

Capstone Senior Paper Plan

Advisor: William W. Franko

Student:

Date:

Project Overview

The senior capstone paper is an independent research project that demonstrates a student's ability to think critically, integrate research materials from multiple sources, and communicate in writing in accordance with the standards of academic political science.

As your faculty advisor for the project, I expect your finished product to be structured as a traditional political science research paper. This involves developing a research question, reviewing the literature related to your question, discussing the theoretical expectations of your study, designing a testable hypothesis based on the existing literature and theory, developing a research design that will be used to test your hypothesis, and discussing your results and the implications of your research. Papers should be a minimum of 30 pages in length with double-spaced lines, one-inch margins (i.e., top, bottom, left, and right), and 12 point, Times New Roman font.

I am assuming that you have become familiar with the research process as a political science major, but I realize you may want some additional guidance as you develop your project. If this is the case, I highly recommend reviewing Kellstedt and Whitten's *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* and the UNC Writing Center's political science handout (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/political-science/>).

Stage 1. Research Question, Hypothesis, and Bibliography

Due Date 1:

Write a research proposal that will summarize your general research question. The research question should state the puzzle or issue that you will address and try to better understand in your paper. Explain why the topic you are interested in is important and touch on how your research will advance our understanding of the topic.

Based on your research question, develop the hypothesis (or hypotheses) you will be testing in

your research paper. Clearly identify the dependent and independent variables in your study and state the null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis for each relationship you plan on testing.

Compile a bibliography that includes all of the scholarly work you intend to use in your study. The main goal is to thoroughly cover the topics you are studying by addressing all of the relevant literature. These citations will mainly be journal articles and books, and should come from established scholarly journals and publishers.

Stage 2. Literature Review and Theory

Due Date 2:

Write an overview of the existing scholarly studies related to the issue you are studying. The purpose of the literature review is to show how your research fits into the broader literature and should develop the context of your project. The review should make a clear connection between previous work and your research. Make sure you discuss the similarities and differences of the current literature and emphasize how your study will improve the research that already exists. The review will largely consist of the work you identified in your bibliography, but will likely expand on this list as you discover additional relevant research during the writing process.

Develop a theory that motivates your study. In general, a theory is “a reasoned and precise speculation about the answer to a research question, including a statement about why the proposed answer is correct. Theories usually imply several more specific descriptive or causal hypotheses (King et al. 1994, 19).” In other words, your theory provides a logical answer to your research question that incorporates past knowledge of the topic, and it serves as the basis for the more detailed hypothesis (or hypotheses) you plan on testing.

Also, make sure you incorporate your research hypotheses in this section of the paper.

Stage 3. Research Design

Due Date 3:

Present a specific research design, a description of the data that will be used to test your hypothesis, and an explanation of how you will measure the concepts central to your study. Make sure you discuss what your unit of analysis will be and why the proposed data will provide appropriate measures of the phenomena you are studying. All of the choices you make related to your design, data, and measures should be justified.

Stage 4. First Draft and Revisions

Due Date 4:

This will be your first attempt at putting it all together, followed by revisions. Your paper should include a strong introduction and conclusion. The introduction should explain the issue your paper is addressing, why the issue is important, how the paper helps us better understand the topic, and give readers a preview of how your research is organized. The conclusion should discuss the implications of your research—for example, how the study will contribute to the broader literature, how your results will influence policy decisions, or what your findings will mean for future research—and give an overall evaluation of the issue you address. You will likely be required to submit multiple revisions based on my feedback.

Stage 5. Final Paper

Due Date 5:

Your final research paper is expected to be proofread, well organized, clearly written, and complete.

Any tables and/or figures included in your paper must be referenced in-text and should be sequentially numbered (e.g., Table 1, Table 2, Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.) in the order they are referred to for the first time. Each table and figure should contain all of the information necessary to allow for a straightforward interpretation without any additional explanation. It is important that all tables and figures are formatted consistently and should be as close to publication quality as possible.