

POSC396 SAGES Senior Capstone Project in Political Science

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GUIDELINES FOR POSC396

This document is for those students interested in undertaking the work of a Senior Capstone paper, working with Professor Beckwith in POSC396. Students do best in POSC396 with Professor Beckwith when 1) they have had at least one previous course with her; 2) they have taken POSC349 Political Science Research Methods; and 3) they are working on a topic based on their previous POSC coursework, regardless of instructor. Students can make an appointment to discuss the possibility of working with Professor Beckwith by signing up through her faculty webpage at <http://politicalscience.case.edu/faculty/karen-beckwith/>.

Below, students will find the *Outline Template for Senior Capstone Projects*, a *General Schedule for Senior Capstone Completion*, and *Guidelines for Formatting a Senior Capstone Paper*, as well as a brief list of *Helpful Sources*.

OUTLINE TEMPLATE FOR SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction to your capstone should introduce your reader to your project and should provide a map of the work that you will present in the pages that follow. The late Lee Sigelman, Columbian College Distinguished Professor of Political Science at George Washington University and former editor of the *American Political Science Review*, encouraged his graduate students (and political scientists submitting manuscripts to the *APSR*) to begin their work with an actual question. This is one good way – but not the only way – to introduce your reader to your work. Some scholars like to begin their work by telling a short story that exemplifies the research puzzle they are trying to solve. In any case, the introduction to your senior capstone should provide an overview of the entire paper and should prepare your reader for the pages to come.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

What is your research question? What is the origin of your question (prior coursework, observation, general interest)? What does the existing scholarship in the area of your research question conclude? What have other scholars found in their research on this topic? This section should review the relevant scholarly literature, provide a scholarly grounding for your research question, and demonstrate where your own work is likely to contribute to knowledge in this area. The document “Guidelines for Critical Reading in Political Science” raises the issues you should consider as you read and review the scholarship relevant to your research project.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Explain how you will move from your research question to develop questions that will be suitable for testing. Explain how you will frame your research question as a set of hypotheses. Identify what it is you seek to explain (the dependent variable) and what factors you anticipate will help to provide the explanation (the independent variables and control variables). Explain how you will operationalize these variables; that is, how will you measure them, and what data and evidence are available for evaluating the relationship among these variables. What criteria will you employ to evaluate whether or not the relationships you hypothesize are supported by the evidence? It may be useful to model these relationships as arrow diagrams. For comparative case studies, it is often helpful to present a table presenting your cases and showing on what variables they are similar and/or different (sometimes referred to as a “truth table”). In explaining your methodology and in developing your research design, be explicit about whether or not you are employing, for example, a comparative case study analysis, a single-case analysis, a small-n statistical analysis, or a large-n statistical analysis.

There is no overarching appropriate research design for all research; each research question – and the availability of data – will determine its appropriate research design and methodology. Although methodology in political science is often dichotomized as quantitative and qualitative, use and interpretation of data often span – or include – both, depending on data availability and research design. Keep in mind that your previous coursework and readings in political science can serve as examples of how data are interpreted and how research questions are addressed with different types of methods.

IV. DATA AND FINDINGS

Present your results. What does the evidence show? On the basis of the evidence, what do you conclude about your research question. Return to your evaluative criteria – those that you stated earlier would be used to determine whether or not the relationships you hypothesized are supported by the evidence. Show how your evaluative criteria lead you to draw your conclusions about whether or not your hypotheses have been supported by the evidence you have analyzed. It is often helpful to summarize your findings in a table. Keep in mind that negative findings (where no relationship was found where one was anticipated) can be as powerful as positive findings; also keep in mind that, as a scholar, you are assessing evidence, not shaping evidence to support a foregone conclusion.

Note that all your evidence and data should be presented and discussed in this section; no new data or evidence should be introduced in your paper’s concluding section. If there is additional data or evidence to be considered, introduce it in this section and analyze it.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This section asks you to do two things: 1) summarize your findings and 2) draw conclusions from them. First, help your reader by briefly summarizing your argument

and your findings. This should be no longer than two pages, reminding your reader of the general purpose and findings of the paper.

Second, draw conclusions about your findings. Explain how your work contributes to a wider understanding of your general research question. Underscore the strengths of your research; also discuss the limitations of your work, including any difficulties or restrictions in regard to data. What do your findings tell us about similar cases or circumstances? How generalizable are your findings? Reflect on the issues that future research in regard to your capstone might explore.

VI. REFERENCES

Provide a full list of references used to support your capstone work, following the citation model of the American Political Science Association. See the *Style Manual for Political Science*, or any article published in the *American Political Science Review*.

VII. APPENDICES

Scholarly standards in political science require that our research be replicable by other scholars, and that our data and analysis of our data be transparent. Much of this information is too lengthy or detailed to be included in the text of a paper; it can be included, however, in appendices to the paper. Relevant appendices include, e.g., original data sets, computer output, and/or additional tables or information necessary for the reader to assess (and to replicate) your work.

GENERAL SCHEDULE FOR SENIOR CAPSTONE COMPLETION

The senior capstone prospectus must be submitted and approved no later than the second week of an academic semester (see <http://politicalscience.case.edu/undergraduate-programs/major-program/political-science-senior-projects/>). The Department recommends that students begin to organize their capstone work well before then, since they will have to identify a capstone director from among the political science faculty, and because students generally have only sixteen weeks in which to complete their work.

A typical schedule for capstone completion is the following:

- Week 1: Capstone Supervisor and Research Question Identified
- Week 2: Draft Template Outline for Capstone [I use this as the basis for scheduling capstone meetings, work to be completed, and completion due date of final paper.]
- Week 3: Draft Introduction and Draft Bibliography; Discussion of Literature Review
- Week 5: Draft Literature Review; Discussion of Methodology and Data
- Week 7: Draft Methodology Statement; Discussion of Data/Evidence
- Week 9: Data/Evidence Analysis Section; Discussion of Findings
- Week 11: Continuing Discussion of Data/Evidence and Findings
- Week 13: Draft Conclusion Completed
- Week 14: Final Meeting before Departmental Senior Capstone Presentation Event.
- Week 16: Final Draft of Capstone Discussed; Review of Comments at Departmental Senior Capstone Presentation Event.

The schedule will vary by student and by research question. It may not be necessary to meet or to consult every other week. Generally, the student and the capstone director will negotiate the schedule for work.

FORMATTING A SENIOR CAPSTONE PAPER

Structural requirements of senior capstone papers include the following:

- The senior capstone paper is the product of a semester's work of reading, research, and writing, and the final written paper should reflect that. The range of page length for a senior capstone paper is 25-35 pages, exclusive of the title page, tables and figures, appendices, and a list of references. This page-length range is a general guide. It would be difficult to produce a good senior capstone project of fewer than 25 pages; more than 35 pages would exceed the normal maximum for article manuscripts submitted to political science journal.
- All papers should be double-spaced in font-size 12, and prepared in Word docx; all pages should be numbered.
- Provide your paper with a title, on a separate title page. Include the title, your name, the name of the course, and the date. The title page is the only place your name should appear in your paper. The title page is not included in the page length count.
- Employ correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar, in standard US English. When discussing your own ideas, write in the first person (I, my, etc.). This allows you to take responsibility for your work – and to take credit for your insights.
- Note that internet articles, Wikipedia, dictionaries and encyclopedias are *not* acceptable sources for research papers – although they may be useful tools for organizing research.
- Employ the American Political Science Association style for formatting papers (refer to the American Political Science Association *Style Manual for Political Science*, available on Blackboard). Note that the APSA style relies on in-text citation of sources, with a complete List of References. The List of References is not included in the page-length count. Remember that full documentation requires page numbers of referenced or quoted sources. Your citation information should permit another scholar to identify your research sources easily and completely. For additional examples of the APSA style, see any article recently published in the *American Political Science Review*.
- Number the pages of your paper.
- Submit an electronic copy of your paper, in Word .docx, to the professor by email (karen.beckwith@case.edu). A paper is not considered submitted until the paper has been submitted by the due date, on time. Keeping an electronic copy for yourself is highly recommended.

- Standards of professionalism and academic integrity are integral components of this course. Students are reminded that they are obliged to understand, to uphold, and to comply with the Academic Integrity Policy of the University. A copy of the Code may be found online at

<https://students.case.edu/handbook/policy/integrity.html>

If you do not understand this Policy after having read it, please make an appointment to see me to discuss it; indeed, I welcome this discussion and encourage students to see me in advance of any assignment about which they have doubts or questions. It is a course requirement that students read the University's Academic Integrity Policy.

HELPFUL SOURCES

APSA Style Manual for Political Science. 2006. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.

Becker, Howard S. 2007 (2nd ed.). *Writing for Social Scientists*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008 (3rd ed.). *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.