COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is open to students majoring in Government and International Politics or Public Administration who have been accepted to pursue honors. It is the first of a two-semester sequence (GOVT 491 and GOVT 496) that will help students to complete successfully their senior honors theses. The course’s main purpose is to create a learning community among the participants that supports the students as they design and execute their thesis projects. The students will identify their research topic, define the goals for their projects, explore and synthesize the literature on their topics, and devise preliminary designs for their own original research, which will mainly be carried out in the spring semester. In addition to these activities, students will become acquainted with Schar School faculty members who may serve as their individual thesis advisors.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, student should have:

a) Understood the many challenges of designing and executing original research projects.

b) Found a specific topic to write their senior honors theses.
c) Turned a topic or question into a research problem whose significance matches the effort that the students put into solving it.

d) Completed literature reviews and preliminary research designs for their theses.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course fulfills requirements for **Synthesis & Writing Intensive in Major in the Mason Core**. The Mason Core is a foundational selection of courses in a student's curriculum that foster the knowledge and skills needed for academic success. Through the Mason Core, students explore new ideas, engage in inquiry and experiential learning, and learn how to integrate this learning into their chosen major and beyond. The student learning outcomes that guide the present course are the following:

**Student learning outcomes for Synthesis:**
The purpose of the synthesis course is to provide students with the opportunity to synthesize the knowledge, skills and values gained from the Mason Core curriculum. Synthesis courses strive to expand students' ability to master new content, think critically, and develop life-long learning skills across the disciplines. While it is not feasible to design courses that cover "all" areas of general education, synthesis courses should function as a careful alignment of disciplinary goals with a range of Mason Core learning outcomes.

The Mason Core synthesis course must address outcomes 1 and 2, and at least one outcome under 3. Upon completing a synthesis course, students will be able to:

1. Communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, applying appropriate rhetorical standards (e.g., audience adaptation, language, argument, organization, evidence, etc.)
2. Using perspectives from two or more disciplines, connect issues in a given field to wider intellectual, community or societal concerns
3. Apply critical thinking skills to:
   a. Evaluate the quality, credibility and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources, OR,
   b. Judge the quality or value of an idea, work, or principle based on appropriate analytics and standards

**Writing-Intensive (WI):**
This course has been approved by the Faculty Senate Writing Across the Curriculum Committee to fulfill in part the Writing Intensive requirement in the Government and International Politics, and Public Administration majors. It does so through the completion of the topic proposal, literature review and thesis prospectus. I will provide extensive feedback on the first two assignments (initial topic proposal and literature review). My comments should be incorporated into the thesis prospectus due on December 3.
More information about Writing Intensive courses is available at Mason’s Writing Across the Curriculum website: https://wac.gmu.edu/wi-course-resources/wi-course-criteria/

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Participation (15%)**
   Each student is expected to complete the reading assignments for each week and contribute actively to class discussions. Credit will be given for regular and active participation in class meetings. This will involve discussion of the readings, oral presentations, and debates about research design and specific research topics raised in the course.

   Students should come prepared each class with a specific case or question related to the readings. They are expected to share this information at some point during the class. In some sessions, students should complete a short homework assignment or answer a specific question related to the relevant discussion (this will be specified one week in advance).

   Participation grades will be thus based on: a) active participation in class meetings; and b) performance on homework assignments.

2. **Initial topic proposal and presentation**: September 16 (15%).

3. **Literature review and presentation**: October 28 (30%).

4. **Thesis prospectus**, due December 2, and presentation December 3 or December 16 (40%).

**Notes:**

Written assignments should be printed and submitted electronically. Writing style matters. Be clear and concise.

*Please note that you can miss examinations and quizzes only for medically certified incapacity or for the gravest adequately documented, crisis in your immediate family. Make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or emergency that is properly documented.*

**GRADING**

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on the following scale:
97-100 A+
93-96 A
90-92 A-
87-89 B+
83-86 B
80-82 B-
77-79 C+
70-76 C
67-69 D+
63-66 D
60-62 D-
< 60 F

GMU’s grading policy can be found at:
http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/grading/#text

STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Students are expected to be diligent in their studies and attend class regularly and on time. Students are responsible for all class work and assignments. On recommendation of the instructor concerned and with the approval of the Dean, students may, at any time, be dropped from the course. This may result in an “F” on the student’s permanent record.

*** Important:

Please provide a respectful learning environment for your fellow students. Repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, reading materials unrelated to the course, and web browsing and texting during class will adversely affect your grade. Repeated disruptive behavior may result in your involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Please arrive at class on time and mute (or switch off) cell phones, pagers, and alarms during class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the
ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting.

UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE

Mason shares in the tradition of an honor system that has existed in Virginia since 1842. The code is an integral part of university life. On the application for admission, students sign a statement agreeing to conform to and uphold the Honor Code. Students are responsible, therefore, for understanding the code’s provisions. In the spirit of the code, a student’s word is a declaration of good faith acceptable as truth in all academic matters. Cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing of academic work and related materials constitute Honor Code violations. To maintain an academic community according to these standards, students and faculty members must report all alleged violations to the Honor Committee. Any student who has knowledge of, but does not report, a violation may be accused of lying under the Honor Code. (See http://oai.gmu.edu for more information)

The complete Honor Code is as follows:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

READING MATERIALS

REQUIRED TEXT:
Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods, Fourth Edition
Author: Lisa A. Baglione
CQ Press
ISBN-10: 1506367429
Published: February 28, 2019

Authors: James D. Lester (Late); James D. Lester Jr.
Pearson
Print ISBN: 9780134542676, 0134542673
eText ISBN: 9780134575902, 0134575903
Published: January 31, 2017

The Craft of Research, Fourth Edition
Authors: Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald
The University of Chicago Press
ISBN-10: 022623973X
Published: October, 2016

RECOMMENDED READINGS:


ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL:

Further readings will be posted on Blackboard, so be sure to check the website often [Note: These materials will be posted one week in advance of the relevant session].

The course schedule will include individual meetings as well as group sessions. Details will be shared as the course moves forward.
DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READINGS PER CLASS
(DRAFT-subject to change)

Week 1: August 26

Road map of the course- Introduction and explanation of course requirements

Week 2: September 9

Research, Researchers and Readers

- The Craft of Research: Preface, Prologue, Chapters 1 and 2
- Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: Chapter 1
- Writing Research Papers: Chapter 1

Week 3: September 16

Initial topic proposal and presentation

Week 4: September 23

Asking Questions, Finding Answers I

- The Craft of Research: Chapters 3 and 4
- Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: Chapter 2
- Writing Research Papers: Chapters 2 and 3

Week 5: September 30

Asking Questions, Finding Answers II

- The Craft of Research: Chapters 5 and 6
- Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: Chapter 3
- Writing Research Papers: Chapters 4 and 5

Week 6: October 7
Making an Argument I

- *The Craft of Research*: Chapters 7 and 8
- *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science*: Chapter 5

Week 7: October 15 (Tuesday)

Making an Argument II

- *The Craft of Research*: Chapters 9 and 11
- *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science*: Chapter 7

Week 8: October 21

Writing your Argument I

- *The Craft of Research*: Chapters 12 and 13
- *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science*: Chapter 4
- *Writing Research Papers*: Chapters 8 and 9

Week 9: October 28

**Literature review and presentation**

Week 10: November 4

Writing your Argument II

- *The Craft of Research*: Chapters 14 and 15
- *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science*: Chapter 6
- *Writing Research Papers*: Chapters 10 and 11

**Guest speaker: TBA**

Week 11: November 11

Writing your Argument III
• \textit{The Craft of Research}: Chapters 16 and 17
• \textit{Writing a Research Paper in Political Science}: Chapter 9
• \textit{Writing Research Papers}: Chapters 12 and 13

\textbf{Guest speaker: TBA}

\textbf{Week 12: November 18}

Research and numbers: Quantitative Research Analysis

• \textit{Writing a Research Paper in Political Science}: Chapter 8
• \textit{Writing a Research Paper in Political Science}: Chapters 14 and 15

\textbf{Guest speaker: TBA}

\textbf{Week 13: November 25}

Qualitative Research Analysis and the Ethics of Research

• \textit{The Craft of Research}: Section V (The Ethics of Research)
• \textit{Writing a Research Paper in Political Science}: Chapter 8
• \textit{Writing Research Papers}: Chapters 6 and 7

\textbf{Guest speaker: TBA}

\textbf{Week 14: December 2}

Thesis prospectus due and presentations I

\textbf{Week 15: December 16}

Thesis prospectus presentations II

*** The professor reserves the right to make reasonable changes to this syllabus as needed ***