

WASHINGTON COLLEGE
Department of Political Science
CHESTERTOWN, MARYLAND 21620

May 1, 2013

TO: Junior Political Science Majors

FROM: Christine Wade, Interim Chair

SUBJECT: Senior Capstone Experience- Changes for AY 13-14

The presentation of an in-depth, substantial research paper during the senior year is the special graduation requirement for all political science majors. This memorandum discusses the purpose of the senior capstone experience and provides an explanation of the methods and deadlines for fulfilling it.

In the academic setting, the writing process represents a crucial learning tool as well as a means of communication. In other words, there is a direct correlation between clear thinking and good writing. One important purpose of a student-initiated, long-term research project is to provide all political science majors with resources for strengthening their academic growth by developing the ability to use writing as a way of discovering and developing their ideas and communicating those ideas effectively to others. In our complex society this developing process of intellectual maturity is vitally necessary for communication.

A senior research experience (SCE), as required by the Department of Political Science for all its majors, is one wherein students either independently pursue topics covered in class lectures and assigned readings in greater depth or explore topics beyond their regular coursework. Unlike essentially passive approaches to learning such as reading or listening to lectures, the SCE actively involves the student in a long-term, substantial project of research and writing. Using reading, writing, research and discussion (with the faculty advisor and others) interchangeably and regularly, students gain the necessary skills to develop reading and writing fluency, as well as analytical rigor.

Political Science majors are required to write a thesis, which should be a minimum of 30 pages, and will then choose, with the guidance of their SCE advisor, whether to present that research as a poster presentation or in the form of a short-form writing project, which includes a synopsis and op-ed style piece.

The SCE will be given a **letter grade** as students will be expected to complete numerous learning objectives that relate to the SCE. Please see the attached "Political Science Grading Rubric: Learning Objectives" for more specific information as to the specific objectives political science faculty consider when evaluating student performance on the thesis portion of the SCE.

To help assure successful completion of the department's senior capstone experience, you are required to heed the following procedures and to meet specific deadlines as you move toward the completion of your SCE.

1. **By September 16, 2013.** Submit to your SCE advisor a **detailed outline** of your thesis (**proposed subdivisions thereof, in outline format**), accompanied by an **updated bibliography** of sources you have determined to be useful and available. It is expected that this document will reflect significant progress beyond the proposal submitted in May. **You should arrange for periodic, regularly scheduled meetings with your thesis advisor throughout the fall semester.**
2. **By October 7, 2013.** Submit to your thesis advisor an annotated bibliography containing a minimum of 12 scholarly sources. The annotations should be critical and should summarize the central theme and scope of the work. Annotations should include some information about the author. Who is she/he? What are her/his credentials? You should also compare the work with another you have cited and/or explain how this work supports your research. Annotations should be approximately 150 words each.
3. **October 30, 2013.** Submit to your advisor a partial **draft** your thesis, consisting of no less than 15 pages. The draft should be word-processed (or typed), double-spaced, and should **include footnotes and bibliography.** Any student who fails to provide some evidence of written progress by this date will be reported to the department chair for appropriate action.
4. **By December 2, 2013.** Submit to your advisor a **full draft** your thesis. The draft should be word-processed (or typed), double-spaced, and should **include footnotes and bibliography.** Any student who fails to provide full draft by this date will be reported to the department chair for appropriate action. Thesis advisors will meet with students BEFORE the end of the semester so that students will understand what revisions are necessary to complete a final satisfactory draft of the thesis and will have the opportunity to complete work on the final stages of the thesis during their winter break.
5. **February 15, 2014.** By this date you must submit to your advisor **the complete thesis.** STUDENTS MUST EARN A “C” OR ABOVE TO BE ELIGIBLE TO CONTINUE ON TO THE SECOND PART OF THE SCE REQUIREMENT. THOSE WHO DO NOT WILL BE REQUIRED TO REVISE THEIR WORK TO AN ACCEPTABLE STANDARD, AND WILL BE PENALIZED ONE LETTER GRADE ON THEIR FINAL SCE GRADE. Additionally, students who do not earn a “C” or better on their theses will automatically **forfeit** the presentation option and will be required to complete the short-form writing project in fulfillment of part II of the SCE.

THE REQUIRED MINIMUM LENGTH OF THE RESEARCH PAPER IS 30 PAGES OF ACTUAL TEXT, EXCLUSIVE OF FOOTNOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, AND OTHER APPENDED MATERIAL. The final draft is to be submitted to your advisor via email. It must contain a title page, which includes the full statement of the Washington College Honor Pledge and your signature, as well as a bibliography abstract, and keywords.

After you have been notified that your thesis has been accepted, you must submit an electronic copy to the library, in accordance with instructions that will be provided.

Students who give no clear evidence of serious progress will be reported to the department chair, who, in turn, will advise the Associate Dean and the Registrar that they are in danger of not graduating.

6. March 7, 2014. This is the ABSOLUTE DEADLINE by which to submit the your complete thesis. NO GRACE PERIOD WILL BE GRANTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. Any student who does not complete the senior capstone experience—either because a completed thesis was judged unacceptable or because a thesis was simply not completed in time—will not be allowed to graduate at the May commencement. **THERE WILL BE NO EXCEPTION TO THIS RULE.**

7. April 7, 2014. Deadline for Part II of the SCE. Poster Presentations and Symposium. Students who have selected the poster option will participate in a symposium on this date. Those who have selected the short-form writing project must submit those to their advisors no later than 4:30pm that day. **This is the ABSOLUTE DEADLINE by which to submit part II of the SCE. NO GRACE PERIOD WILL BE GRANTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. Regardless of which option majors choose, all seniors are required to attend the symposium. Please plan accordingly, as there will be no exceptions.**

8. Period before examination week. During this period your advisor will evaluate your SCE and make the determination of its acceptability and determine a final letter grade for the SCE.

Students are reminded that plagiarism in any form will be severely punished. Any evidence of willful plagiarism will be grounds for failure – which would require a repeat of the SCE in a future semester.

First-semester seniors who hope to complete their work in December 2013 and any senior who will not be in residence during either semester of the senior year should see the department chair to make alternative written arrangements for completion of the SCE.

Honors Thesis

Students who wish to attempt an honors SCE, as an alternative to the regular senior SCE, must make their intention known to their advisor no later than October 1, 2013. Students must have a GPA of 3.5 in their major to apply for honors consideration. The department expects that an honors thesis will involve the use of primary sources and reflect an element of originality in analysis, interpretation, or evaluation. The advisor must approve the project and agree to supervise the honors thesis, and a detailed outline of the thesis must be distributed to all faculty in the department by December 1, if not before. Papers submitted after this deadline will be treated as

ordinary theses. A student who has decided to attempt an honors thesis may change his or her mind at any time and switch to the preparation of a regular senior thesis. **No one, however, will be permitted to select the honors option after October 1, 2013.** Students who are candidates for honors on the thesis will make a public presentation on their project at the April 7 Departmental symposium, during which they will answer questions from the department. All members of the department will participate in the determination of whether or not a thesis is worthy of honors. Those students who are successful will receive a grade of Pass with Honors in addition to the letter grade (as determined by the advisor of the thesis). Students who do not earn honors will still receive a letter grade as determined by the advisor of the thesis. **Students who wish to graduate with Honors in Political Science must earn honors on the senior thesis, as well as achieving a GPA of 3.5 in all political science courses.**

Double Majors

If a student wishes to pursue a double major, he or she should coordinate with the chairs of Political Science and the other department involved. If the capstone experience in the other department is a thesis or written work product, and that department agrees, the student may pursue a joint project that results in two overlapping versions of the paper, tailored for the respective departments. If the capstone experience in the other department is something other than a thesis or research paper, then the student will have to complete two separate capstone experiences.