

DRAFT

GENERAL RESEARCH SEMINAR



Instructor: Professor Diascro
E-mail: Jennifer.Diascro@ucdc.edu
Office: Room 324
Phone: 202.974.6352
Office Hours: Wed 3:00p – 4:00p, by appointment

Course Instructor

I am an Associate Academic Director of the University of California’s Washington Program and a political scientist. I earned my BA in political science from the University of California, San Diego (1990), where I grew up. I earned my PhD in political science from the Ohio State University (1995), and was on the faculty at the University of Kentucky (1995-2002) and American University (2002-2010). In 2000-01, I was a Supreme Court Fellow at the US Sentencing Commission in Washington, DC. Most recently, I was a senior director at the American Political Science Association (2011-2015). I’ve authored or coauthored peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and books, on topics related to American judicial politics.

Course Description

Gathering knowledge and learning the truth about the world around us is a fundamental part of human development and progress. While most of us take knowledge and truth for granted, the processes by which we understand our political, social, cultural, physical, biological environment has become particularly salient in the last year – and notably in the last several months – as we’ve been confronted with an ever-increasing post-fact and post-truth world.

[Stephen Colbert coined the term “truthiness”](#) to describe the tendency of people to “go with their gut” rather than facts and evidence in evaluating the world around them. We are all affected by biases that obstruct critical thinking; these biases influence how we hear and understand new information, whether we question assumptions, and how we disentangle opinion from fact.

Challenging these biases is essential to making rational, evidence-based argument and decisions. A primary concern underlying public discourse and policy making about issues such as climate change, organic food, fertilizers, Zika virus, school testing, Brexit, poverty, hunger, gun control, and so many other contemporary issues including the presidential election, is the availability – and the validity and reliability – of evidence to support arguments on one side or another.

This seminar is designed to develop skills required to be a critical observer of and contributor to our world through the use of evidence-based arguments. We will spend the next 10 weeks using critical thinking and argumentation skills to examine a research question related to the work of students’ internship organizations.

Learning Objectives

Goal #1: Students will develop skills to make evidence-based arguments.

Objective #1: Students will write an evidence-based argumentative research paper.

Goal #2: Students will be able to relate their internship experience with the skills and substance learned in their course.

Objective #2: Students will write an argumentative research paper related to the work of their internship organization.

Goal #3: Students will experience a cultural, historical, policy or other event in the District of Columbia that relates to their course.

Objective #3: Students will attend (virtually or in person) at least one congressional or other government briefing, a think tank seminar or lecture, or NGO/advocacy/nonprofit event.

Goal #4: Students will be able to communicate persuasively in writing and orally.

Objective #4: Students will write at least one analytical assignment, and discuss course work in class.

Goal #5: Students will be able to critically examine competing arguments, and use empirical evidence to research and apply theory to practice.

Objective #5: Students will complete several critical thinking and writing assignments.

Course Materials and Accessibility

Among the materials for this course are a combination of scholarly articles, news articles, blog entries, Youtube videos, congressional hearing and other transcripts. Most of the readings are available online (O); others will be available in Dropbox or other location, to be determined. There will be copies of any assigned books on reserve at the 4th floor desk.

****Importantly, I reserve the right to make changes to the course materials as the term progresses. This includes, but is not limited to, adding and subtracting articles and other readings.****

Additionally, the syllabus, descriptions of the course assignments, and other announcements about the course will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Responsibilities and Assignments

- **Attendance:** Attendance is required so please be sure that your internship supervisor understands that you will be in class every Wednesday 10a-1p; on group meeting days, you may be at the Center before 10a and after 1p. Excused absences are usually extraordinary events such as the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or grandparent), personal illness, or a major religious holiday that is not on the [UCDC calendar](#). **You MUST provide written documentation for each of these absences; and for religious holidays, you must submit your excuse two weeks in advance of the absence to be excused.**

On occasion, and with at least 48 hours notice, you may request to be excused for a special internship or other DC event. If granted, it is likely you will be asked to report on your experience in class. For information about missed and late assignments, see below.

- Each *unexcused* absence will lower your final course grade to the next lower grade (e.g. A- will become a B+).
- **In-Class Individual and Group Participation:** Participation is very important for this class, and everyone will be expected to contribute in a substantively meaningful way to the class discussion. There will be in-class individual and group exercises; you may or may not have advanced warning. Also, you should always be ready to be asked for your input on any and all things assigned for class. In-class participation cannot be made up. In the event of an extraordinary event (identified above), you *may* be able to complete a different assignment to earn participation points.
- **Reading Assignments:** All the reading assigned in this syllabus and any added throughout the term is required. This means that you should read all of the material BEFORE the class meeting and be ready to use it for your graded assignments (if relevant) EVEN IF we do not discuss it in class. I reserve the right to change the readings and the schedule if necessary as the term progresses. See the Weekly Schedule below for dates and assignments. You should bring assigned reading to class for discussion.
- **Infographic Assignment:** This is an empirical, evidence-based assignment (Objective #5). Students will choose a current political, social, scientific, or other debate of their choice (unrelated to their research paper), and create an infographic for two sides of the debate. If possible, part of the evidence for this

assignment will come from student attendance at a congressional or government briefing, think tank seminar/lecture, or advocacy event (other than at their internship) in DC (Objective #3). More details will be forthcoming. See the Weekly Schedule below for deadlines.

- **Argumentative Research Paper:** This is a thorough, evidence-based writing assignment related to the work of students' internship organizations (Objective #4 and #5). It will require critical thinking and writing skills to ask an important question, synthesize existing knowledge, collect relevant evidence, and make a compelling argument. **Papers will be written in stages over the course of the term, culminating in the final version due at the end of the term.** More detail will be forthcoming. See the Weekly Schedule below for deadlines.

Grading Standards and Measurement

Individual assignments in this course will be worth various points but converted to a 100 point scale such that an A=100-93%, A-=92-90%, B+=89-87, B=86-83, B-=82-80, etc. **You should understand that only excellent work will earn an A. If the work is good, it will earn a B, and satisfactory work will earn a C.** You will earn Ds and Fs if your work is less than satisfactory or of poor quality. If you fail to complete the work, you will earn a 0 for the assignment. Incompletes will be allowed only under the most exceptional circumstances.

Final course grades will be proportioned as follows:

In-Class Individual and Group Participation	15%
Infographic Assignment	15%
Research Question and Significance (2-3 pages)	10%
Annotated Bibliography (3-5 pages)	15%
Argument (6-8 pages)	15%
Final Paper (15-20* pages)	30%

*Several campuses require 20 page research papers for major or other course credit. Students should check with their campus advisors before turning in a final paper that is less than 20 pages in length.

For Semester students, the total here will account for 85% of your total course grade. The remaining 15% will be the grade you earned in the last four weeks of the term.

For Quarter students, the total here will account for 100% of your total course grade.

According to general university policies, final course grades earned in this class will be worth the following points: A=4.0, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, B=3.0, B-=2.7, C+=2.3, C=2.0, C-=1.7, D=1.0, F=0.

Course Communication Tools

I will use Blackboard, Turnitin, and email for communicating with you this term. Unless you tell me otherwise, I will be communicating with you using the email address that you included as your primary address when you enrolled for classes. You are responsible for checking your email and Turnitin regularly for messages and feedback. You are responsible for letting me know if you change your email address.

Turnitin may be used for submitting and returning graded writing assignments. We will discuss in class how to create an account if you don't already have one, and how to use the software. Read more about academic misconduct below. Also, I encourage students to use the [Purdue University OWL](#) site for very accessible and useful information about writing styles and rules.

Policy on Attendance

See Course Responsibilities and Assignments (above).

Policy on Missed and Late Assignments

Assignment deadlines are firm, and makeup assignments are permitted only for excused absences (see above). You may submit assignments early, but I do not guarantee early feedback.

Missed assignments. Assignments can be made up only for excused absences (see above). Be aware that you may be asked to turn in a written assignment *before* the deadline, and the makeup assignment may be different than the original assignment. If there is some other reason for you to miss an assignment (e.g. a previously scheduled family engagement), you must inform me within the first week of classes *to be considered* eligible to make up the assignment; this is not a guarantee that you will be allowed to make up the assignment. If you do not meet these conditions, you will receive a zero for the assignment. **IMPORTANT:** You should discuss make up assignments with me as soon as you are aware of them in office hours or by email; I will not discuss these arrangements in class.

Late assignments. All assignments are considered due at the beginning of each class period, even if I don't formally ask for them until later in the class or if they are due through Turnitin. Assignments submitted after the time and date at which they are due, and that are NOT accompanied by an acceptable excuse (as described previously) will be addressed as follows. **For every 24 hour period after the date and time that the assignment is due (including weekends), the grade received for the assignment will be decreased by two (2) parts of a grade.** The 24 hour periods include weekends. For example, if you turn in an A quality assignment on Friday before 11:00a, after it was due on Wednesday at 11:00a, then the assignment will be 2 days late and you will earn a B- on that assignment. If you turn in a B quality assignment at that same time, you will earn a C-.

Statement on Weather Emergencies

In the event of a weather emergency, UCDC follows the [federal government's decisions](#) about delays and closures. We will cross that bridge if/when we get there!

Policy on Academic Misconduct

UCDC has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of dishonesty. Students should refer to their home campus Student Code of Conduct for the regulations that apply to them. The burden is on each student to know what behaviors constitute cheating and plagiarism. Ignorance of these behaviors is not an adequate defense.

Policy on Classroom Conduct

I'm sure it goes without saying that we all must treat others in class with respect. We do not have to agree, but being polite and thoughtful in our interactions with each other is absolutely required. Also, in consideration of your classmates and me, you should observe the following rules: (1) DO set your cell phones to silent and answer them only in an emergency (e.g. child care or medical for you or an immediate family member). If you leave class to answer a call, you may not return to class until we break. (2) Do NOT use a laptop computer, other electronic device, or audio taping equipment unless you have approval from me. (3) Do NOT arrive late to class unless you have advanced approval; you may arrive during the break for the second part of class. (4) Do NOT do homework for other classes or read material not related to this class. For any of these infractions, you will be warned only once; after the warning, you may be excused from class and will be docked 2 percentage points of your total course grade for each infraction at the end of the term.

[Statement on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence](#)

Click on this link for the University of California statement on sexual harassment and sexual violence.

Students who wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct should contact UCDC's Counseling Services at UCDCCounseling@gmail.com. To report sexual misconduct or ask questions about UCDC policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, please contact the UCDC Title IX administrator, Josh Brimmeier (202-974-6214 or josh.brimmeier@ucdc.edu). Because the University of California is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, the confidentiality of reported misconduct cannot be guaranteed.

[Statement on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)

Click on this link for the University of California statement on accommodations for students with disabilities.

If you require accommodation for class, please let me know at our first meeting (if not earlier) so the necessary arrangements can be made.

Course Schedule

Session 1: Why Does Evidence-Based Problem-Solving Matter?

- Achenbach, Joel. 2015. "[The Age of Disbelief.](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2015/03/science-doubters/achenbach-text)" *National Geographic*, March: 34-47. (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2015/03/science-doubters/achenbach-text>, accessed August 11, 2015) (O)
- Konnikova, Maria. "I Don't Want to be Right." *The New Yorker*, May 16, 2014. (From <http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/i-dont-want-to-be-right>, accessed August 7, 2015) (O)
- Newman, Eryn 2014. "Psychology Explains Why People Are So Easily Duped: The Science of Truthiness." *Washington Post*. June 30, 2014. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/06/30/psychology-explains-why-people-are-so-easily-duped/?utm_term=.1eee31010fc4, accessed August 14, 2016) (O)

Session 2: Exploring Ideas and Asking Questions

- Henderson, Mark. 2013. *The Geek Manifesto: Why Science Matters*. Random House: London, England. Chapters 1-3: pp. 11-95.
- Giles, Jim. 2011. "Social science lines up its biggest challenges." *Nature*, Vol. 470: 18-19.
- Javeline, Debra. 2014. "The Most Important Topic Political Scientists Are Not Studying: Adapting to Climate Change." *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 2: 420-434.

Session 3: Group Meetings (No Class Session) : Research Question and Significance

Session 4: Reviewing Literature, Using Citations, and Developing a Bibliography

- Plagiarism, The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/plagiarism/>, accessed January 6, 2017) (O)
- Literature Reviews, The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/>, accessed January 6, 2017) (O)
- Purdue University OWL (Online Writing Lab) (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>, accessed January 6, 2017) (O)

EXTRACURRICULAR: Research Orientation Session, Time TBD: [Library of Congress](#)

Session 5: Group Meetings (No Class Session) : Literature Review & Bibliography

Session 6: Evidence-Based Arguments

- Frennda, Steven J. et al. 2013. "False memories of fabricated political events." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49: 280-286.

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249804753_False_Memories_of_Fabricated_Political_Events accessed August 14, 2016) (O)

- Kraft, Patrick W., Milton Lodge, Charles S. Taber. 2015. 'Why People "Don't Trust the Evidence": Motivated Reasoning and Scientific Beliefs.' *ANNALS, AAPSS*, 658: 121-133. (<http://ann.sagepub.com/content/658/1/121.full.pdf+html> , accessed August 14, 2016) (O)
- Ball, Philip. 2015. "The Trouble With Scientists." *Nautilus*, May 14, 2015. (<http://nautil.us/issue/24/error/the-trouble-with-scientists>, accessed August 14, 2016) (O)

Session 7: Group Meetings (No Class Session): Argument

Session 8: More on Evidence and Argument

- Chapman, Daniel A. and Brian Lickel. 2016. "Climate Change and Disasters: How Framing Affects Justifications for Giving or Withholding Aid to Disaster Victims." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 7(1): 13-20.
- Taber, Charles S. and Milton Lodge. 2016. "The Illusion of Choice in Democratic Politics: The Unconscious Impact of Motivated Political Reasoning." *Political Psychology* 37(S1): 61-85.

EXTRACURRICULAR: Seminar on Research Methods, Time TBD: [Pew Research Center](#)

Session 10: Group Meetings (No Class Session)

Session 11: Infographic Presentations