MACALESTER COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

POLI 400 (Fall 2010)

Senior Seminar

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Office: Carnegie 203E
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Location: Carnegie 105
Time: MWF 1050h-1150h
Office Hours: MWF 1300h-1400h

A. DESCRIPTION, SCOPE AND PURPOSE
Research seminars provide PS majors with a culminating experience designed to bring
their program to a successful and satisfying completion. The primary goals of a POL 400
are: (1) to deepen graduating seniors’ appreciation of the discipline of political science or
a sub-discipline (e.g. international relations or comparative politics) as an approach to the
study of social, ethical and political issues confronting humanity today; (2) to foster the
integration and synthesis of the diverse elements of the PS program into a more mature
understanding of the discipline as a mode of social inquiry; (3) to further develop the
research, organizational and writing skills necessary to doing disciplined research; and
(4) provide an opportunity for the Department to assess the relationship of the major
program to its vision statement. In order to promote these goals, the Research Seminar is
organized around an intensive and challenging research/writing project that provides
students with an opportunity to develop a deeper appreciation of the discipline, while
engaging in study in-depth of one of the key substantive issues in the field or sub-field.
Given the limits and strengths of my expertise, the course will best support qualitative
empirical projects that focus on international relations.

B. COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

The research project for this course will include the completion of an article-length
(6000-8000 words) piece of original scholarship.

Grading:

100% of your grade will be determined by the quality of the final draft of your paper.
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Friday, September 10

**Introduction and Organization of Work**


**MODULE 1  FROM A FOCUS STATEMENT TO A LONG OUTLINE**

In this module we will develop the “focus statement” you worked up over the summer into a “long outline”. Although it will likely evolve along the way, the long outline will guide and govern your work over the remainder of the semester. Basically, this outline is your focus statement plus (a) a provisional outline of your article, and (b) an annotated bibliography.

Monday, September 13

**Elements of a Long Outline**

*Pre-Class Readings:*


[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/1/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/1/)

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/01/)

*In-Class Work:*

Develop norms for a good/useful “long outline”

*Post-Class Work:*

Transform your “focus statement” into a “long outline”
Wednesday, September 15  Develop a Long Outline

Independent Work Session:

No class today; work on your long outline.

Friday, September 17

Independent Work Session:

No class today; work on your long outline; submit it to me no later than midnight, Sunday September 19.

Monday, September 20  Individual Conferences

Conference 1 (10:50)  Jack Cooper
Conference 2 (11:10)  Ben Gockel
Conference 3 (11:30)  Caitlin Hannahan

Wednesday, September 22  Individual Conferences

Conference 1 (10:50)  Caitlin Lauer
Conference 2 (11:10)  Stephen Murphy-Logue
Conference 3 (11:30)  Sarah Nilsson Dolah

Friday, September 24  Individual Conferences

Conference 1 (10:50)  Eddie Oliver
Conference 2 (11:10)  Collin Ostroot
Conference 3 (11:30)  Maria Paschke
Conference 4 (11:50)  Thomas Poulos
MODULE 2: DRAFTING

In this module you will transform the long outline into a draft. While you are writing, we will be discussing a number of “big” issues related to argumentative writing. At the end of this module, I will meet with you again to discuss your progress – this time introducing the “rubric” I will be using to evaluate your final draft. In the final module, you will be expected to revise your paper on the basis of how well you fared against the rubric.

Monday, September 27  Reading for and Writing the Literature Review

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricintr/documents/CloseReading.html

http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/lamont_handouts/interrogatingtexts.html

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html

Wednesday, September 29  Overcoming Writers Block

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/procrastination.html

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/writing_anxiety.html

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/567/01/

Friday, October 1  Evaluating Sources

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/fallacies.html

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/553/01/

Monday, October 4  Logical Argument and Fallacies

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/logic.shtml

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/659/01/

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/evidence_use.html
http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/evidence.html

**Wednesday, October 6**  *Paragraph Development*

http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/paragraph.html

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/paragraphs.html


http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Transitions.html

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/

**Friday, October 8**  *Introductions and Conclusions*

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/introductions.html

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Begin.html

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/conclusions.html

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Conclusions.html

http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/introductions.html

**Monday, October 11**  *Independent Work Session*

**Wednesday, October 13**  *Independent Work Session*

**Friday, October 15**  *Independent Work Session*

**Monday, October 18**  *Independent Work Session*

**Wednesday, October 20**  *Independent Work Session*

**Friday, October 22**  *Independent Work Session*

**Monday, October 25**  *Independent Work Session*

**Wednesday, October 27**  *Independent Work Session*

**Monday, November 1**  *Independent Work Session*
Wednesday, November 3  Independent Work Session

Friday, November 5  Penultimate Draft Due
Submit it to me no later than midnight.

Monday, November 8  Individual Conferences
Conference 1 (10:50)  Jack Cooper
Conference 2 (11:10)  Ben Gockel
Conference 3 (11:30)  Caitlin Hannahan

Wednesday, November 10  Individual Conferences
Conference 1 (10:50)  Caitlin Lauer
Conference 2 (11:10)  Stephen Murphy-Logue
Conference 3 (11:30)  Sarah Nilsson Dolah

Friday, November 12  Individual Conferences
Conference 1 (10:50)  Eddie Oliver
Conference 2 (11:10)  Collin Ostroot
Conference 3 (11:30)  Maria Paschke
Conference 4 (11:50)  Thomas Poulos
MODULE 3: REVISION

In this module you will transform your penultimate draft into a final, polished draft. While you are revising, we will be discussing a number of steps you can take to transform your draft from a potentially very good paper into a truly excellent paper. At the end of this module, I will grade your work according to the standards of excellence articulated in the grading rubric.

Monday, November 15  Revision: Higher Order Concerns

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/revision.html

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/690/01/

https://my.hamilton.edu/writing/RevisionStrategies.html

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/organization.html


Wednesday, November 17  Revision: Grammar


http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/proofread.html

http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/mistakes.html

http://www.hamilton.edu/writing/sentence.html

Friday, November 19  Revision: Style, Clarity and Grace

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/style.shtml

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/600/1/

http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/concise.html

http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingtips/27.html
Monday, November 22  
Revision: Introductions, Conclusion and Polish

http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/collegewriting/revising_the_introduction.htm

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/edit2.html

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/GP.html

Wednesday, November 24  
Independent Work Session

Thanksgiving Break

Monday, November 29  
Independent Work Session

Wednesday, December 1  
Independent Work Session

Friday, December 3  
Independent Work Session

Monday, December 6  
Presentations

Wednesday, December 8  
Presentations

Friday, December 10  
Presentations
APPENDIX 1

Summer Letter

Hello and Welcome to the Fall 2010 Senior Seminar!

I realize that you probably don’t expect (and almost certainly won’t welcome) an email from me at this point in your summer – especially one such as this that asks you to do some pretty serious work over the new few months. As I explain below, however, although we won’t actually start meeting until September, your success in this seminar is to a great degree dependent on your starting your project now. Given that my task is to ensure that each and every one of you has a successful and rewarding capstone experience, I thought it best to get in touch with you now and provide you with some help to get your project off the ground over the summer so that you have a good chance of exceeding even your own expectations during the Fall term.

As you are probably aware, this seminar is intended to be an academic experience unlike most of your previous courses in the Department. Instead of engaging with an instructor-defined topic through a pre-specified program of reading, discussion and writing, Poli 400 is structured to help you define and complete your own scholarly project – in this case, a 6000-8000 word scholarly journal article (which you should treat as a kind of “mini-thesis”). In other words, it is about helping you write the very best piece of scholarship you can on a topic defined by you. Somewhat more specifically, this seminar has two goals. First, it is intended to provide you with the practical guidance, writing advice and other academic support necessary to complete your senior capstone project in Political Science. Completing a high-quality scholarly project – one that might even be published in an undergraduate journal or presented at an academic conference – is going to be one of the most challenging (and rewarding) experiences you will have at Macalester. In order to meet this challenge successfully, you will need the intellectual support of your professor and peers. The Senior Seminar is intended to provide that support. Second, the seminar is intended to provide a supportive and encouraging environment that will facilitate the kind of critical thinking and disciplined writing necessary to complete your project on time and to the highest standards. To this end, it will bring you together with other Senior Seminar members to reflect on and overcome the challenges you will encounter as you work on your capstone project. Needless to say, given these goals, the seminar will be light on “content” and you will have a lot of “free” time (actually, it will be unstructured writing time, but it will be free in the sense that it will not be programmed by me). This is by design; it is intended to create a context within which you have not only the support and motivation, but also the time to realize your scholarly potential to the fullest extent possible.

So far, so good. But why, you might reasonably ask, is the professor writing to me in June? The answer to this question is simple: as I indicated above, if this seminar is going to be a truly rewarding culminating experience for you – that is, if you are going to take this opportunity to craft a piece of scholarly writing that you can take real pride in and
this is truly reflective of your academic achievement and intellectual potential — then you really must begin work on your project right now (tomorrow, would be good; today even better). In my experience, there simply is not enough time in the course of a single semester to take a good writing project from conception to completion. You really must invest some time and intellectual energy over the summer sorting out the DNA of your project. At a minimum, by the first day of classes you need to have sorted out:

- Your topic;
- Your research question;
- A statement of why the question is significant and to whom;
- A provisional answer to your question (i.e. a thesis);
- A brief statement of what would count as evidence to support your thesis;
- A statement of how you might go about collecting this evidence (research design);
- The qualifications/limitations of your project.

I’m not suggesting, of course, that when you arrive in September you will rigidly and mechanically execute this “plan” over the course of the semester — that is not how the writing process works (another topic we’ll explore together during the seminar). Rather, I’m letting you know that in my experience (and I’ve been running seminars like this for well over a decade), those students who arrive in September having thought through their intended project and having done significant pre-writing and planning have a much better chance of succeeding than those who start with a blank sheet of paper in September.

This being the case, I’m going to provide you with some tools to help you get your project off the ground. The first is the Harvard Writing Program’s Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Government (Harvardese for Political Science). This is a very good overview of Harvard’s year-long version of our Senior Seminar. Although our seminar is only one semester long, and is focused on helping you write an article rather than a thesis, there is much of value for you in this document. For example, there is a section on developing a topic and converting it into a research question, clearly something that is very relevant to you at this point in the process. I would strongly encourage you to read the non Harvard-specific bits as a kind of primer for the kind of project that you are about to begin.

The second tool is a template for a “focus statement” for a scholarly article. A focus statement is a 1-2 page paper that guides and governs the writing of the capstone project. It is typically made up of several important items: a topic, research question, statement of significance to target audience, provisional thesis, evidentiary requirements (what do I need to do to “prove” my case?), key concepts, and method (if applicable). It might even include a preliminary list of sources. A template is a rhetorical model that provides a predetermined structure for developing and presenting the required material. In the past of have used templates for focus statements to very good effect; students typically find that they promote the type of clarity necessary to get the DNA of the project right and launch the project effectively. Sometimes, of course, a student’s first reaction to being asked to use a template is that it will stifle their creativity and force them into some sort of
straightjacket. In my experience, however, this is simply not the case. Having a clear framework for developing the DNA of your project helps you to focus your research and writing, thus actually enabling the kind of creativity and originality valued at Macalester and in the Liberal Arts more broadly. Moreover, when the various elements of your focus statement start morphing into the various elements of your capstone project (especially the introduction), you will have plenty of opportunity to improvise and make it sound more like you. For now, you'll just have to take my word that they work. Please review the attached template, do some reading and thinking, and then complete it to the best of your ability before you arrive on campus in the Fall.

Finally, I'm providing some inline links and PDF documents that will help you with developing an argument (perhaps the crucial element of the focus statement and, indeed, the whole capstone project). These are written by professionals at various institutions of higher education for the express purpose of improving student writing at the capstone level. I strongly suggest that you devote some time to reviewing these resources – they may be the difference between a good focus statement and one that is less helpful to you than it needs to be.


http://serc.carleton.edu/case/thesis.html

Just a few more preliminary comments to get you off on the right foot. First, the topic of your project is up to you. There are some fairly predictable limits, of course – it must, for example, be about politics – but you can write on any topic, in any subfield, from any perspective. Second, your capstone paper really should be on a topic that interests you. Successful completion of the capstone (and by successful I mean not only earning a passing grade, but really experiencing significant intellectual growth and satisfaction) will require a measure of dedication, commitment and perseverance that will perhaps be unprecedented for you. It will be much easier to sustain the necessary level of focus and effort if the topic is of real importance and significance to you. Third, although it is important that the topic be of interest to you, it must also be of interests to some audience beyond you. This audience may be a scholarly or policy or advocacy one, but it must be an audience that has either (a) grappled with this topic before, but done so unsatisfactorily, or (b) failed to come to grips with this topic, but really should have. Finally, your project needs to have an appropriate scope and focus. By this I mean that it should be neither too narrow nor too broad. As I said, I'm attaching the Harvard Writing Program's Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Government. I really do encourage you to read this document in its entirety in order to get a better sense of what is involved in a serious capstone project. On the specific issue of scope, however, I would recommend that you review pages 3-7. After reading this passage you'll begin to get a sense of how to calibrate your topic so that your project is can be tackled in 7500 words and over the course of six months or so (June-December).
When we begin our sessions in September will be spending considerable time on a number of “big” issues related to argumentative writing, including:

- Understanding the writing process;
- Reviewing the existing literature (strategic reading and the literature review);
- Research strategies;
- Methods;
- Integrating references;
- Substantiating your thesis through careful argument and skillful use of evidence;
- Addressing relevant counter-arguments;
- Discussing the implications of your argument/findings for the scholarly, policy or other audience that you are targeting; and
- How to revise, edit and proofread.

We will also spend considerable time on the more micro (but still very important) issues, including:

- Citation style;
- Grammar;
- Formatting; and
- Style (specifically, how to write more gracefully).

Finally, we will discuss and work on overcoming some of the more serious practical impediments to successful writing, including:

- Perfectionism;
- Procrastination;
- Impatience; and
- Dysphoria

I think that’s probably enough for now other than to let you know that my personal goal in this seminar is to ensure that each and every one of you has the most successful and rewarding capstone experience possible. This is not an easy course (if it were, what would be the point?). And you may very well experience some very dark days when finishing this project to the highest possible standard just seems impossible. But I have designed this course to provide the support, encouragement and guidance necessary for you to overcome the challenges that all scholars face and to write the best and most rewarding piece of scholarship that you possibly can. It has worked in the past and it will work for you. The key at this point is to decide that this really is going to be the most rewarding challenge of your academic career to date and to get working on the reading and writing that I have assigned.

Good luck and I’ll see you in September!
APPENDIX II

Focus Statement
(Research Prospectus)

1. Topic

*The topic of my research article is...*

- You should complete the sentence. For guidance, see http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Topic.html and/or http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/what.shtml#topic

- If you do not yet have a topic, or if it is too diffuse or unfocused to provide the basis for a good research paper, you might want to engage in some “brainstorming”. Here are some resources to help you with that: http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/brainstorming.html

2. Research Question/Problem

*Somewhat more specifically, this study will address the following research question...*

- For support see http://www.esc.edu/esconline/across_esc/writerscomplex.nsf/0/f87fd7182f0ff21ce852569c2005a47b7

3. Significance (to the target audience)

*This question is significant for a number of reasons....*

- The cost(s) of not answering the question (to the target audience) and/or
- the benefit(s) of answering the question (to the target audience)
- For support see http://redschoolhouse.org/drupal/?q=problem-frames/consequences/basic-principle
4. Provisional Thesis

The working thesis of study is....

You should state the working/tentative answer to your research question. For support, see:

- http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/
- https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/01/

5. Key Concepts

In order to develop this argument I will employ a number of concepts....

- discuss any of the concepts that you intend to use to help you address the research question.

6. Methods

This project also uses the following formal methodology...

- discuss any of the methods (case-studies, surveys, interviews, etc) that you intend to use to help you address the research question

7. Evidentiary Requirements and Research Plan

What knowledge, data, facts or evidence do I need in order to answer the research question? In other words, what do I need to do to “prove” my case? For support see http://redschoolhouse.org/drupal/?q=evidence/sidebar/types

How should I proceed to acquire the knowledge required to complete the assigned task?

- Your goal here is to develop a timetable for subsequent research. Two key milestones to bear in mind: a long outline with full annotated bibliography and/or literature review will be due at the end of September; and your penultimate draft (the one that will be peer reviewed and critiqued by me and that you will revise and turn in by the end of the semester) will be due in mid-November.
8. Literature Review

Although you don’t need to have completed the literature review before we begin the seminar I do expect that you will have (a) reviewed the following sites on writing a literature review and (b) identified several books and journal articles that you think will be relevant to your project:

http://www.wesleyan.edu/libr/tut/litrev/index.html

http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/write-a-literature-review

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html

And here is some useful guidance with respect to reading strategies:

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/readingwriting.html