

SENIOR RESEARCH SEMINAR IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Barnard College, Political Science BC3761

Wednesdays 4:10 - 6 p.m.

501 Milbank Hall

Fall 2003 – Spring 2004

Instructor: [Heather Foust-Cummings](#), Ph.D.

Office: 403 Lehman Hall

Office Hours: Wednesdays 3 – 4 p.m.

e-mail: hf81@columbia.edu

Course Description

The senior research seminar is a two-semester course designed to support the student in her writing of a 50-100 page senior essay, the capstone of academic work at Barnard. The senior essay will analyze a question about American politics; American governmental institutions and/or processes; and/or public policy in the U.S. Students will meet in groups and individually with the instructor during the two semesters; progress toward completion of the essay will be facilitated through a schedule of writing assignments and presentations where a student's ongoing work is critiqued by peers and the instructor. Individual meetings with the instructor will provide the opportunity for regular feedback. The seminar aims to create a research community for advanced undergraduates – a community supportive of the individual effort to produce original research.

Course Requirements

An essay of 50-100 pages on an original topic related to American politics is due to the instructor on April 7, 2004.

The requirements for the fall semester are:

1. Completion of writing assignments on time;
2. Participation in the scheduled group meetings;
3. Individual meetings with the instructor, to be scheduled; and
4. Constructive peer review/work, as described below.

Your final course grade in the spring will reflect your performance throughout the year. You will be evaluated for the quality of your participation in class and in your peer work; your research effort and timeliness; and the quality of the completed essay. Additional guidelines for the paper are attached below.

There are no required texts for the course. Supplemental readings will be assigned as needed.

Course Schedule

9/3 Introduction

ASSIGNMENT FOR 9/10: Think about a research topic you would like to pursue. Write one or two paragraphs about your idea(s) and be prepared to discuss these interests in class.

9/10 Turning Interests into Research Questions

Presentation of research interests: Each student will discuss her topic idea; basic questions about the topic; her source of interest in the subject; and any previous work she may have done on the topic.

We will also discuss formulating questions, understanding concepts and creating measures. Assignment of peer mentors based on research interests will take place at this meeting.

9/17 Library Orientation

Meet in the library (2nd Floor, Lehman Hall) near the reference desk for library orientation with a reference librarian.

ASSIGNMENT: Begin library research and work on preliminary bibliography.

9/24 Individual Meetings – Research Topic Discussion

10/1 Individual Meetings – Research Design Discussion

ASSIGNMENT DUE 10/5 BY 5 P.M.: Prepare a five-page description of your research design. Send to the professor via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment. Also deposit a copy with your peer mentor via e-mail or in person by 5 p.m.

Your research design should include a detailed discussion of your topic; your research questions or hypotheses; and the research methods you will use. In discussing your methodology, you should distinguish between the use of primary and secondary source material. Remember that the senior essay project requires the use of some primary source material – the collection and analysis of raw data, or information unmediated by another.

ASSIGNMENT FOR 10/8: Prepare a critique of your peer's research design. This critique should be a *constructive* critical appraisal of your peer mentor's research design. Summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the design with a view to how well the design has turned a research interest into a researchable question (or questions), and whether the research methodologies to be used will likely produce the data needed to support an argument in response to the question(s).

10/8 Research Designs

Present research design and critiques – 5-10 minutes.

ASSIGNMENT FOR 10/15: Revise research design. Continue work on preliminary bibliography and begin literature review.

ASSIGNMENT FOR 10/29: Prepare an annotated bibliography.

10/15 Individual Meetings – Literature Review Research

Submit revised research design to professor by 5 p.m.

10/22 Individual Meetings – Literature Review Research

10/29 Individual Meetings – Literature Review Research

Annotated bibliography due by 5 p.m.

ASSIGNMENT FOR 11/5: Prepare an outline of Chapter One.

11/5 Individual Meetings – Chapter One Outline

ASSIGNMENT FOR 11/19: Prepare a draft of Chapter One.

11/12 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

11/19 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

First draft of Chapter One due by 5 p.m.

ASSIGNMENT FOR 11/26: Prepare a critique of your peer mentor's first draft of Chapter One. Make a *constructive* critique of your peer mentor's draft of Chapter One. Analyze whether the researcher has persuaded you of the significance of the research. Why is the topic important? Does the research address a current or classic debate in politics? Are there important policy implications of the research? As you did in your critique of your peer mentor's research design, assess the methodological approach to the research questions. What sources will be consulted and why? What kind of data will be collected and how well will it allow the researcher to explore answers to the questions or substantiate an argument?

11/26 No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday

12/3 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

12/10 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

Final draft of Chapter One due by 5 p.m.

ASSIGNMENT FOR 12/17: Write a five-page progress report. The progress report should describe the work completed to date on your essay project. It should address the problems you have encountered in focusing your topic ideas, developing your research questions, and in your preliminary library research. Conclude your report with a plan for completing your research in the spring semester. We will meet together as a group during the first week of classes to discuss projects and agendas for the semester.

12/17 No Required Meeting

Progress report due to professor via e-mail by 5 p.m.

TENTATIVE Class Schedule and Deadlines for Spring 2004

1/21 Welcome Back Meeting

Informal discussion of progress, problems, semester schedule.

1/28 Individual Meetings – Data Collection and Chapter Two

ASSIGNMENT FOR 2/4: Prepare an outline of Chapter Two.

2/4 Individual Meetings – Chapter Two Outline

ASSIGNMENT FOR 2/18: Complete primary research.

2/11 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

2/18 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

Draft of Chapter Two due to the professor and your peer mentor by 5 p.m.

ASSIGNMENT FOR 2/25: Prepare a critique of your peer mentor's first draft of Chapter Two.

2/25 Chapter Two Meeting

Present Chapter Two and critiques – 5-10 minutes.

3/3 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

3/10 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

ASSIGNMENT FOR 3/24: Prepare a draft of Chapter Three.

3/17 No Class – Happy Spring Break!

3/24 No Required Meeting; Individual Meetings as needed

Draft of Chapter Three due to the professor by 5 p.m.

3/31 Final Presentations

Present research findings.

4/7 Final Essay Due Date

Final completed essay due. **THIS DEADLINE IS NOT FLEXIBLE. SUBMIT TWO COPIES OF YOUR ESSAY TO ME BY 5 P.M.**

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GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THESES

In your senior essay, you should focus on a research topic or question relevant to American politics and/or policy. Then, marshal evidence in support and explanation of your argument(s).

In writing the essay, you should begin with an introduction that clearly and briefly explains the research topic. Your reader should know by the end of the first section what the overall scope of the paper will be. The body of the paper needs to develop the topic and present the evidence that supports the argument(s) you are making. Again, your reader will look for points that are focused, directly stated, and supported with ideas or information from the sources you reference, any course discussions, and/or the data you collect. As you bring the essay to a close, fit your topic into the extant literature by explaining how your research has contributed to answering a political question and/or has participated meaningfully in a debate. Again ask yourself, “So what? How is this case relevant to an overall examination of politics and/or policy?”

The thesis is your individual analysis of a research topic. Please address the following questions in writing your paper:

- Does this essay as a whole develop a coherent analysis and explanation of the topic?
- What does the paper tell us that is relevant to our analysis and understanding of pertinent issues in politics or policy?
- Does this paper cite sources appropriately?
- Has this paper been proofed and edited for errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar?

I will grade the papers according to the following scheme:
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An “A” paper is one that is clearly written and well-organized. Most importantly, it contains a perceptive, original, central analysis supported by well-chosen evidentiary sources. It demonstrates that the writer has grappled with the central issues raised by the topic and formulated a compelling, independent analysis of the topic.

A “B” paper is a solid work containing flashes of insight that demonstrate that the writer has wrestled with some of the issues raised by the selected research topic. Yet a “B” paper mainly provides a summary of ideas and information. Other “B” papers give evidence of independent thought, but the analysis is not presented clearly or convincingly.

A paper receiving a grade of “C” or lower provides a less thorough defense of the writer’s independent argument, does not respond to the assignment adequately, and/or is marred by errors, unclear writing, and poor organization.

Keep in mind that you have requirements beyond the paper itself (i.e., attendance, peer review, etc.), and that your final course grade reflects more than simply the quality of the final essay.