

**GENERAL RESEARCH SEMINAR:
Developing Critical Writing and Thinking Skills
Through Independent Research**

**Fall 2020
September – December 2020
Day/Time TBD**



Instructor: Professor Diascro (she/her/hers)
Office Hours: Tues 2:00p – 3:30p, by appointment

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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

[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. Challenging these biases is essential to making rational, evidence-based arguments and decisions. A primary concern underlying public discourse and policy making about issues such as COVID-19, climate change, school testing, immigration, poverty, gun control, mass incarceration, and so many other contemporary issues is the availability, validity, reliability, and utility of evidence to support arguments on one side or another.

We will spend this term developing and using the critical thinking and writing skills necessary to examine and propose solutions to real-world problems. Students will develop research projects on a topic of their choosing, preferably related to the work of their internship organization. They will work independently and in small groups, if possible, throughout the multi-stage writing process.

Course Requirements

In-Class Individual & Group Participation	20%	
Research Question & Significance (1-2 pages)	15%	Due: Week 3
Annotated Bibliography (3-4 pages)	15%	Due: Week 5
Argument Fundamentals (4-5 pages)	20%	Due: Week 7
Final Research Paper (15-20* pages)	35%	Due: Week 11

*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.

Preliminary Course Schedule

<u>Week 1</u>	Biases and Assumptions: Why Does Evidence-Based Problem-Solving Matter?
<u>Week 2</u>	Exploring Ideas and Asking Questions
<u>Week 3</u>	Group Work & #ShutUpAndWrite: Research Question/Problem and Significance

<u>Week 4</u>	Building Knowledge: Reviewing Literature and Building a Bibliography
<u>Week 5</u>	Group Work & #ShutUpAndWrite: Annotated Bibliography
<u>Week 6</u>	Evidence Matters
<u>Week 7</u>	Group Work & #ShutUpAndWrite: Argument Fundamentals
<u>Week 8</u>	Evidence Matters (cont'd)
<u>Week 9</u>	Group Work & #ShutUpAndWrite: Final Paper
<u>Week 10</u>	THANKSGIVING: No class
<u>Week 11</u>	Writing Beginnings and Endings: Finishing Touches