JUNIOR SEMINAR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYSIS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE.

This course is the first part of the two-part Capstone sequence in Political Science. The goals for this semester are to review and discuss some of the different approaches to Political Science generally, explore a variety of research designs used by Political Scientists today, and ultimately to have students develop a research question and design/approach which will guide their capstone project to be finished in the Fall semester. (This latter project will be in the form of an article in a Political Science research journal.) In pursuit of these goals, the semester will be organized into three broad sections. We begin with a relatively quick review of some of the major approaches to the discipline of Political Science; these approaches explore the issue of what counts as knowledge in the study of politics and how to attain it. The second section is a more in depth review of some of the major varieties of research design used in political research today, with examples of the kind of scholarship produced with each design. The goal here is to help each student frame a research question and decide upon a research design that will best help explore that question. In the third section we will focus on writing a polished research proposal, through a combination of one-on-one and group sessions. The creation of such a proposal is the main aim of this course.

OUTCOMES:

By the end of the semester, students will be expected to demonstrate the following abilities:

- An understanding of the main debates regarding the discipline of Political Science.

- The ability to explain the strengths and weaknesses of the major forms of Research Design used in contemporary Political Science scholarship.

- The ability to develop and complete a coherent Research Proposal for a Capstone research project, including a clear research question, an appropriate research design, and a plan for completion of the research project.

READING:

There are three texts required for this class, and they are available at the College bookstore:

Akan Malici and Elizabeth S. Smith, eds., Political Science Research in Practice. (Routledge)

The Lowndes, et al. book is our main guide to general approaches to Political Science, the Malici/Smith book is a practical review of different research designs, and Baglione’s book is a very good step by step approach to developing a research paper. Additional reading – in the form of journal articles that illustrate different research designs – will be assigned over the course of the semester.

COURSE OUTLINE:

The following outline is meant as a general guide. We will adjust the readings and topics as our discussions progress and especially in light of the kinds of topics and projects students seem to be interested in. (This is particularly true of the second half of the semester.)

[Note: Below I refer to the Malici and Smith book as “M&S” and the Lowndes, et al. book as “T&M” (for Theories and Methods).]

A) What is Political Science? Here we will review the ongoing debates regarding the goals, purposes, nature, and role of the discipline of Political Science. These debates can get a bit esoteric at times, but the underlying questions concern the nature and role of political knowledge and analysis in political life…especially in a democracy.

January 16 – Course Introduction: The Structure and Aims of the PS Capstone.

January 18 – What is Political Science and Why (and How) Should We Do It?
Reading: M&S, chapters 1 and 2.
T&M, chapter 1.

January 23 – Major Approaches to PS I – Behavior and Institutions.
Reading: T&M, chapters 2 and 4.

January 25 – Major Approaches to PS II – Rational Choice and Normative Theory.
Reading: T&M, chapters 3 and 10.

B) Research Design in Political Science. In this section we review the variety of approaches to research that characterizes contemporary Political Science. Broadly speaking, these can be grouped into qualitative or quantitative approaches, but the distinction is not as clear as it often seems and does not necessarily map easily onto the different approaches to the discipline. The goal here is to start thinking about a topic for research and a research design most appropriate to your question.

Reading: T&M, chapters 13 and 14.
February 1-6 – Qualitative Methods (II): Case Studies.  
**Reading:** T&M, chapter 16; M&S, chapter 3.

February 8-13 – Qualitative Methods (III): Field Research and Interviewing.  
**Reading:** T&M, chapter 5; M&S, chapters 4 and 5.

February 15 – Discussion: Student Research Questions.  
**Reading:** Baglione, chapters 1 and 2  
*[IMPT: Read well before this class. We will be discussing your initial ideas for a research question/project.]*

February 20 – PS Research Design – Quantitative Methods (I).  
**Reading:** T&M, chapter 15, M&S, chapter 6.

**Reading:** M&S, chapter 7. (T&M, chapter 9 is optional)

February 27 – Quantitative Methods (III): Secondary Data Analysis.  
**Reading:** M&S, chapter 8; T&M, chapter 18.

March 1 – Quantitative Methods (IV): Content Analysis.  
**Reading:** M&S, chapter 9

March 3-11 – Spring Break: Students Should Begin Literature Review.

**Reading:** Baglione, chapters 3 and 4.

**Reading:** M&S, chapters 10 and 11; T&M, chapters 6 and 17.

March 27 – Developing Your Research Design.  
**Reading:** Baglione, chapter 6.

March 29-April 2 – Easter Break.

April 3 – Monday Classes Meet.

April 5 – No Class: Professor at Conference.


C) **The Research Paper Proposal.** This section begins by returning to some broad questions – the role of radical alternatives in Political Science, and the ethical challenges of Political Science Research. But most of this section will focus on the writing and polishing of your research paper proposal. Much of this will occur in individual and group sessions.
April 12 – Normative, Ethical, and Practical Considerations in PS Research. 
**Reading:** M&S, chapter 12; T&M, chapter 19.

April 17-May 1 – Proposal Revisions: Discussions and Workshops.

Tuesday, May 3 – Research Paper Proposal Due.

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

The central assignment in this course is to develop an adequate Research Paper Proposal on the basis of which you will write your Capstone Paper for submission near the end of the Fall, 2018 semester. (Yes, we assume that you will work on the paper over the summer break.) I will provide more details on the shape of this Proposal during the semester, but use the following as a starting point:

The capstone proposal will include:

1. A statement of the research topic,
2. At least one testable hypothesis (preferably several),
3. A review of the relevant academic literature related to the topic,
4. A discussion of the methods to be used,
5. Identification of data appropriate to the project’s topic and method.

Proposals should average around 10-12 pages in length.

However, the course will include three other assignments:

- An exam that reviews the material discussed over the first third of the semester.

- Two (2) critical reviews of published Political Science journal articles. Your reviews will identify the key elements of the research design presented in these articles, identify any problems in the research design, and evaluate the persuasiveness of the findings of each article.

More details on each assignment will follow. For now, the general guidelines for course grading are as follows:

- Research Paper Proposal – 50%
- Midterm Exam – 20%
- Critical Reviews – 30% (15% each)

At this point, I hope I do not have to review the College policies on Academic Integrity, etc. But they will be taken very seriously in this course.
HOW TO FIND ME:

Office - 302 Patterson Hall
Office Phone - 724-946-7304
E-Mail – cohenes@westminster.edu

Office Hours – Wednesday, 10 am – 3 pm.
And by Appointment.