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PA190G (WRITING I):
WRITING AND COMMUNICATION FOR GLOBAL POLICY STUDIES
Fall 2011
Wednesdays 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
August 24 – September 21
SRH 3.314

This course, the first step in the writing sequence for the Master of Global Policy Studies degree, explores and develops the writing skills necessary for policy professionals. Students will have weekly opportunities to practice the direct, organized presentation of ideas and evidence in short papers. Students who need help with grammar and punctuation will have the opportunity to sharpen their basic skills, but the class will mainly focus on the principles of policy-oriented composition and style. You will learn to structure your presentation and phrasing so they "sound right" and maximize communication and effectiveness.

Format

Classes will generally start with a presentation and discussion of a key topic in professional writing. In addition, to help improve awareness and appreciation of style and cadence, each class session will feature a short excerpt of writing notable for its elegance and grace. We will also be on the look out for writing excerpts that are notable for their lack of elegance, grace, proper grammar, and other elements of quality writing. As well as reading, analyzing and editing writing examples of various qualities is one of the best ways to improve your own writing skills. Accordingly, we will also spend class time editing as a group, in pairs, or individually. For practice, students will also write or edit a short paper each week.

We (Professor Weaver and Tom Vincent) will not be able to review your work prior to submission of the assignment. However, your classmates are a great resource. It goes without saying that everyone should proofread his or her own paper carefully and be sure to turn in his or her own work. But a second (or third) set of eyes on a paper can be tremendously helpful for finding rough or confusing passages and for catching errors, small and large. We will reinforce this habit of peer review in our weekly assignments.

Also, some of our class sessions will involve in-class writing assignments, for which you will need a laptop computer. Please bring your laptop to class, and if you do not have access to one, let us know and we can try to arrange for a loaner from the school.

Grading

Grading will be based on the writing assignments that you submit (80%) and class participation (20%).

The participation grade will depend on both quantity and quality of participation, including your performance as peer reviewer in the peer review assignments. Your participation grade will also reflect the effort and goodwill you put into the exercises in class. I expect students to manage their own schedules, but missing this class will be costly since so much depends on in-class activities. Also, a few of the assignments involve in-class peer editing and are due during the class period, so it is essential that you make every effort to attend class. If you cannot attend for medical or personal reasons, please make every effort to let me know in advance.

There are four writing and/or presentation assignments in this course. Each is worth 20% for a total of 80%. Because this class is only five weeks in length and there is an assignment almost every week, papers must be turned in on time. I will penalize late papers one full grade each day (24 hours) past the due date, *plus* you will lose credit for participation in classroom activities tied to your paper submission.

All papers must be submitted on the course Blackboard site, available at <https://courses.utexas.edu>, under the section entitled “Student Papers.” The due dates and times are listed in the syllabus below. **For the first three assignments, you will submit your draft assignments on BB by 5:00 pm on the Tuesday evening before class.** Then, your assigned peer reviewer will read and prepare comments on the draft, which he or she will share with you at the start of class the next day during the “reflect and edit” portion of the class. You will have a short amount of time in class to absorb these comments and revise your paper before you submit the final version of your assignment on BB. Thus, for each of the first three assignments, there will be two versions posted: a draft (due the night before) and the final version (due in class). Both versions will be posted on BB.

You can upload your assignments in the appropriate spot in the “Discussion Board” section of the BB site. Please upload files in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) so that we can use the tracked changes feature in grading. Please do not submit your papers as .pdf or .rtf, as this interferes with the editing process. We will strive to return all assignments no later than one week after their submission. **Please also name your files in the following manner, e.g. “Weaver-Assignment1(Draft)-PA190GFa2011.docx” or “Weaver-Assignment1(Final)_PA190GFall2011.docx”.** This will help us keep track of the assignments for course evaluation purposes, as well as the MGPS program’s Performance Based Assessment requirements.

Required Book (available at the UT Bookstore):

William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White. 2000. *The Elements of Style, 4th Edition*. New York: Longman Press.

Other readings will be posted to the course Blackboard site.

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

I. Wednesday, August 24: Introduction

Please read:

William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White. 1999. *The Elements of Style, 4th Edition*. New York: Longman Press.

** Pay particular attention to both Chapter 2 on Principles of Composition and Chapter 5 on Style. The Introduction is also helpful because it explains the overall emphasis of the book. You should all know and follow the various rules of usage and avoid the common mistakes discussed in the book (see Chapters 1 and 4). This may require study. You might come to class with an idea about which rules are your "favorites" or the ones on which you need to concentrate most.

George Orwell. 1946. "Politics and the English Language." Available at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm>

"How to Write in Plain English." From the Plain English Campaign. Available at <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html>. (Also on BB)

Recommended (especially if you find the passive voice confounding): <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/passivevoice.html>

For fun, read:

Website for PlainLanguage.com. See especially the "Humor" section. Available at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/humor/index.cfm>

In-class activities:

- Discuss good and bad examples of writing
- Reflections on your own writing
- Discuss *The Elements of Style* and key examples
- In-class editing exercise.

Assignment 1 (due next Tuesday by 5:00 pm on BB):

Please edit Assignment 1 (posted on Blackboard). Post your edited assignment on BB no later than Tuesday, August 30 at 5:00 pm. Then bring the edited assignment to class (as an electronic file, so please bring a laptop if you have one, or ask for us to arrange for a loaner to be available). You will edit, and then resubmit, the assignment during class on Wednesday, August 31.

Please note that proper editing may require much more than simply fixing grammar, word choice or punctuation within each sentence. Careful editing often entails restructuring of the entire document, including rearranging sentences and paragraphs, or eliminating them altogether.

II. Wednesday, August 31: Writing with Style and Evidence

Please closely read and take notes:

Daniel Drezner. 2011. "Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy?" *Foreign Affairs*, 90(4): 57-68. [BB]

Please skim:

William Zinsser. 2006. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, Sixth Edition, New York: Harper Perennial: pp. 3-91, 165-77. [BB]

Talitha May. 2010. "A Brief Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism." Austin, LBJ School of Public Affairs, 02 July 2010 <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/writing/plagiarism.pdf>. Accessed 4 August 2010.

In-class activities:

- Examples of good and bad writing in your daily life
- Peer edit and turn in Assignment 1.
- Discuss: use of style and evidence in policy writing; (im)proper ways to use style and cite evidence; how to avoid plagiarism.
- In-class exercise on identifying and evaluating evidence, based upon Drezner's 2011 essay in *Foreign Affairs*.

Assignment 2 (due next Tuesday by 5:00 pm): Deconstruct and evaluate, in three pages or less, the core argument and evidence of one of the following three recent articles (citations below). Your essay should:

- (1) Identify who the author is and who the target audience is for this essay;
- (2) Concisely summarize the author's analytical argument;
- (3) Describe the evidence the author brings to bear to support his argument;
- (4) Provide an evaluation of how well the author anticipates and defends against potential counterarguments, and;
- (5) Briefly provide your assessment of the overall validity and persuasiveness of the author's argument. This should serve as your conclusion.

Your essay should be no longer than three pages, single-spaced, 12-point font. Please note that shorter is often better.

Choose one:

Jeffrey Goldberg. 2011. "Danger: Falling Tyrants." *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2011: 46-54.

James Fallows. 2010. "Dirty Coal, Clean Future." *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 2010: 64-78.

David Rieff. 2011. "Saints Go Marching In." *The National Interest*, 21 June 2011. Available at <http://nationalinterest.org/article/saints-go-marching-5442>

III. Wednesday, September 7: Writing with Style and Evidence, Continued
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Please read prior to class:

Celeste Ward Gventer. 2011. "Interventionism Run Amok." *Foreign Policy*, 10 August 2011. Available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/08/10/interventionism_run_amok. [Also on BB].

Richard Haas. 2011. "Bringing Our Foreign Policy Home" *Time*, 8 August 2011. Available at <http://www.cfr.org/us-strategy-and-politics/bringing-our-foreign-policy-home/p25514>

In-class activities:

- Peer edit and turn in Assignment 2 in class.
- Discuss: What is a normative or prescriptive argument? How might evidence be used differently in a normative or prescriptive argument, as opposed to a purely analytical or predictive argument?
- Discuss Gventer's essay (counterargument)
- Discuss Haas' essay, then read in class and discuss the response by Michael Singh in *Foreign Policy Magazine's Shadow Government*, 26 July 2011. Available at http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/26/restoration_is_not_an_option_why_a_merica_cant_afford_to_lead_from_behind

Assignment 3 (due next Tuesday by 5:00 pm):

Read one of the following opinion-editorial (op-ed) pieces below. Write a 1 page response op-ed (single-spaced) in which you present and defend an argument that opposes or counters the core argument of your selected op-ed (note: this may force you to present and defend an argument that is contrary to your own beliefs). In your response, make sure to correctly identify, summarize and contend against the argument of the selected op-ed. Do not assume that your reader has read the op-ed you are challenging.

Pay attention to the use of evidence in your own response, as well as the op-ed's style and grammar. Be engaging, concise, and persuasive.

Choose one:

David Brooks. 2011. "Smart Power Setback," *New York Times*, 20 June 2011. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/opinion/21brooks.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

Martin Wolf. 2011. "Europe Should Not Control the IMF," *Financial Times*, 24 May 2011. [BB]

Joseph Stiglitz. 2011. "The Ideological Crisis of Western Capitalism." Project Syndicate, 6 July 2011.
Available at <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/stiglitz140/English>

Nuruddin Farah. 2011. "In Somalia, New Famine Born Out of Old Failures," *Washington Post*, 29 July 2011. Available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/in-somalia-a-failure-in-1992-has-led-to-a-famine-today/2011/07/26/gIQAvrdYhI_story_1.html

Zalmay Khalilzad. 2011. "Obama and Karzai Need a Reset." *The National Interest*, 3 August 2011. Available at <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/obama-karzai-need-reset-5697>

IV. Wednesday, September 14: Oral Presentations

Skim:

"We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Powerpoint," *New York Times*, 27 April 2010. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/27/world/27powerpoint.html?ref=world>. Accessed 15 August 2010.

Read and Take Notes on:

Robert Blackwill, "Plan B in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011: 42-50. [BB]

Paul Miller, "Finish the Job," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2011: 51-65. [BB]

[**Note:** Carefully read the two *Foreign Affairs* articles, and bring copies of them with you to class. They present contrasting positions on Afghanistan policy that will form the basis of our in-class exercise today.]

In-class activity:

- Peer edit and turn-in Assignment 3.
- Discuss the elements of a good oral presentation.
- Watch and critique examples of oral and visual presentations.

- In-class writing and presentation exercise, based on the Afghanistan policy debate from the two *Foreign Affairs* articles. [This exercise will also serve as a “practice run” of sorts for Week Five’s in-class writing assignment].

No take-home writing assignment.

V. Wednesday, September 21: Writing Under Pressure

Required Reading:

Susan Doyle. (undated). “How to Write a Policy Brief.” Available at <http://web.uvic.ca/~sdoyle/E302/Notes/WritingBriefingNotes.html>.

Susan Doyle. (undated). “How to Write a Policy Recommendation.” Available at <http://web.uvic.ca/~sdoyle/E302/Notes/Policy%20Recommendation.html>.

In-class activities:

- Discuss: What are the elements of a good policy brief and policy recommendation? How can you quickly gather background information for your policy brief? What are some tips for writing effective policy briefs under time pressure?
- In-class exercise writing policy briefs under time pressure.

Assignment #4: In-class Policy Briefing exercise, due at 12:00 today (end of class):

For the last two hours of class, you will assume the role of a Legislative Assistant to Senator Kate Weaver, Chairperson of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee. You will watch a short video in class and then write a one-page policy brief, with recommendations, on the subject of the video. Address this policy brief to Senator Weaver. The brief should comprehensively and concisely summarize what you just saw in the video, and should provide key policy recommendations for actions to be taken on the issue by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As with most Senators, Senator Weaver is self-important, unreasonably demanding, and exacting in her expectations of the style and content of memos written by her staff (which may explain why she has such high staff turnover, with the average tenure of her staff being only 5 weeks – by strange coincidence, the same timeframe as this class....)

You may need to do some impromptu Internet research to provide sufficient background to this memo. You cannot really prepare for this exercise, other than to be up to date on current events and to think through what your “go-to” resources might be for current news and analysis on global affairs. While you will be required to sign the memo, it should be written in the third person and in a professional (not personal) style. The policy brief should be no longer than 1-2 pages and should be carefully edited for content, style and grammar. A format for the policy brief will be provided in class.