

**Writing and Professional Development in Political Science**  
Political Science 513  
Fall 2007

Monday 1:30-3:00, Room 236 Pond Laboratory  
Suzanna De Boef  
Associate Professor  
Office Hours: Monday 9:00-11:45

[SDEBOEF@PSU.EDU](mailto:SDEBOEF@PSU.EDU)  
320 Pond Laboratory.  
863-9402

**The Purpose.**

This course is designed to complement the first course on Teaching and Professional Norms in Political Science that welcomed you to graduate school at Penn State and to the profession of political science. That course was designed to introduce you to the many roles graduate students assume in the first two years of academic life, helping you to succeed both in graduate school and in the profession more widely. That hurdle is well behind you and a new and exciting set of challenges lies ahead! This course is designed to help you surmount these challenges: comprehensive exams, the dissertation, publishing and the job market.

**The Plan.**

We will cover a variety of topics over the course of the semester including writing for publication, criticizing as a professional, writing reviews, writing the dissertation, finding grant opportunities, writing grant proposals, preparing for comprehensive exams, creating posters, presenting your research, networking/presenting yourself to the profession, and preparing dossiers. Topics will vary from week to week, however, over the course of the semester you will work with a single manuscript that you have written for a previous course, a conference, or perhaps your MA essay, redrafting the paper and preparing to send it out for publication. We will return to this paper each (or nearly each) week, writing and rewriting, and reading/reviewing one another's drafts.

**Evaluation.**

The course is pass/fail. The profession is in many ways also pass/fail. Tenure obviously has that flavor, but so does publishing. Your paper proposals are either selected or not selected for presentation at conferences, you either get the interview/job or you don't, the examples go on.

Passing in the profession requires publishing your work, it requires presenting yourself successfully to the profession in a variety of ways. The topics covered in this course were selected specifically to help get you on the road to successful solo authored publications, to provide a sense of how to write and use reviews, to find resources for funding your research and to go about getting that funding, to go about studying for and passing exams, and to be professional political scientists more quickly and more comfortably than you might otherwise. This makes everything from publishing to getting a job easier and more fun. In order to pass the course, you need to actively participate in the course. In

addition to regular attendance, the key to success in the course will be marked by moving a manuscript of your own closer to publication and by helping your peers to do the same.

### **The texts.**

I've assigned one text for purchase and will make copies of a small number of additional readings available for you as well. Mostly we will be reading each other's work and sharing our collective wisdom.

Howard S. Becker. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start, and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. The University of Chicago Press.

## **The Weekly Plan**

August 27 **Writing in the discipline.**

Today will be part introduction to and overview of the course, but in addition we'll dig in, discussing writing as social interaction and the norms of that interaction in political science.

**Assignment** (for next week's class): Read Becker chapters 1-6.

September 3 **Labor Day—No Class.**

September 10 **The Writing Process.**

Becker is a perennial favorite with students and offers a lot of sound advice for approaching writing. We'll discuss these in class.

**Assignments:** Select a paper that you are currently drafting and that you'd like to work on this semester. Pick one with a completed analysis. Email me the title, abstract, and a sentence or two about the status of and plans for the manuscript.

Read funding information from RGSO and NSF. Find 2-3 awards that match your research interests. Identify their proposal requirements and due dates. What will they fund? Read a sample NSF dissertation proposal. I will provide these.

<http://www.la.psu.edu/CLA-Graduate/funding.shtml>  
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2001/nsf01113/nsf01113.htm>

September 17 **Finding Grant Opportunities and Writing Grant Proposals.**

Grants are a wonderful opportunity to make your life easier and send a signal to perspective employers that your research is innovative and compelling. Grants may also be essential for completing your dissertation research. So how do you go about finding sources for funds to carry out your research? Once you find sources how do you maximize the odds that

you are a recipient of the money? We'll talk about answers to these questions today.

September 24 **Writing: Outlines and Introductions.**

Bring a notebook, the current draft of your paper, and an interesting article. We'll talk about the importance of outlines and strong introductions. We'll analyze our own papers, working backward to produce an outline and reading to identify weaknesses/strengths of the introduction.

**Assignment:** Edit your introduction. Bring it and your paper outline to class next week. Bring enough copies for everyone.

October 1 **In class editing.**

We'll establish some ground rules for commenting on each other's work and then will exchange introductions and outlines.

**Assignment:** Read "Giving Talks" chapter 2 in Thomson, William. 2001. *A Guide for the Young Economist: Writing and Speaking Effectively about Economics*, William Thomson, MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.

Incorporate comments/suggestions in your introduction and outline.

October 8 **Giving a Research Presentation.**

You'll be asked countless numbers of times throughout your professional life: "What sort of research do you do?" or "What are you working on?" We'll talk about how to answer that question and how to give formal research presentations that highlight your research. What goes into a conference presentation? A job talk? Your talk next week? Should you use overheads? Powerpoint?

**Assignment:** Prepare your research presentation for next week.

Continue editing your manuscript.

October 15 **Research Presentations.**

Each student will give a 15-20 minute presentation of the research that will serve as the basis of the paper being drafted for submission this semester. These time limits are strict!

**Assignment:** Divide a piece of paper into 3 columns, positive, negative, questions. List something in each column for each speaker (a new piece of paper for each speaker!). I'll collect these comments and distribute them to your classmates at the end of class.

Continue editing your manuscript.

- October 22 **Writing: Theories and hypotheses.**  
Today we will talk about the essentials of a good theory and clearly written hypotheses. Bring your theory section to class (this may be part of your literature section, for example, or it may stand on its own). Today we'll break down the theory into its smallest parts and write it out in a single paragraph.
- October 29 **In class editing.**  
Today we'll exchange our theory sections and comment on each other's work. Bring enough copies of your theory section only to share with your classmates.
- November 5 **Criticizing as a Professional--Editing your peers & writing reviews.**  
We will talk about how to be a professional critic in all our professional writings, e.g., our papers and blind reviews.
- Assignment:** Bring a printed copy of your full paper to class to give to a classmate. Each of you will write an anonymous review of a peer's paper. Email to De Boef by Sunday morning November 18.
- Evaluate your own draft (see St. Martin's Guide, pages 47-50).
- November 12 **Presenting yourself to the profession.**  
LeeAnn Banaszak will visit class today and discuss preparing a dossier, networking and other aspects of job placement.
- Assignments:** Incorporate anonymous reviewer comments in your draft, a response memo and revisions are due to De Boef by November 26 at noon.
- Students who've taken comps: Prepare and bring a tip sheet with your 10 best suggestions for your peers preparing for comps.  
Students who haven't taken comps: Prepare and bring a list of 5 questions/concerns about comps.
- November 19 **No Class—Thanksgiving Break.**
- November 26 **Preparing for Comprehensive Exams.**  
We will talk about the purpose of comprehensive exams, the format, the content, the reading lists, how to prepare, the orals, etc.
- December 3 **Selecting a Dissertation Topic and Writing the Dissertation**  
Selecting a dissertation topic can come naturally or be a bit ominous (I was one of those for whom the later was true). And it's a big deal, you

spend a lot of time working on it, you need to pick something you enjoy, that's doable, and that other's find interesting. All are important. We'll talk about recipes to help increase the probability that you select a topic that passes these tests.

My advisor told me that dissertations could be written in 6 weeks. While that still seems a stretch to me. No doubt virtually all dissertations could be written more quickly than they are. Procrastination is in part to blame. But dissertations are unlike anything we've ever written and require some different organization and thinking. We'll talk about how to write a dissertation and strategies for writing that help keep the end goal in sight.

**Assignment:** Semi-free writing on a potential dissertation topic or design.

December 10 **Select a topic. Creating a Poster? Writing abstracts, conference paper proposals? More editing?**

This week you get to pick the topic. Send me suggestions about what you'd like to talk about.

## Resources

Boice, Robert. 2000. *Advise for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*. Allyn and Bacon. Boice's *Advise for New Faculty Members*, offers a philosophical approach to teaching, research, and the profession. It is designed for assistant professors but is widely applicable to us all. It is an easy read and offers some good general advice.

Morris, Mary, Julia Heilberger, and Vick Miller. 2000. *The Academic Job Search Handbook*. The University of Pennsylvania Press.

There really is no better time to plan for getting a job than now. It is not as simple as applying for jobs the year before you leave PSU. Getting a job requires you to take on tasks and set goals now. This book is designed to help you to do this well. While teaching is one part of the preparation for an academic job, this book considers your preparation for the job search in all areas.

Bolker, Joan. 1998. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. Owl Books.

\*Rudestam, Kjell Erik and Rae R. Newton. 2001. *Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Sage Publications.

This book discusses everything from selecting a topic, to conducting a literature review, writing an argument, presenting data and results, writing, dealing with your committee, and writer's block.

Whitely, Sandra. 1994. *The Essential Writer's Companion: A Concise Guide to Writing Effectively for School, Home, or Office*. Houghton Mifflin.

Becker, Howard. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article (Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing)*. University of Chicago Press.

Booth, Wayne C., Joseph M. Williams, Gregory G. Colomb. 2003. *The Craft of Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing). University of Chicago Press.

## **Academic Dishonesty**<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist of any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Other violations include, but are not limited to, any attempt to gain an unfair advantage in regard to an examination, such as tampering with a graded exam or claiming another's work to be one's own. Violations shall also consist of obtaining or attempting to obtain, previous to any examinations, copies of the examination papers or the questions to appear thereon, or to obtain any illegal knowledge of these questions. Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of a violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to impose appropriate penalties that are consistent with University guidelines.

---

<sup>1</sup>Much of the text above has been directly obtained from the sections of the Princeton University website <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/rrr/99/pages/OI.htm> concerning academic integrity (Rights, Rules, Responsibilities introductory text as well as pages 55-69) as well as from the website of the Department of Economics at The Pennsylvania State University.

## **Disabilities**

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations will be made for all students with disabilities, but it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor early in the term. Do not wait until just before an exam to decide you want to inform the instructor of a learning disability; any accommodations for disabilities must be arranged well in advance.

### **Visit our web site**

The Political Science Department is in the process of upgrading its web site and will continue to do so during this and future academic years. In the undergraduate section you will find a wealth of information including course schedules, faculty office hours, faculty home pages describing their areas of teaching and research activities, answers to questions about advising, internship opportunities, announcements, and much, much, more. Check back often: we will continuously update our information about internships and career opportunities: <http://polisci.la.psu.edu/>