

Senior Seminar

84606 POLS 400, Spring 2010

Meets T, Th: 7 - 8:40 PM, in Flagg 163, Instructor: Phil Neisser
Office – Satterlee 307, Phone: Office 267-2554; Home 379-9713
Office Hours: T, Th 11-12 ; email: neissept@potsgdam.edu

From the Instructor: Feel free to call, email, or come see me for any reason. My office hours are listed above, and I am available to meet with you at other times as well. Please contact me to make an appointment. If you come to my office and I am not there, I might be a few doors down with a fellow professor, or in the Departmental Office (Satterlee 311). Look around. If I cannot be found then leave me a message. I will call or email you and we can pick a time to meet.

Course Objective: To provide advanced students with the opportunity to develop and expand their research and writing skills and learn more about politics by focusing on a relatively narrow subject of inquiry and producing a well-wrought essay. Each student must write a major research paper about a political subject. The paper should present the results of the student author's substantial research effort undertaken during the semester.

Learning Outcomes: Students who pass the course will have completed a research paper as described above and thus will possess at least minimal ability to conduct basic research, cite sources, construct a multi-part scholarly argument, present that argument in written form, and summarize it in an oral presentation.

General Education: Successful completion of this course meets the General Education Requirement known as "Writing Intensive," also known as "WI." That means just what it says; students are given the opportunity to, and expected to, repeatedly revise and edit their writing before they submit it.

Class Policies:

Attendance is required. "Attendance" here means attendance **on time** and for the entire class period. Students who arrive after the instructor has finished taking attendance will be credited with one half of an absence (or more, depending on how much of the class is missed), as will students who leave early. For each absence beyond 3 (those not "excused"), a student will receive a deduction of .25 from their final grade, and those with more than 6 such absences will fail the class. An absence is "excused" if the reason for the absences is documented and is either the result of a SUNY Potsdam obligation or a genuine medical emergency. Students with more than 10 absences, whether excused or not, will fail the class, unless they apply for, and qualify for, a special withdrawal (inquire at the Registrar's Office).

Make-up policy – All assignments must be turned in on time to be accepted. Dates are noted in the syllabus and/or will be announced in class. There are no make-ups for failing to submit written material. For every day the final paper is late .25 will be deducted from the grade. Computer problems are not an acceptable excuse for a failure to hand papers in on time. Students

should save their work regularly as they work and save every day to a back-up drive of some kind. Above all, students should do their work ahead of time.

Cell Phones, Computers, etc. – All cell phones, beepers, etc. should be turned off before each class begins and not used during class. Computers may not be used during class.

Academic Dishonesty – Any presentation of the words of another as if they were the student's own words (including so-called "paraphrasing" whereby a few words are changed here and there) counts as plagiarism, which is a violation of the Code of Student Conduct. All summary must be in the student's own words. All quotations must be indicated as such and properly cited. Students who copy, *even inadvertently while summarizing*, will be charged with violating the College's Code of Student Conduct.

Citations – All use of the work of others must be properly cited according to some standard scholarly format (students can pick the format). Many style guides are available in the library. Ask someone at the reference desk.

Writing – Neatness counts; papers should be error-free. Students should carefully edit their work, read it aloud, have others read it, and utilize the tutors at the College Writing Center.

Accommodative services: Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations should speak with the professor or contact Sharon House, Coordinator of Academic Services. She can be reached at 267-3267, in Sisson 112, or at housese@potsdam.edu. All disclosures will remain confidential.

Reading Assignments and Support Materials (on Blackboard under "Course Documents"):

Carlson, James M. and Mark S. Hyde. 2003. Selections from *Doing Empirical Political Research*. Houghton Mifflin.

"Critical Legal Theory." Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_legal_theory, Accessed 1/22/10.

"Feminism." Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism>. Accessed 1/22/10.

"Natural Law Theory." Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_law_theory. Accessed 1/22/10.

"Rational Choice Theory." Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_choice_theory. Accessed 1/22/10.

"Utilitarianism," Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism>. Accessed 1/22/10.

Assignments and Calculation of the Final Grade:

1. Initial topic statement(s), writing, and starting bibliography: 2/2, 3%
2. Expanded topic statement and longer, partially annotated bibliography: 2/11, 2%
3. One-on-one meeting with the professor, showing up and preparation: 2/17-2/25, 2%
4. Completely annotated bibliography: 2/26, 3%
5. Literature review presentation, 3/2-3/18, 5%
6. 2000 word draft, with table of contents: 3/23, 5%
7. Peer review of 2000 word draft: 3/30, 2%

8. First full length draft: 4/13, 5%
9. Peer review of the first full length draft: 4/20, 3%
10. Second full length draft: 4/27, 15%
11. Oral reports: 5/6-5/18, 5%
12. Final paper: 5/17, 50%
13. Class participation and preparedness: Each student's final average can be increased or lowered by as much as a quarter letter grade (.25) depending on their degree of preparation, participation, and contributions to discussions. For example, consistently coming prepared, participating in discussions, asking informed questions, and above all helping their fellow students with their work will result in a grade boost. In contrast, missing class, being unprepared, apathetic, unengaged, or otherwise uninspired will result in a grade deduction. Also each student will be assigned specific tasks to perform in class, such as summarizing a theoretical perspective. Performance on these tasks will factor into whether each student gets a "plus," a "minus," or an "about-even" for class participation and preparedness.

Description of Each Assignment:

1) Initial topic statement(s), initial statement of interest, and starting bibliography (due 2/2)

- *Name at least one topic. Each topic must be phrased as a question to be answered or addressed by the paper. All topics are subject to instructor approval.*
- *Provide a statement, at least 300 words in length, explaining the significance of the topic(s), including possible implications of this or that answer to the paper's governing question.*
- *Provide a list of at least two **scholarly** sources relevant to each of the proposed topics. Proper bibliographical form must be used. **To count as scholarly, a text must be at least 10 pages long, and include citation of its sources.***

Topic Advice: Students should start by picking any political subject or issue which deeply interests them and ask a question about it which a paper might answer. A good topic is based on an initial hypothesis (a belief or hunch about the answer to the question); it concerns a question for which the answer (and even the question) is potentially or actually a matter of debate, rather than simply factual or blatantly obvious; it's not too specific (such as about only one person or one event, with no attempt to draw a general lesson) or too broad (impossible to cover in one semester, or impossible to answer in principle); it's not merely speculative (e.g., only about what will happen or should in the future); it can be elucidated with the help of research; it commits the writer to go beyond mere description; and **it allows for an element of comparison** (between arguments, between nations, between states, between policy alternatives, etc.).

Two Topic Formats:

- Such and such (regulatory policy, law, constitutional provision, proposed reform, political practice, law, organizational arrangement, etc.) is morally wrong because...
- Such and such (regulatory policy, law, constitutional provision, proposed reform, political practice, law, organizational arrangement, etc.) is (or would be) ineffective (or inefficient, too costly, etc.) because...
- Such and Such outcomes are more likely in states (nations, cities, etc.) that use *x* policy instead of *y* policy.

Forbidden Topics: Please, no papers on the death penalty, abortion, or the Electoral College.

2) Expanded topic statement and longer, partially annotated bibliography (due 2/11)

- *Provide a topic statement, at least 300 words in length, that names the question to be asked, offers a hypothesis as a provisional answer, and names the theoretical perspective that will be used as the primary lens of analysis.*
- *Provide a list of at least four **scholarly** sources, at least two of which are annotated (an annotation is a one-paragraph summary of the work and statement of its relevance to the task at hand). **To count as scholarly, a text must be at least 10 pages long, and include citation of its sources.***
- *Describe the comparative component of the paper.*

3) One-on-one meeting with the professor, showing up and preparation (2/17-2/25)

- *To be scheduled ahead of time, via a sign-up sheet circulated in class.*

4) Completely annotated bibliography (2/26)

- *Provide a list of at least 10 sources, and least six of which are scholarly, and all of which are annotated.*

5) Literature Review Presentation (3/2-3/18)

- *Make a ten-minute presentation to the class (and any Politics Professor guests able to attend) that summarizes selected articles and/or books used in the presenter's paper. At least four works must be summarized. Also the relevance of the works to the project must be explained.*

6) 2000 word draft, with table of contents (3/23)

- *Submit 2000 words of coherent, edited writing from any section(s) of the paper: the introduction, the naming of the question and hypothesis, the statement of the topic's significance, summary of key findings, summary of theoretical perspectives, explanation of how the chosen theoretical perspective applies, etc. This assignment is to be submitted both the instructor and to the student's peer reviewer. **Also the draft must include page numbers.***
- *Submit a Proposed Table of Contents.*

7) Peer review of 2000 word draft (3/30)

- *Submit a 600 word commentary on the work of another student. The commentary might include (for example) suggestions about what information the author might gather, possible significance of the author's question not noted by the author, potential problems with the author's proposed explanation, answer, or argument, and the flagging of statements or sections that are not clear. This assignment is to be submitted both the instructor and to the student whose work is reviewed.*

8) First full length draft (4/13)

- *The draft must include a bibliography. This assignment is to be submitted both the instructor and to the student's peer reviewer. **Also the draft must include page numbers.***

9) Peer review of the first full length draft (4/20)

- *Provide a 600 word commentary on the work of another student. The commentary might include (for example) suggestions about what information the author might gather, possible significance of the author's question not noted by the author, potential problems with the author's proposed explanation, answer, or argument, and the flagging of statements or sections that are not clear. This assignment is to be submitted both the instructor and to the student whose work is reviewed.*

10) Second full length draft (4/27)

- *This draft will be submitted to the instructor only, as a single Microsoft Word (or compatible) file. It must include everything required in the final paper, and it will be graded as if it were the final paper.*

11) Oral reports (5/6-5/18)

- *Students should make a five to ten minute presentation to the class and the Politics faculty that summarizes the paper. Students should practice their presentations and their use of "smart" technology (if they use such technology), both to be sure of their timing and to make sure that the load-up time between presentations is minimal.*

12) The Paper (5/17)

The paper must:

- *Consist of wholly new work (sStudents may not use papers from other classes, including literature reviews from the Political Puzzles course).*
- *Be at least 7500 words long, **not counting references, quotations (if quotations are used), titles, and the like.***
- *Begin with a question to be addressed about a political subject. All topics are subject to instructor approval.*
- *Explain the theoretical perspectives that will be used as the mode of analysis.*
- *Present a hypothesis or argument (see below) as a provisional answer to the chosen question.*
- *Present a counter-hypothesis or argument that disagrees with your own.*
- *Explain how the hypothesis makes sense given the theoretical approach being used.*
- *Provide a literature review that makes clear the relevance of each work that is summarized.*
- *Present relevant facts and arguments in order to explore the validity of the hypothesis. This part of the paper must include some sort of comparative element (comparison of arguments, laws, proposals, units of government, etc.)*
- *Offer, explain, and defend conclusions concerning the validity of the hypothesis (this does necessarily mean defending the hypothesis; it might mean rejecting it or concluding that the issue is not resolved by available evidence).*

- *Tackle (refute, show weaknesses in, accept, show strengths in, etc.) your counter-hypothesis or opposing argument.*
- *Describe and explain implications of the research presented. For example: (a) Are there different questions or different versions of the same question that could usefully be asked? (b) What sort of further study is needed, and why? (c) What is the political, normative, and public policy significance of the findings?*

Structure of the Paper:

1. The Governing Question
2. The Theoretical Approach
3. The Hypothesis
4. The Counter-hypothesis or Counter-argument
5. The Literature Review
6. The Plan of Study (what will be compared to what and why)
7. The Findings (Facts and Arguments)
8. The Validity of the Hypothesis
9. The Implications

About The Hypothesis:

The “hypothesis” chosen to organize the research must be either:

- *An empirical hypothesis, meaning statement of an expected relationship between a “dependent variable” and one or more “independent variables.”*
- *A normative claim, meaning a statement that offers a normative evaluation of something clearly specified and somehow political: e.g., a policy, a system, or a law.*

About the Arguments Utilized in the Paper:

- *Papers must present (summarize the relevant parts of) the arguments of scholars in the field both on the questions at hand and the theoretical perspectives being considered or utilized.*

About Theoretical Perspectives:

Theoretical perspectives are used to

- Make sense of the world (make sense of observations)
- Generate questions to ask and hypothetical answers
- Explain findings
- Justify positions taken

Below is a list of a few of theoretical perspectives students might choose as their mode of analysis. Essays outlining each approach are provided on Blackboard. Students are encouraged to use no more than one or two texts as sources when it comes to the approach they use. This is because the bulk of each student’s research energy should be thrown into finding materials on the subject of the paper, not the approach. *The use of a particular approach to analyze a particular topic must be approved by the instructor. Also: some questions are suited to certain approaches but not to others. Also: it is wise to pick an approach that seems clear to you and makes sense to you.*

- Behavioralist political science
- Critical legal studies
- Rational Choice Theory
- Feminism
- Natural law theory
- Utilitarianism

Sample Question, Hypothesis, Counter-hypothesis, Operationalization, Plan, Arguments, and Theory:

- *Question:* Is the death penalty effective?
- *Hypothesis:* The death penalty is not effective.
- *Counter-hypothesis:* The death penalty is effective.
- *Operationalization:* “effective” is defined as... and is measured as ... and “the death penalty” is defined as ... and is measured as
- *Plan:* two states, and also two nations besides the U.S., some of which use the death penalty and some of which do not, will be compared to each other.
- *Various Arguments:* the death penalty is too rare to count as a possible penalty in the minds of citizens contemplating crime; the death penalty is effective at sending a moral message; society could make the death penalty more effective by changing the court system; states with more executions do not have lower crime rates; etc.
- *Theory:* people who commit crime do not usually engage in rational analysis of likely outcomes and of their true interests.

Grading Standards

0.0 Level Work is (1) vague, imprecise, and unreasoned, (2) simplistic and error-filled, or (3) fails to do what is asked by the assignment. Assignments are not completed, do not meet minimal stated standards, or appear to have been done pro forma, with the student simply going through the motions. The work done does not clearly identify relevant concepts and assumptions (e.g. of the texts being analyzed), does not identify relevant competing points of view, does not reason carefully from clearly stated premises, and does not trace political implications and consequences. The student’s work does not display discernable reasoning and problem-solving skills.

1.0 Level Work shows only a minimal level understanding of the course material. Work is mostly or always merely descriptive, without evidence of critical thinking. Most assignments are poorly done, barely meet minimal stated standards, or do something good while being nonetheless incomplete. There is little evidence that the student is reasoning through the assignments. There is little evidence of an effort to take charge of ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. In general, the work lacks discipline and clarity, rarely analyzes political issues clearly and precisely, almost never formulates political information accurately, rarely distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, rarely recognizes key questionable assumptions, almost never clarifies key political concepts effectively, only rarely identifies relevant competing points of view, and almost never reasons carefully from clearly stated premises or recognizes important implications and consequences.

2.0 Level Work reveals inconsistent achievement in grasping the course material and revealing political thinking by the student. Though some assignments are reasonably well done, others are poorly done, mediocre, and/or incomplete. There are more than occasional lapses in reasoning. Political thinking terms and distinctions are sometimes used effectively and sometimes used ineffectively. Only on occasion does the work display a mind taking charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. Only occasionally does it display intellectual discipline and clarity.

3.0 Level Work provides clear demonstration of a range of specific political thinking skills. It is mostly clear, precise, and well-reasoned, with only occasional lapses into weak reasoning. On the whole, political science terms and distinctions are used effectively. The work demonstrates a mind beginning to take charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. The student often analyzes political issues clearly and precisely, often formulates political information accurately, usually distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, often recognizes key questionable assumptions, usually clarifies key political concepts effectively, typically uses political science language in keeping with established professional usage, frequently identifies relevant political competing points of view, and shows a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises as well as a noticeable sensitivity to important implications and consequences.

4.0 Level Work displays excellent political reasoning and problem-solving skills consistently and at a high level of intellectual excellence. The work is mostly or entirely clear, precise, and well-reasoned. Political science terms and distinctions are used effectively. The work demonstrates a mind beginning to take charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. The work analyzes political issues clearly and precisely, formulates political information accurately, usually distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, often recognizes key questionable assumptions, usually clarifies key political science concepts effectively, typically uses political science language in keeping with established professional usage, frequently identifies relevant competing political points of view, and shows a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, as well as noticeable sensitivity to important implications and consequences.

Assignment Schedule (each assignments submission should be emailed to the instructor as a single Word file):

Thursday January 28: Class meets in the Crumb Library lobby and will proceed to the Crumb computer classroom on the first floor. Students will learn about and get help choosing a topic and finding initial sources. Students should come to class having thought about likely topics.

Tuesday, February 2: The initial topic statements, writing, and bibliography are due. Students will choose theoretical perspectives and key concepts to summarize for the rest of the class, in class, over the next several sessions, and will sign up for presentation dates.

Thursday, February 4: Students will present to the class, as scheduled.

Tuesday, February 9: Students will present to the class, as scheduled.

Thursday, February 11: The expanded topic statement and longer, partially annotated bibliography is due. Students will present to the class, as scheduled.

Tuesday, February 16: Each student will schedule a one-on-one meeting with the instructor, be assigned a peer reviewer, and schedule their literature review presentation. ***One-on-one meetings:*** *students are expected to come prepared to explain their paper: what's in it so far, what will be in it, and why.*

Thursday, February 18: No class. Students meet one-on-one with the instructor at scheduled times.

Tuesday, February 2: No class. Students meet one-on-one with the instructor at scheduled times.

Thursday, February 25: No class. Students meet one-on-one with the instructor at scheduled times.

Friday, February 26: The completely annotated bibliography is due by 10:00am.

Tuesday, March 2: Literature review presentations.

Thursday, March 4: Literature review presentations.

Tuesday, March 16: Literature review presentations.

Thursday, March 18: Literature review Presentations.

Tuesday, March 23: The 2000 Word Draft and Table of Contents are due. Each student should send a copy to the professor and a copy to their peer reviewer.

Thursday, March 25:

Tuesday, March 30: The peer reviews of the 2000 word draft are due. Students should bring a copy to class to present to their peer and also submit a copy to the instructor.

Thursday, April 1:

Thursday, April 8: No class.

Tuesday, April 13: The first full length draft is due today. Students should submit two copies: one for the instructor and one for their peer reviewer. ***The First Full Length Draft*** *should look like a finished paper, with a title, a bibliography, and page numbers.*

Thursday, April 15: No class.

Tuesday, April 20: Peer reviews of the first full length draft are due. Students should submit one copy to the instructor and send one to their peer.

Thursday, April 22: No class due to College-wide Festival. Students should attend relevant Festival events.

Tuesday, April 27: The second full length draft is due by 10:00am (there is no need for students to send a copy to their peer reviewer). *The Second Full Length Draft should look just like a finished paper, with a title, a bibliography, and page numbers. It should also be as good as possible. In other words, the assignment should be treated as if it were the final paper assignment. Drafts without a bibliography will receive a grade of zero. **The second full length draft will be graded by the same standard as will the final paper.*** Also, each student will schedule their oral report at this time, if they have not already done so.

Thursday, April 29:

Tuesday, May 4:

Thursday, May 6: Oral Reports

Tuesday, May 11: Oral Reports.

Thursday, May 13: Oral Reports.

Monday, May 17: **The final paper is due by 10:00am.** Students who fail to hand in a final paper will receive a final paper grade identical to their second full length draft grade.

Tuesday, May 18 (5:00-7:00pm in our regular classroom): Oral Reports