Political Science 400: Senior Research Seminar

Dr. Patrick Schmidt
Fall 2010, T & TH 3:00 – 4:30 p.m.
Location: 206 Carnegie Hall
Office Hours: MWF 3:30 – 4:30, T 1:15 – 2:15 p.m.
or by appointment

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Tel: 651.696.6147
http://moodle.macalester.edu

Course Description:

This is not just a course; it’s an experience! The aim of this semester will be, at one level, to satisfy the requirement of the Department of Political Science and of the college that you undertake, complete, and present a “capstone,” which is a major piece of research. Specifically, the College guidelines require:

1) that students “demonstrate their proficiency in the methods and modes of communication of the discipline or interdiscipline in which they have majored. Proficiency is demonstrated through the creation or performance of advanced work.”

2) that “the advanced project is peer-reviewed so that all students in the major are encouraged to reflect on what constitutes acceptable, good, and excellent work at this point in their academic lives,” and

3) that “the advanced work should be shared with the Macalester community through public presentations and performances, thereby providing opportunities for celebrating the range of scholarly achievements engendered by a Macalester education.”

These guidelines are plainly helpful in understanding what you will be doing, and even why you’ll be doing it. But it doesn’t tell you what you should think about this course. After all, when something is required, we tend to think of it as a hurdle to surmount or a burden to bear, focusing only on the joy of being done. To have that mindset, however, will be devastating to your happiness, intellectual development, and love of Alma Mater.

I urge you, instead, to view this as a great opportunity. First, the structure of this course will be kept to a minimum. This “course” is about my assisting your very individual efforts regarding the capstone requirement. All of you have taken (or perhaps, are taking this semester) a course in research methods, so methodological instruction is not necessary, at least in theory. The students in this section will employ many different methods, so there is little incentive for hours of lecture on that front. Second, your topic is of your own choosing, albeit with assistance from me to make it workable. Hopefully you will choose a topic of intense personal interest, so you can wake up each morning bursting with enthusiasm for the task at hand. Third, doing original research is far better than a mere “book report” or typical college paper. In this research seminar you are creating new knowledge, learning what cannot be learned from library books alone, and sharing it with the worldwide community of humanity. What’s not exciting about that?

Befitting the role that this course plays in your undergraduate career, the expectations for your work are high. Your work should be ambitious, original, yet do-able. You must take initiative, work diligently, support one another both intellectually and emotionally, and set your own expectations higher than you think possible. Only then will you accomplish something about which you can be proud.
Readings:


Important: some additional material will be supplied to you via Moodle. These are indicated on the syllabus.

I reserve the right to add to or subtract from the readings during the course of the semester. I will operate forums on Moodle in which I will provide links to recent articles or current events and there will be opportunity for discussion of such things on Moodle’s forums. More generally, as is true for all political science courses, one of the most important things you should be doing (now and for the rest of your life) is to read at least one newspaper a day. I recommend hitting a daily survey of views from across the political spectrum.

Course Requirements:

There are three general components of this course. Their weights are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Written Project</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two intermediary writing projects</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Presentation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellanea (short assignments, peer reviews, group work)</td>
<td>200</td>
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All assignments must be completed in order to pass this course.

A less mechanical sense of the grade for the semester comes down to this: first, I grade the output of your project. At the end of the day, you cannot get a better grade than the project—you can’t get an A when you write a B+ capstone, just because of “great effort”. Second, nevertheless, even if process isn’t rewarded per se, it can detract. If you fail to turn in thoughtful work at the intermediary stages, or completely ignore the short assignments, expect it to have a deleterious effect on your grade, even if you turn in a publishable piece of work at the end of the semester. Third, a high priority for me is your work as a team player. If you’re late with a deadline to turn something in to me...well, that might be overlooked. But you should not, cannot, and must not impair the work of your classmates by failing to get peer reviews and feedback to them on time. A grade of A for the semester is awarded to students who perform to the fullest of their abilities for themselves and for their classmates.

Grading: Your point total for the semester will be converted to a letter grade with the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>933 or more</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>767 – 799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>900 – 932</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>733 – 766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>867 – 899</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>700 – 732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>833 – 866</td>
<td>D’s</td>
<td>etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>800 – 832</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>599 or fewer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no rounding.

What do the numbers mean? That’s the essential thing, but it’s difficult to put into words. Broadly speaking, a grade of “A” is assigned to work that achieves “excellence,” meaning showing originality, insight, or outstanding effort while avoiding “avoidable” errors. A grade of “B” is awarded to “solid
work” that displays consistency, thoroughness of preparation, and a grounded understanding of the topic, though either missing the attributes of excellence or containing notable, avoidable errors of substance or style. A grade of “C” attaches to work that is “significantly flawed” in some respect, such as research/preparation, analysis, or writing. Grades of “D” and “F” are reserved for cases that are “unacceptable as college-level work”. While with most written assignments I designate in advance a component score for writing, I may give a D or F to essays containing severe flaws of writing, even if a component score of zero would not drop the total grade that far on its own.

Attendance, Discussion, and Participation: Regular attendance and participation are essential parts of this course. Though no “participation score” has been designated per se, I reserve the right to factor it into ultimate grading decisions to reflect your overall level of work for the course, and I also reserve the right to build it into the “Miscellanea” category of the above course structure. I don’t get grumpy when students have excused absences—job interviews, travel for sports, whatever. However, I despite a lack of communication. If you keep me informed in a timely and courteous way, expect things to go a lot smoother. Documentation is not necessary for absences, with one exception: at the end of the semester we will have presentation by classmates. If you are to miss any of those for any reason other than an immediate emergency, you must submit the reason for your absence to me and to the class. When you know in advance of an absence for reasons of religious observance or any other foreseeable reason, please speak with me at the beginning of the term or as early as otherwise possible. I welcome your questions and active discussion of it. Positive participation may be considered in assigning course grades.

Late Penalty: I reserve the right to mark down work that is late, though in this course I can be flexible when appropriate communication and timelines are in place. A penalty for unexcused lateness may rise to as much as 3% of the point total for the remainder of the day (i.e. after the class period) on which it is due, and 5% of the point total per 24 hour period (or part thereof) beyond that. Written work might not be accepted after one week, with a total loss of the score. Please be aware that if you are in a late situation, a paper counts as “in” when an email copy has been received in my inbox or in the course electronic drop box (with email sent notifying me), although a paper copy is still required.

Incompletes: A grade of “I”, meaning Incomplete and allowing for course work to be completed beyond the scheduled end of the course, will be contemplated by me only in the most remarkable cases of dire emergency, loss of adequate health, or extraordinary family crisis. Incompletes must be negotiated with me before the end of the course and should not be presumed available solely in light of your interpretation of “remarkable”.

Plagiarism and Cheating: Academic dishonesty is not tolerated in this course and will be considered grounds for partial or full reductions in grades and recourse to the college's disciplinary processes, as described in the Student Handbook, available at: http://www.macalester.edu/deanofstudents/. In the past ten years, I have never been more genuinely angry—including my personal as well as my professional life—than when I have discovered clear cases of plagiarism and cheating.

Disabilities and Learning Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a documented disability must first contact the Office of Student Affairs to schedule a meeting with Ms. Lisa Landreman, the Disability Student Services Coordinator, 119 Weyerhaeuser Administration Building, 651.696.6220 to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations. Then you should schedule an appointment with me to make appropriate arrangements.

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify me in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with me, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. Absences for religious observance do not count against your allotment of “free” unexcused absences.
Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity, or an ad hoc activity or field trip for another course (with communication from that course's instructor), will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with me prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. Such absences do not count against your allotment of “free” unexcused absences.

Course Outline:

September 7: Introduction

Reading: Lipson, Chs.1 – 2.

September 9: What are we doing here? Where are we going?

Assignment Due: Professional Development Plan

Reading: “Can Rory Stewart Fix Afghanistan?”, Lipson, Ch. 20

NO MATTER WHAT CAREER I CHOSE, SOONER OR LATER, I WOULD FAIL. THERE CAME A POINT IN TIME WHEN I SIMPLY STOPPED TRYING.

PERHAPS YOU CHOSE THE VERY THINGS YOU WERE UNSUITABLE FOR, OR UNSUITED TO. THERE MUST BE SOMETHING YOU REALLY WANTED TO TRY BUT NEVER EVEN ATTEMPTED.

I QUITE LIKED THE IDEA OF BEING A MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER.

September 14 & 16: No Class – Individual Meetings

Part I: Up and Running

September 21: Question-Driven Research and Its Alternatives


Assignment: Topics, Titles, and Abstracts
September 23: Thinking About Literatures / Ethics: A Way of Being

Reading: Lipson, Chapter 3, esp. pgs. 37 – 46; A Sample Book Proposal; Galvan, excerpts from Writing Literature Reviews; Johnson and Reynolds, “Conducting a Literature Review”; Lipson, Ch. 3, beginning at pgs. 46; A Sample SSIRB Proposal; excerpt, Stanley Milgram’s Obedience to Authority.

September 28: Thinking Bigger: the Logic of the Case / Individual Reports and Trouble-Shooting

Reading: Lipson, Ch. 6

September 30: Cracking the Nut: Peer Review of Draft Material

Assignment: Draft of First-Wave Material with Reflective Introduction

October 5 & 7: No Class – Individual Meetings

October 7 – 9: Macalester International Roundtable

Part II: Soaking and Poking:in Theory and Practice

October 12: Methodological Workshops

Reading: Lipson, Chs. 7 & 8; Norgaard (2008), plus any readings to be announced later.

Assignment: Reflection on Roundtable or Other Talk of Choice

October 14: MAPLA Attendance – Instructor Not In Class

October 19: Analysis and Argumentation; Argumentative Gutchecks and Titular Reflections

Reading: Lipson, Chs. 9 – 11.

Assignment: Reflection on the Individual in a Political World
October 21: Thinking About Presentation as a Research Skill

Reading: Lipson, Ch. 12

Assignment: Oral Communication Self-Assessment and Goals

Part III: The Art of the Write-Up

October 26: Imagining Dissemination

Assignment Due: Second Wave Writing with Reflective Introduction

October 28: Fall Break

November 2: Peer Review and Individual Consultation; Abstract Expressionism

Assignment: Revised Abstract
November 4: Presentations II

Assignment Due: Powerpoint Slides in Progress

November 9 & 11: Individual Meetings – No Class

November 16: Presentation Prep and Peer Review Meetings

November 18: Hard Editing – Exchange, Consultations, and Considerations

November 23: Presentations of Research

November 25: No Class – Thanksgiving Break

November 30: Presentations of Research

December 2: Presentations of Research

December 7: Presentations of Research

December 9: Presentation and Celebratory Wrap-up

Assignments: Course Evaluation, Revisions, and Reflections

Reading: Lipson, Ch. 18