

DISSERTATION WORKSHOP
POLI 511, FALL 2004
TUESDAY, 1:30-4:30 PM, 207A SEWALL HALL

INSTRUCTORS:

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COURSE GOALS:

This course is intended to serve as a forum in which students can make significant progress on their dissertation projects and receive constructive feedback on their work. Students have two primary responsibilities: (1) to take advantage of the opportunity to advance their own research and (2) to assist other class members in advancing their research. We hope that when you leave this course, you will be well on your way to a strong dissertation and will have developed valuable skills in evaluating other projects that will help you to be a good mentor and valuable colleague in the future.

While our specific research goal for each student will differ depending on the stage that he or she begins at, at a minimum we expect each student to complete the part of the dissertation that motivates the project and defines the key theoretical concepts to be used. We hope that each of you will have a prospectus largely completed by the end of the semester. Some of you will need to apply for dissertation grants, and thus may concentrate on producing grant proposals. The primary requirement, however, is that every student continue to make solid progress toward completing his or her research project.

Another goal we have for each student is to gain experience in commenting critically on your colleagues' work. This is an important part of your professional life as scholars—you will be asked to serve as professional reviewers for journals, as discussants at conferences, and as mentors to your own students on their projects. In addition, the most valuable colleagues are those who are willing and able to help others make their work better. You must invest in one another's work to be successful in this course. Do so with respect and intellectual honesty. In addition, please respond to all criticism of your own work as a professional—use it as springboard to improve your project.

EVALUATION:

Your grade for this course will be pass/fail. You can only fail this course by not turning in written work on time, not commenting usefully on other work, and not being prepared for class discussions.

We will be very serious about this. Since the whole class will be about discussing your work, the class will not be successful if you do not make assignments available on time or if you do not read and think carefully about your colleagues' work.

CLASS SESSIONS AND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

During the class sessions, we will usually focus on student work rather than other readings. As the need arises, we may assign additional reading or assignments to the group or to individual students.

During the first class meeting, we will hear a short presentation by each student that will tell us at what stage he/she is in the project and what he/she thinks the project will contribute to which bodies of knowledge. This discussion will result in student specific assignments for the next two meetings. In the following meetings, we will generally hear from (and receive written work from) three or four students. After each presentation, we will agree on the next assignment that the presenter is responsible for. Students should expect to present at least every other week. Written work for presenters must to be made available to all your colleagues and instructors no later than **Monday at noon**.

We will review these written assignments in class in great detail in an effort to help the author improve the research and its presentation. Do not be surprised to have your writing put on an overhead and the question posed: "What is [the student] trying to say? How could he or she do it more effectively?" Be prepared to have every aspect of your project scrutinized, with the goal of helping you to identify areas of weakness and strengthen them.

In addition to completing your written assignments related to your own research project, each student is also required to prepare written comments on the projects of the other students in the course. Each student must write a review of the new work completed by each of the week's presenters before the class meets. We intend for these comments to range from the very broad to the quite specific, including discussions about writing style and the most effective way to communicate a particular idea. Work hard to make your comments constructive. In other words, try not only to identify the areas that you think need improvement, but to offer suggestions for ways the author can improve them. Good reviewers don't just provide a gut reaction—I like it or I don't—but can explain clearly to an author what would make the project better—what weaknesses need to be removed and how one might do that. This takes a lot of time and effort; you should prepare to invest heavily in your colleagues' work. Developing strong reviewing skills, however, will make you a very valuable member of the scholarly community. These written comments must be circulated to other class members and instructors by **10:00 AM on Tuesday**. Presenters should review these written comments before the class meeting.

During the class meeting, we will assign one student who is not presenting to take minutes of the discussion related to each project, including writing down the agreed assignment for the next scheduled presentation. These minutes must be circulated to all class members and instructors within twenty-four hours after the class meeting. We will refer to these minutes in evaluating the next submitted work on the project.

SPECIAL PROVISIONS:

Students with documented disabilities who require special accommodations should express their needs during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential. Students with disabilities must also contact Disability Support Services in the Ley Student Center. The Department of Political Science is happy to do whatever we can to assure each student full and rewarding participation in classes.

EMAIL CONTACTS:

Please send your written work (by 12:00 pm Monday) and your comments (by 10:00 am Tuesday) to these addresses:

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