

Liberal Studies 4800, Senior Capstone Seminar

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Welcome to the Liberal Studies Capstone Seminar!

General Information

This course involves writing and revising a research paper on a topic of your choice, and helping other students with their research papers.

How should you pick your topic? You can draw on your experiences in the Liberal Studies Colloquium and your two chosen Liberal Studies tracks (e.g., Philosophy and Psychology, English and History, etc.). Selecting an individual research topic that synthesizes interests you have developed within your concentrations is smart because you have some experience with it. You will develop this topic through extensive research and writing. You will share your project with your classmates through online Discussion Board, and will exchange detailed feedback with them.

Once you turn in Assignment 1 (see below) you will need to select 10 sources for your paper, which you will discuss in various assignments before you turn in your final draft.

You will turn in **Assignments** by clicking "Turn In Assignments" and then clicking on the link for the Assignment you're turning in.

You may not submit your assignments in ".docx" format, since too many people cannot open that format. Instead, please use ".doc" format. See the "**Saving your files as .doc instead of .docx**" section below for information about how to do this. If you accidentally submit a .docx, it's no big deal-- just save it as a .doc and submit the .doc version as well. That way students who can't open .docx will have a .doc version handy.

You will complete **Discussion Board Tasks** by clicking on your own Personal Discussion Board or the Personal Discussion Boards of your classmates. Depending on which Discussion Board Task you are working on, your job will be to

- (a) attach Assignments to posts on your Personal Discussion Board so your classmates can read them, or
- (b) write feedback on your classmates' Assignments on the Personal Discussion Board of the classmate you are helping, or
- (c) write replies to feedback posted on your Personal Discussion Board by your classmates.

I will set up Personal Discussion Boards after you submit Assignment 1.

Please offer constructive criticism as part of your discussion, and remember to be respectful and polite. This is part of your grade.

When working with **Discussion Boards**, you may need to click "**Collect**" to read everything. Some items sometimes cannot be read on the default display.

Your grades on individual assignments will appear in the "Grade Center" as soon as I input them.

I provide feedback on Assignments 1-8. Please post on the Discussion Board if you are having trouble accessing attachments with comments.

It is your responsibility to keep copies of your work! I do not expect the WPUNJ computers to crash and destroy work that you have submitted, but if they do, I will ask you to resubmit all the assignments you've already submitted.

Getting Help with the Blackboard Software

It is my hope that all of the Blackboard functions you need to use for this class will be fairly self-explanatory.

If you are having trouble with the software, please click on the tab on the top of the screen that reads "Bb Support: Students" and follow the instructions that appear there.

Asking me questions about Assignments, Deadlines, Expectations, Etc.

Please **do not email me general questions about the class**. It is important for me to be able to share answers to general questions about the class with all students, and email isn't a good approach for that.

Instead, please post questions for me on the General Discussion Board, which you can access by clicking "Discussion Board" on the left side of the screen. (This is different from the Personal Discussion Boards. Personal discussion boards are for class work only, not for general questions about the class.)

You may email me directly whenever you have an individual question about your research project, or if you need an extension on a deadline for a legitimate reason.

Getting Started in the Class

Your main project in this class is going to be to write a 3400-word document on a topic of your choice. The topic should be something you have studied in a class before which you'd like to learn more about. You will need to conduct your own research and cite your sources. A lot of your work will be done in discussions with your classmates. Remember that neither I nor your classmates are likely to be experts on the topic you choose. So it will be extremely important to explain all the specialized concepts you're using clearly and in detail. *In this class, you're basically going to be teaching me and your group members about your topic.*

Assignment 1

Your first assignment is to pick your topic and write a 700-word explanation of it, the questions you are going to ask, and how you are going to research it. (You can include a list of sources that you are going to use, but you don't have to do that yet. If you include it, don't count it toward the 700 words.) This assignment will be 5% of your total grade.

Here are some important points to keep in mind:

1) You can use the first two pages that you write as part of the paper.

It's up to you how broadly you define your topic. But it's important to define it in a way that you can usefully discuss in 10 pages. You might consider the availability of sources. If you choose a super-narrow topic, it might be harder to find useful sources.

If you're not sure what you want to write about your topic, then start looking for and reading high-quality sources to get inspiration. Look for articles in good magazines or encyclopedias (no Wikipedia!) or articles in academic journals. You can do all your research online if you want, if you're careful about finding good web-based content (for example, content written by experts with specialized training, not just people with blogs). You can always go to a library (whether at WPUNJ, Mercer, or your local town library) and get help with sources there too. See the "Sources" section below for more advice.

I will give you feedback on your topic choice after you turn in your 700-word explanation of it. But any topic that you know enough about to research is OK. I will help you fine-tune your approach to it as we go forward.

2) I am flexible about everything except plagiarism. That means that if you use text that somebody else wrote, you had better make sure you cite it, or you will get a zero for that assignment. I gave six zeros on a major assignment in my Liberal Studies class last semester, and it was a miserable experience for the students and for me too, since I don't like to give zeros. I don't care what format you use for citations. You can use footnotes or endnotes, or you can just insert the reference into the body of the paper. For example, you could do it like this:

According to William Peabody, "the orange feathers of the towheaded warbler are the most exquisite sight in all of nature" (William Peabody, *An Annoying Naturalist's Musings about Beauty*, Pomposity Press, 1809).

So, just to be super-clear about what I am saying, I really don't care what format you use, I just care that you give me some kind of reference to where you got the words from.

You should also cite your sources when you just read them as background material.

3) Since this class is all online, I can't answer individual emails unless you want to communicate something personal. Please post your questions on the General Discussion Board. For example, if you missed a deadline because of a personal matter, you can email me directly about that. But if it's a question about what I'm looking for in a particular assignment, or about when I'll be giving you grades back on something, please use the discussion board.

Assignment 2

Assignment 2 needs to be 800 words long. You are to describe two source articles about your topic. Half of the writing (400 words) should be about one source, and half (400 words) about the other. The division doesn't have to be exact. The discussion of both articles should be submitted as one document—don't submit two separate documents for the two sources.

Keep in mind that what you write for this assignment can become part of your research paper. You'll have to edit them to smoothly integrate them into the paper, but you can accomplish a lot of work for the paper by doing your best work on the source discussions -- for example, describing the sources in detail, and explaining how they connect to your topic.

Please note that I will grade you on the quality of your sources. You should use articles in respected magazines or academic journals, or academic books. See the "Sources" section below for more information.

Assignment 3

Assignment 3 needs to be 1000 words long. It is a revised and expanded version of Assignment 1. If you'd like to modify or fine-tune your topic based on feedback you've received, this is a good opportunity to do it. If you're happy with your topic, then this is a chance to polish your writing and expand it a little bit. It doesn't have to be dramatically different if you were happy with the grade you got the first time, but if I gave you feedback that something should be different, then you should change it if you want to get a better grade this time. It's also OK to change your focus based on the research that you've done since you turned in assignment 1. Basically it's just a graded opportunity to improve on what you did in assignment 1.

Assignments 4-7

Assignments 4-7 should be 800 words each. Assignments 4-7 are the same as Assignment 2. By the time you turn in Assignment 7, you will have written up summaries of 10 different sources.

Keep in mind that what you write for these Assignments can become part of your research paper. You'll have to edit them to smoothly integrate them into the paper, but you can accomplish a lot of work for the paper by doing your best work on the source discussions -- for example, describing the sources in detail, and explaining how they connect to your topic.

Please note that I will grade you on the quality of your sources. **You should use articles in respected magazines or academic journals, or academic books.** See the "Sources" section below for more information.

Assignment 8

Assignment 7 is a 2000-word rough draft. This is an important grade. See the grading weights at the end for complete information.

You can include all the writing you've already completed, the initial outline as well as the source descriptions, if you're still happy with those projects. If you've changed your mind about your topic, of course, then you should modify what you've already written, and if you got feedback on your sources that said you might want to consider changing them, then you should consider changing them.

The rough draft is not an outline. It should be smooth, comprehensible prose throughout. Don't just cut-and-paste your earlier projects into a series. You need to create smooth connections between them to create one integrated project. You also need to use your very best spelling and grammar. Everything counts in the rough draft and the final paper. You will get a zero if you plagiarize. **Linguistic ineptitudes will not be tolerated.** That means the grammar, syntax and spelling must always be correct, in everything you submit or post!

The rough draft should be a complete essay with proper citations and bibliography, correct grammar and spelling, and an introduction, body, and conclusion. It should be well-organized. You should not use jargon or technical terms without explaining it. You must not plagiarize.

The rough draft is "rough" only in the sense that I will expect you to revise it thoroughly based on my feedback, and expand it, before you turn in the final paper. Please make sure that you have carefully proofread anything before you submit it!

Assignment 9

Assignment 9 is a 3400-word final draft. It should be an expanded version of Assignment 8, including your response to any feedback I have provided on Assignment 8.

Discussion tasks

On **Discussion Tasks**, I grade your contribution to your classmates' work. You need to actively discuss the projects of all of your classmates and respond to their comments on your own project. Please try to get involved with the details of their project. It's a friendly, supportive thing to say that you think their topics are important and interesting. But that's not enough. You can be friendly and supportive and still go deeper into the details of their projects. Exchanging projects with your group members is a way to get to know them and their interests, and to learn something new about the topics they are researching. Please see the syllabus for length requirements.

Please only post the requested assignments to the Personal Discussion Boards. The schedule at the end of the syllabus clearly specifies which assignments are to be posted to your discussion.

Sources

Please note that I will grade you on the quality of your sources. **You should use articles in academic journals, academic books, or high-quality newspapers or magazines.** Some sources are not appropriate for an academic paper even if they seem to focus on your topic. For example, if you are studying child development, you may find appropriate sources in education journals or psychology journals, but you will get a poor grade if you use articles from "parenting magazines." I have nothing against parents, being one myself, but parenting magazines are targeted at the general public and typically present watered-down information that can be understood by people without college-level training. You are expected to work at a higher level.

You have to use at least 10 different sources, but you can use more if you want.

The Cheng Library has huge electronic archives of excellent academic articles on all the topics you are studying. (The library website also has tips on how to communicate with the library to get help if you need it, and you can help each other with this too--leave a request for tips on the General Discussion Board.) So when I see that you've chosen a website that's intended for the general public, or a website that doesn't cite its sources or give an author's name, I worry that you haven't tried hard enough.

You can always go to a library (whether at WPUNJ, Mercer, or your local town library) and get help with sources there too.

If you decide, based on my feedback, that you shouldn't use some of the sources you initially submit, you can change them. I won't re-grade any of the source assignments, but when I grade your rough draft and final draft, it will boost your grade if you've replaced problematic sources with better ones.

If you've gotten feedback that you need better sources, the best place to go for them is the library. But you don't have to go there in person--our library has fantastic on-line resources.

Here's how to get started looking for on-line sources at the library.

- 1) go to <http://www.wpunj.edu/library/>
- 2) Click on "Resource Guides by Subject" (in the right column under the horizontal yellow bar that says "Find Books & Media in the Library").
- 3) Click on the resource guide that is most relevant for your topic.
- 4) Read over the resources guide to start getting familiar with it.
- 5) go back to <http://www.wpunj.edu/library/>
- 6) Click on "new set of tutorials" --it's in the middle of the screen toward the bottom.

7) Watch the videos for "Searching Journals and Periodicals", "Scholarly v. Popular", and read the PowerPoint for "Citing the Information You Use".

8) Go back to the resource guide and read it thoroughly.

9) Use your knowledge to get good sources!

10) If you want additional help, go to the "Ask a Question" page:

<http://www.wpunj.edu/library/ask-a-question-2.dot>

There are several ways available here to get extra help. The library staff is very friendly, understanding, and supportive. They want you to get familiar with the resources they have to offer as much as I do!

Saving your files as .doc instead of .docx

.docx is the standard file type for the newest version of Microsoft Word, but people who don't have this version can't open them. What you want to do is to save files that you want to share with your group as ".doc" files instead of ".docx". This is easy to do. Open your file, and then go to the menu you use to save, but use the "save as" function instead of "save", and then click "Word 97-2003 document". This will give you a .doc file which you can attach to posts and then be confident that everyone will be able to open them.

If you accidentally submit a .docx, it's no big deal-- just save it as a .doc and submit the .doc version as well. That way students who can't open .docx will have a .doc version handy.

Factors in Grading

On **Discussion Board Tasks**, I grade on whether you write enough, whether you demonstrate a civil, supportive attitude, whether you demonstrate that you have read your group members' work, and whether you use good spelling and grammar. You can be critical and still be civil! This is a very important skill and I hope you will practice it here! Uncritical feedback is not very helpful!

On **Assignments**, I grade you on grammar, spelling, clarity of explanation, organization, depth of analysis, and mastery of concepts.

Late Work

I will accept late assignments, but not late discussion tasks. Please let me know IMMEDIATELY if you expect to miss deadlines. See the "**Schedule**" section below for more information about deadlines.

Assignments: I will deduct 5% of the assignment grade for each day you are late unless you have a legitimate reason for missing the deadline. Please note that I decide what counts as legitimate, and you should expect to document your claims about why you missed the deadline.

Discussion tasks: if you miss a deadline for a discussion task, you throw off your whole class, so you will not get credit for late discussion submissions.

The Role of Class Work in your Grade

You will not be graded on whether you incorporate your classmates' feedback into your assignments. I encourage you to learn from others' feedback and use it if it is helpful, but it is not a requirement of the class that you use it.

Grading Scale

All the assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale, as follows:

92.5-100=A

90-92.5=A-

87.5-90=B+

82.5-87.5=B

80-82.5=B-

77.5-80=C+

72.5-77.5=C

70-72.5=C-

and so on. Please note that it is rare for me to give a grade higher than 95.

If you are right on the border, for example, 92.5, I will bump you up to A rather than down to A- as long as you have demonstrated civility in your online actions with other students.

Grading Weights

Your grade is based on your completion of the items in the schedule below. The % weight appears right after the date. Each date listed is a due date.

It is your responsibility to keep copies of your work! I do not expect the WPUNJ computers to crash and destroy work that you have submitted, but if they do, I will ask you to resubmit all the assignments you've already submitted.

Schedule

All assignments are due at 11:59 PM on the date listed beside them

12/23 (5%): **Assignment 1:** 700-word draft due

12/25 (2.8125%): **Discussion Task 1:** *Attach* your completed Assignment 1 to a post on your Personal Discussion Board. **This post goes on your own Personal Discussion Board.**

12/26 (2.8125%): **Discussion Task 2:** Read the Assignment 1 postings of all your classmates, and post a comment of at least 200 words on the Personal Discussion Board of each of your classmates. You can ask questions, share your agreement or disagreement with their views, suggest sources they might look at, or related topics they might consider. **These posts go on the Personal Discussion Boards of your classmates.**

12/27 (5%): **Assignment 2:** Choose 2 source papers and submit a 400-word discussion of each source paper.

12/28 (2.8125%): **Discussion Task 3:** Post replies to the comments that your classmates have made on your work. Each reply should be at least 75 words. You can take this opportunity to clarify or expand your ideas or ask your classmates about the ideas expressed in their comments. **These posts go on your Personal Discussion Board.**

12/30 (5%): **Assignment 3:** Submit a 1000-word revised draft.

12/30 (2.8125%): **Discussion Task 4:** *Attach* your completed Assignment 3 to a post on your Personal Discussion Board. **This post goes on your own Personal Discussion Board.**

1/01 (5%): **Assignment 4:** Choose 2 source papers and submit a 400-word discussion of each source paper.

1/02 (5%): **Assignment 5:** Choose 2 source papers and submit a 400-word discussion of each source paper.

1/03 (2.8125%) **Discussion Task 5:** Read the Assignment 3 postings of all your classmates, and post a comment of at least 200 words on the Personal Discussion Board of each of your classmates. You can ask questions, share your agreement or disagreement with their views, suggest sources they might look at, or related topics they might consider. **These posts go on the Personal Discussion Boards of your classmates.**

1/04 (5%): **Assignment 6:** Choose 2 source papers and submit a 400-word discussion of each source paper.

1/05 (2.8125%): **Discussion Task 6:** Post replies to the comments that your classmates have made on your work. Each reply should be at least 75 words. You can take this opportunity to clarify or expand your ideas or ask your classmates about the ideas expressed in their comments. **These posts go on your own Personal Discussion Board.**

1/06 (5%) **Assignment 7:** Choose 2 source papers and submit a 400-word discussion of each source paper.

1/08 (15.5%): **Assignment 8:** Submit a 2000 word rough draft

1/08 (2.8125%): **Discussion Task 7:** *Attach* your completed Assignment 7 to a post on your Personal Discussion Board. **This post goes on your own Personal Discussion Board.**

1/09 (2.8125%): **Discussion Task 8:** Read the Assignment 8 postings of all your classmates, and post a comment of at least 200 words on the Personal Discussion Board of each of your classmates. You can ask questions, share your agreement or disagreement with their views, suggest sources they might look at, or related topics they might consider. **These posts go on the Personal Discussion Boards of your classmates.**

1/11 (27%): **Assignment 9:** Submit 3400 word final draft.

Plagiarism

I repeat:

I will not tolerate plagiarism. If you use text that somebody else wrote, you had better make sure you cite it, or you will get a zero for that assignment. I gave six zeros on a major assignment in my Liberal Studies class last semester, and it was a miserable experience for the students and for me too, since I don't like to give zeros. I don't care what format you use for citations. You can use footnotes or endnotes, or you can just insert the reference into the body of the paper. For example, you could do it like this:

According to William Peabody, "the orange feathers of the towheaded warbler are the most exquisite sight in all of nature" (William Peabody, *An Annoying Naturalist's Musings about Beauty*, Pomposity Press, 1809).

So, just to be super-clear about what I am saying, I really don't care what format you use, I just care that you give me some kind of reference to where you got the words from.

You should also cite your sources when you just read them as background material.