a scholarly review of a manuscript.
- (5) Assess the quality of an abstract, introduction, literature review, theoretical argument, data analysis, and conclusion of a social science article.

COURSE MATERIALS

We will read a variety of short pieces. I will post them on Canvas or circulate them via e-mail.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grading for the course will be pass/fail. In order to receive a passing grade, students are expected to attend all class sessions, read *carefully* the assigned materials in advance of class, complete a series of short writing assignments, gradually draft the first half of a research paper, and participate actively in seminar discussions. The major assignments for the course are summarized in the course schedule, though other short writings may be assigned.

Please remember that attending class and sitting silently is not, by definition, "participation." This is a graduate seminar. It is your collective job to carry the majority of our class discussion. Everyone's experience in this course is enhanced by regular attendance and active participation; conversely, everyone's experience suffers if individuals do not participate. Remember that a sincere question often adds as much (if not more) to our understanding of the course material as an explanation of the week's readings. So, don't be afraid to speak up!

EXPECTATIONS/PROCEDURES

RESPECT. In this course, we are all engaged in the endeavor of preparing ourselves for successful careers.

Everyone comes to this course with a different background in the subject (particularly with respect to the technical aspects of the readings). It is important that we all treat each other with the utmost respect.

Criticism. This is a seminar and, as such, it is our job to be critics. As you read for class, you should examine the goals of an article, the persuasiveness of the evidence it presents in support of its theory, and the place it makes for itself in the literature. Remember that a harsh critique isn't the same thing as an intellectually rigorous one, and focus less on what you perceive to be flaws and more on what you could learn from the article. Oftentimes, it is more difficult to point out what is "good" than what is "bad". In other words, treat our authors the way you would like to be treated by students in your shoes in 20 years.

OFFICE HOURS. I have office hours, listed at the beginning of the syllabus. My door is usually open, and you shouldn't hesitate to stop by outside of my scheduled office hour times.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS. Assignments not submitted by the assigned due date and time are late. This is a graduate class, so I expect you to communicate with me about things that affect your ability to get an assignment in on time. All assignments must be completed to complete this course.

EXTENSIONS. Extensions will be granted in only the most severe circumstances. If you foresee the need for an extension, one needs to be requested and granted at least 24 hours before the due date. No one is entitled to an extension; they will be offered only at my discretion.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. I take violations of the University's academic dishonesty policy—reprinted below—very seriously. Please review the policy and let me know if you have any questions.

A NOTE ON GRADES. I do not *give* grades. You *earn* grades. It is essential that you are proactive regarding your performance in this course; *do not wait* until grades are posted and then ask how your grade could be improved. At that point, barring a mathematical error on my part, it cannot be. If, at any point, you are unsure of your current standing in the course, please come to my office hours.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic

integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: <http://www.la.psu.edu/current-students/student-services/academic-integrity/academic-integrity>

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. The Student Disability Resources Web site provides [contact information for every Penn State campus](#). For further information, please visit the [Student Disability Resources Web site](#).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, [participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation](#). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your [campus's disability services office](#) will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES. Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

[Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park \(CAPS\)](#): 814-863-0395

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400

Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND REPORTING BIAS INCIDENTS. State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the [Report Bias webpage](#). You may also contact one of the following offices:

University Police Services, University Park: 814-863-1111

Multicultural Resource Center, Diversity Advocate for Students: 814-865-1773

Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity: 814-865-5906

Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs: 814-865-0909

Affirmative Action Office: 814-863-0471

Call 911 in cases where physical injury has occurred or is imminent.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (8/22): Introduction to Course

Before Class: Nothing

During Class: Review syllabus. Discuss goals.

Week 2 (8/29): What are “Good” Research Topics?

Before Class: Eidlin, “The Method of Problems versus the Method of Topics.”

Gustafsson and Hagstrom “What is the Point?”

Gray and Wegner, “Six Guidelines for Interesting Research”

Find (and bring to class) 3 articles published in the last 5 years that are closely related to your research interests

During Class: Discuss selecting research topics.

Week 3 (9/5): What is “Good” Oral Communication?

Before Class: Salmond and Smith, “Cheating Death-by-PowerPoint”

Smith and Salmond, “Verbal Sticks and Rhetorical Stones”

Hassner, “Trial by Fire”

Carsey, “What Makes a Good Research Presentation?” (slides)

During Class: Discuss effective presentation strategies

Week 4 (9/12): Presentations, Part I

Before Class: Produce 2 documents: a 1-page research statement and a 1-page summary of your MA essay idea. This summary should include a prospective title, hypotheses, description of research design and methods. You do not need results or a conclusion at this stage. Please upload these to Canvas by 9 am September 11. You will make a 7-8 minute presentation of your MA essay idea over the next few weeks. Be prepared to give students feedback on their presentations.

Read summaries and come prepared to ask informed questions of your classmates

During Class: Research presentations

Week 5 (9/19): Presentations, Part II

Before Class: Read summaries and come prepared to ask informed questions of your classmates

During Class: Research presentations

Week 6 (9/26): Presentations, Part III

Before Class: Read summaries and come prepared to ask informed questions of your classmates

During Class: Research presentations.

Week 7 (10/3): What is “Good” Writing?

Before Class: Read Munger “10 Tips”

Bartholomae “Inventing the University”

During Class: Discuss effective writing strategies.

Week 8 (10/10): Literature Reviews

Before Class: Weingast, “Caltech Rules for Writing Papers”
Outline the literature review sections of the articles you selected.

During Class: Discuss outlines and effective literature review strategies.

Week 9 (10/17): Preparing for the Job Market

Before Class: Draft and post on Canvas the Literature Review section of your paper.
Miller and Gentry, “Navigating the Academic Job Market”
Hanley, “A Primer on Applying to the Liberal Arts College”
Example job market materials

During Class: Discuss the political science job market and strategies for preparation.

Week 10 (10/24): Theories and Data Analysis

Before Class: ~~Draft a research statement no more than 2 pages in length.~~
~~Comment on your classmates’ literature reviews.~~

During Class: Writing Workshop

Week 11 (10/31): Comprehensive Examinations and Writing Abstracts/Introductions

Before Class: Outline the abstracts in your 3 model articles.
Nature, “How to Construct a *Nature* Summary Paragraph”
Little, “Three Templates for Introductions to Political Science Articles”
Zuckerman, “On Genre: A Few More Tips to Article-Writers”

During Class: Comprehensive exam Q&A

Week 12 (11/7): Theory Writing Workshop

Before Class: Draft and post on Canvas the introduction and theory sections of your paper.
Bring 2 printed copies to class.

During Class: Writing Workshop

Week 13 (11/14): Funding Research and IRB Approval

Before Class: Yanow and Schwartz-Shea “Encountering your IRB 2.0”
Michelson “The Risk of Over-Reliance”
NSF Proposal Solicitation for DDIG

During Class: Presentation from PSU IRB Office

Week 14 (11/28): Writing Reviews

Before Class: Upload revised draft to Canvas's discussion board (so your classmates can see it).
Miller et al. "How To Be a Peer Reviewer"
Berk et al. "How to Write an Effective Referee Report and Improve the Scientific Review Process" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 2017.
The Political Methodologist Special Issue "Acceptance Rates and the Aesthetics of Peer Review"
Example reviews available on Canvas.

During Class: Discuss journal selection and peer-review processes. How to write a good review.

Week 15 (12/5): Responding to Reviews

Before Class: Turn in peer reviews of your classmates' papers.
Read example response memos available on Canvas.
Alvarez, "Dealing with Rejection: Advice from an Editor."

During Class: Talk to group about reviews. Discuss writing response memos.

Finals Week

Turn in response memo and revised draft by Wednesday (12/13) at noon.