Political Science Department Writing Plan

The ability to communicate ideas through writing is important in all walks of life, including those careers most closely associated with the study of politics: teaching, law, politics, and advocacy. In our courses we help students pursue writing projects that express a clear point or thesis; use evidence effectively in support of a paper's thesis; and follow grammar and style conventions of standard written English.

Types of Writing Assignments

Writing in political science uses two major approaches:

- *research papers* that include formulating a significant question to investigate, presenting the information gathered, and drawing appropriate conclusions
- *argumentative papers* that take and defend a position, usually in response to an issue raised by others

In addition, a few of our courses include a series of short response papers on class readings. Some courses require writing that is more closely associated with politics. These include short, dense policy briefings and op-eds.

Signs of Excellence

Whatever the approach, students and practitioners of political science strive for papers that do the following:

- state the paper's focal question or issue clearly and describe it comprehensively, delivering the range of perspectives necessary for full reader understanding
- comprehensively synthesize information from background sources, going beyond the literal meanings of texts to draw appropriate inferences
- demonstrate appropriate background knowledge of the area which the paper addresses, whether American or international politics
- use language fluently to communicate meaning to readers

Writing Emphasis Courses

Nearly all of our department's courses include a significant writing component. These can range from brief reading responses to multi-stage research projects. Those that include competency in written communication as a principal course objective include the following:

POL-207 Religion and US Politics
POL-248 Political Violence and the Violent
POL-258 World Politics
POL-266 Latin American Politics
POL-276 African Politics
POL-277 Women and US Politics
POL-286 Asian Politics
POL-298 European Politics
POL-305 Terrorism
POL-310 International Organizations
POL-325 American Congress
POL-345 American Presidency
POL-350 US Social Policy
POL-365 American Foreign Policy
POL-386 International Development
POL-398 Religion and World Politics
POL-435 Ancient-Medieval Political Theory
POL-445 Modern Political Theory
POL-405 Contemporary Political Theory

Thus, as students progress through a major or minor in political science, they will write a number of papers of different lengths and perhaps different styles. This reflects our understanding of writing as a skill, which, like other skills, must be practiced and honed. Writing is also a central form of political communication and, if done well, can be a political act.