

MEMORANDUM:

TO: Doug Deal, Director, General Education

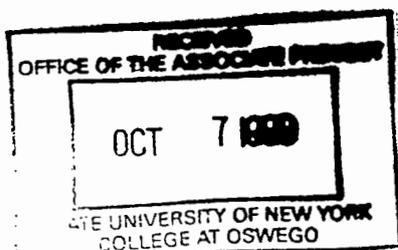
FROM: Bruce Altschuler, Chair, Department of Political Science

DATE: October 6, 1999

SUBJECT: POLITICAL SCIENCE'S WRITING PLAN

When the Political Science writing plan was approved it required students to take POL 203, POL 497 and three additional upper division writing designated courses which assign papers making up at least 50% of the grade. Since then we have added or revised five additional courses which meet those criteria and would like to add them to our list of designated writing courses. They are:

POL 303, Ancient and Medieval Political Thought
POL 309, International Law
POL 313, Modern Political Thought
POL 319, International Organization
POL 359, Nation State and Global Order.



Political Science Department's plan for writing across the curriculum

Draft:

I. Introduction and Rationale

Politics uses writing to communicate information necessary to public policy, to express ideas, beliefs and values, to contest alternative viewpoints. Political Science as a discipline seeks to understand, interpret, analyze, and criticize these political texts. At Oswego, Political Science addresses itself to several constituencies: ^① those who will become practitioners of politics in its various forms (government officials, policy advocates, lobbyists, community organizers, ^② journalists, etc.); ^③ those who will become scholars of Political Science; and those who will become citizens interested in the effects of political power on their lives. The need to address these multiple constituencies guides our departmental writing program.

The varied nature of political writing suggests several implications for the teaching of writing as part of Political Science. Perhaps most important is that writing political texts and writing about them are closely connected to the skills for **reading** political texts. Any writing program must emphasize the ability to understand, analyze, and interpret the various kinds of political writing – speeches, government studies, policy reports, legal briefs, propaganda, press statements, scholarly monographs, etc.. Since politics involves advocacy as well, a writing program in Political Science must involve the teaching of research skills and the ability to present clear, well-organized arguments. Critical thinking, then, is not separate from writing, and therefore the Critical Thinking in Politics course will be the first required writing course for Political Science majors.

Political Science is also an important field within a broader liberal arts education. Politics pervades the institutions, organizations, and practices of civil

society in which most Oswego graduates will live and work. Therefore, a writing program in Political Science must give students the ability to recognize and decode the ways in which politics is interpolated into everyday life. In so far as Political Science is significant in the more general education of citizens who possess the ability, if they choose, to participate actively in political debates and contesting political power, it must give students the ability to read and write political texts.

II. Writing Goals

1. Learn to read and critically analyze forms of writing common in politics, including government documents, policy position papers, historical and theoretical narratives.
2. Learn to distinguish and use primary and secondary sources.
3. Learn to write research papers, as well as analytic and argumentative essays.
4. Learn to communicate ideas and interpretations clearly to others.
5. Learn to summarize and synthesize information from different sources.
6. Learn to recognize and interpret the political dimensions of symbolic discourses in print media as well as visual, virtual, and aural media (e.g. television news, popular culture, the internet).
7. Learn how to document sources properly in research.

III. Writing Program Objectives

It is important that reading, writing, and analytic skills be continually reinforced throughout the student's college career. While not every course in

Political Science is designated a General Education writing course, nearly all require some writing consistent with the particular content and format of the course. In order to ensure that all Political Science majors develop adequate skills, required writing courses range from introductory level to advanced seminar. Students must complete POL 203 and POL 497 as part of their General Education writing requirement. They will in addition take three upper-division writing-designated electives, one of which may be taken outside the department.

1. Lower-Division Writing Course. POL 203, "Critical Thinking in Politics" introduces students to the basic vocabulary of political theory and to the analysis of various kinds of political discourse. It is the department's introductory level writing-designated course, required of all Political Science majors. The course directly and explicitly introduces the basics of research, critical analysis, argument, organization, and presentation, and gives students practice and feedback in argumentative essays. As such, it is designed to provide students with reading, writing, critical, and argument skills necessary for their later Political Science, and general liberal arts courses. It will involve several short critical essays, a research project (which will be revised and resubmitted), and analytic exercises.

2. Upper-Division Writing-Designated Electives. Political Science majors will choose 3 upper-division writing-designated courses from the following list. These courses will involve either short writing exercises appropriate to the substance of the course (policy papers, descriptive essays, analytic essays, legal briefs, etc.) or a research paper, using both primary and secondary sources, which will be commented on and returned to the student for revision. The total writing should be at least 20 pages.

All of these courses will assign either a long paper or a series of short ones with the writing requirement making up at least 50% of the grade.

--Upper division writing-designated courses:

POL 307	European Politics
POL 311	Public Policy Analysis
POL 321	Organizational Politics
POL 327	African Politics
POL 333	Religion and Politics
POL 343	Democratic Theory
POL 345	Constitutional Law
POL 353	Contemporary Political Theory
POL 355	Civil Liberties
POL 357	Latin American Politics
POL 363	Feminist Theory
POL 364	Administrative Law
POL 365	Political Parties
POL 405	Mass Media and Public Opinion

3. Capstone Seminar. All Political Science majors during their senior year (and with exception during their junior year) will take POL 497, "Seminar in Political Science." This course involves substantial, individual research resulting in a single seminar paper of approximately 30 pages in length or several shorter essays. Research will be conducted under the supervision of the course instructor, and will be reviewed by her/him at several stages in the research and writing process. The course will also involve presentation and defense of the research findings and argument. This requirement can be met by writing an Honors thesis.