Political Science Department—Senior Paper

To aid students in preparing superior course research papers and the Department's senior paper, the following standards will prove helpful:

Writing Standards

The purpose of a paper that meets the Department's requirements is to demonstrate a student's ability to communicate ideas and information effectively. It follows that an acceptable paper should have something significant to say about a political science topic, and should say it clearly, accurately, and convincingly. The principles of research, organization, analysis, and presentation—as taught in the Political Science 200 course—should be followed.

1. When a definite assignment has been given in the course, the paper should conform exactly to that assignment. When no definite assignment has been given, the paper should still accomplish what it set out to do and not wander from its own stated purpose.

2. A significant and clearly stated central idea should control the entire paper. No other virtues can compensate for a muddled or missing central idea.

    a. The central idea should not be merely a repetition of one expressed by a teacher (or some other authority), though it may be an extension of such an idea, or a critique of it.

    b. The central idea should be stated clearly and concisely so that it can benefit both the student who writes the paper and the teacher who reads the paper.

        i. The writer should state the controlling idea early in the paper so the supporting evidence can be better evaluated for its effectiveness and relevance.

        ii. The writer should not be "given the benefit of the doubt" in the statement of the controlling idea. If the reader cannot find the central idea, then one probably does not exist.

3. The paper should contain convincing and sufficient support for the central idea.

    a. The support should satisfy both readers who agree with the conclusions of the paper and readers who do not. (A heavily supported series of generalizations, an unassimilated collection of quotations, or a narrow partisan argument which ignores important contradictory evidence cannot be considered acceptable.)

    b. The support should be factual and verifiable, as indicated by the citations (the "footnoting).

4. The organization of the paper (both of the whole and of the parts, including individual paragraphs) should be clear to the reader and all parts should "stick together" to form one smoothly unfolding idea. The role of the transition sentences and paragraphs, and appropriate subheadings, should not be underestimated.

    a. The organization should be consistent with the central idea and should always be clear. The reader should never have to ask: "What does this have to do with your point?"

        i. The relationship between ideas and supporting evidence should always be clear. The reader should never have to ask: "What does this have to do with your point?"

      ii.   The proportion of the paper allocated to any section should reflect the relative importance of that section. A minor idea should never be discussed at length, nor a major one given only cursory treatment.

   b. The paper should read clearly and smoothly.

      i.   The writer should provide signals (transitions, headings, etc.) to show how sections relate to each other and to the central idea.

      ii.   Jarring gaps in thought (where the writer has leaped too abruptly from one sentence to the next or from one paragraph or section t the next) always confuse the reader. They may occur simply because the writer has failed to put all that was in mind into the paper, but they suggest superficial thinking and a failure to see relationships.

5. The diction (word choice) of the paper should be precise and economical. Even though some of the students' academic models encourage them to think that wordy, pretentious, jargon-ridden language is "impressive," they should be brought to recognize that such language is irritating and confusing to a reader and seriously lessens the effectiveness of the paper. Yet the writer should also recognize that one person's "jargon" is another's clarification. Thus the nature of the audience must always be kept in mind. A good model is to assume that you are writing for an "intelligent but uniformed" reader.

6. In expression, the paper should meet acceptable standards of sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. It should be literate, without any writing or typing errors. Submit the paper only after thorough proofing.

You are invited to take advantage also of the assistance of the FHSS Writing Lab in 1051 JFSB.

Other Aspects of Paper Format

1. The format of the senior paper is like that of a learned-journal article, not of mini-chapters in a book, meaning that the text of the paper runs consecutively.

2. As taught in PLSC 200, it is essential to use a style guide. From now on, this will be the seventh edition of Kate Turabian's <u>A Manual for Writers</u>. It should be followed correctly and in detail, not just in general. The department requires an in-text documentation style. In Turabian, refer to the section entitled "Citation I: Parenthetical References and Reference Lists." This style is taught in PLSC 200.

3. The organization of the paper's discussion shows most clearly with subsections and subheading. With such, a table of contents is not necessary. The paper title and each subheading ought to be drafted and thoughtfully revised so they clearly summarize the writing that follows. An "introduction" subheading isn't necessary unless it says something substantive. A 'conclusion" is necessary and this subheading should be worded so that the thrust of the conclusion is understood.

4. A paper length of at least twenty pages makes this requirement more than the average course paper. This length includes citations and the references. As a standard these are pages of 250 or so words in elite, 12-pitch style, with a 1.5" left margin, and one inch margins on the right side, top, and bottom.

5. In addition, the paper should have a title sheet, including the paper title, the name of the student and of the faculty sponsor, the Department, and the wording, "Paper Submitted in Fulfillment of the Undergraduate Major Writing Proficiency Requirement." Include the date.

   One common feature of journal articles is a brief resume of the paper. This should be included in the form of a half-page abstract.

6. Forgetting to number the pages not only makes it more difficult for the reader to check through the paper rapidly, but also too often results in the pages not being collated in order.

   There are numerous styles of numbering, but the simplest and easiest to follow is numbering pages two (2) and following at the top right where it can be seen as the first thing on the page.

   Writing with quotations has both substantive and formatting challenges. Since their early school years, students frequently write a report by stringing together quotations, which are often well worded, from secondary sources. In good academic writing, your paper should be a flowing discussion in your own words, with quotations being inserted only when calling upon an expert or a participant whose ideas have particular relevance for the discussion.

   Therefore, when citing people, they should be identified: who are they, and why should their ideas be considered?

   Sloppily, and therefore inaccurately, copied quotations are an indication of sloppy research. Indicate omitted portions of sentences with …, and .…, at the end of a sentence. Use [], not () when it is necessary to edit for clarity or amplification. For quotations of four lines or more, indent them, but do not set them off with " ".

   In summary, the senior paper should be the best paper you have written up to this point of your political science studies. Superior quality is required in topic presentation, in writing style, and in format.

Political Science Department – Writing Proficiency Requirement
Senior Paper Approval Form

_____   _____   _____
Last Name   First Name   Middle Initial

_____   _____   _____
Social Security Number   Anticipated Graduation Date (Month, Year)   Local Phone Number

Local Address

_____   _____   _____   _____
Street Address, Apt. #   City   State   Zip Code

Permanent Address

_____   _____   _____   _____
Street Address, Apt. #   City   State   Zip Code

(_____)_____
Permanent Phone Number

_____
Sponsor

_____
Last Name

_____   _____
Date Submitted to Dept. Receptionist   Logged by (Receptionist name)

Revisions Needed

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Date returned to student   Returned by (Receptionist name)

Papers must be resubmitted within four weeks of return date

_____   _____
Date Submitted to Dept. Receptionist   Logged by (Receptionist name)

Final Comments Concerning Paper and Approval

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_____   _____   _____   _____
Date Approved by Sponsor   Sponsor Signature   Date Approved by Chair   Chair Signature

_____   _____
Date FHSS & Student Notified   Notified by (Receptionist name)