Competency: Advanced Writing in the Major

Educational experiences that satisfy the Advanced Writing competency in the major will provide students with sustained practice in increasingly sophisticated writing, in a variety of formats appropriate to the discipline. Faculty will guide students toward writing effectively in the discipline by providing appropriate evaluation of written documents, including opportunities to incorporate feedback and progress as writers, either through revision or subsequent assignments. Students’ coursework will also convey knowledge of and access to the necessary tools and resources for writing in the discipline.

Part 1: In the text box below, briefly describe (in about one paragraph), and in language suited to an audience composed of colleagues who are not specialists in your field, what it means to be competent in advanced writing at the undergraduate level in the discipline(s) appropriate to the major. *The text boxes in this form will expand as you type.*

Political Scientists write in several genres. Like most social scientists, our main academic journals advantage work that pursues interesting puzzles in new and compelling ways. Social scientific hypothesis testing is joined by qualitative work and interpretative analysis as standard forms of research and writing. In the major we expect our undergraduates to appreciate all these forms of discourse and gain experience in most of them. Critical thinking and advanced writing are developed together. In their writing we expect students use and develop concepts and claims and situate them in context with counterarguments. Student writing can rely on empirical evidence, argument and reasoning. Political Science majors will write a variety of papers in the major. In addition to the writing evident in our Introductory courses described below, papers are required in a majority of our 300 level courses.¹ In the 400 level Research and Writing course, formerly all Z courses and true to those requirements, student written work will undergo revision as a result of feedback from a faculty member. Through coursework in the major students will recognize distinctions in the type of research, writing and argument most common in the different subfields in the discipline.

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¹ An analysis of all the 300 level course syllabi shows of the 19 300 level courses offered in the major 14 (74%) had syllabi available online and 12/14, 86%, required at least 1 paper.
Part 2: Please briefly describe how your major curriculum meets each one of the learning objectives for Advanced Writing. Please attach a description of major requirements, sample syllabi, and any other relevant materials as appendices to this document.

*Students completing educational experiences that satisfy the Advanced Writing competency as part of the requirements for graduation in the major will:*

1. *demonstrate increasingly sophisticated writing according to the conventions of their academic discipline;*

   The Political Science major includes writing across the curriculum. Students are required to write across genres from their introductory courses to their 400 level research and writing seminar. It is standard practice for students to write in their Introductory Political Science courses. An evaluation of the syllabi of the last 4 semesters of our 3 required Introductory courses shows that 10 of the 12 offerings require a paper, sometimes two. The two that did not require a standard paper were experimenting with in-class and online writing assignments. The types of assignment vary across the courses. Introduction to American requires reaction papers or policy memos; in both types of assignments students are required to take a position, present evidence and account for counter arguments. In the Introduction to Comparative and International Politics course students develop a hypothesis and test it systematically. In the Political Theory course students react to a prompt that requires them to interpret the scholarly text in their analysis. Introduction to Public Law, a 300 level (RPOS326) course recommended for students interested in the Public Law concentration, students use legal reasoning to write legal complaints, responses, or memoranda outlining settlements or judgments. See Appendix 3 for these examples of the paper assignments and details from our introductory courses. ([http://www.albany.edu/rockefeller/courses_syllabi_pos.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/rockefeller/courses_syllabi_pos.shtml))

2. *be able to communicate clearly in writing, employing fundamental rules of usage, style, and mechanics in the context of their discipline;*

   Students are provided clear guidelines or models for the writing assignments they are asked to produce. Beginning in their introductory courses students are referred to the style guidelines available at the University Library website and they are clearly instructed on University policies on academic integrity. Appendix 5 includes examples of the rubrics and feedback models provided to students.
3.  be able to evaluate critically a variety of appropriate written texts, including their own:

The evaluation of written texts develops key skills in the students’ ability to produce their own work. Students evaluate the work of others beginning in the 100 level courses through to their capstone. By engaging texts from Plato, Aristotle and the Federalist papers to recent Supreme Court decisions as well as scholarly analysis of all the of above, students are engaged in critical analysis in the development of their writing skills.

4.  demonstrate the ability to incorporate critical feedback on their writing, coming to understand that revision and rewriting are an integral part of the writing process.

Editing and revision as a result of feedback is a key component of the writing process. Appendix 4 demonstrates the revision guidelines in the range of 400 level research and writing courses in our major, all offered in a single semester, Spring 2013, and typical of the capstone courses available in Political Science. Note as well in Appendix 3 that the opportunity to receive feedback on a draft is typically available in our lower level and gateway courses.

http://www.albany.edu/rockefeller/courses_syllabi_pos.shtml
Competency: Oral Discourse

Oral discourse provides opportunities for students to develop the oral communication skills they need to participate more effectively in public and academic debates and discussions. Each academic major will offer opportunities for students to participate in a variety of communication contexts appropriate to the discipline, and to reflect on the principles and theories relevant to specific oral communication activities.

Part 1: In the text box below, briefly describe (in about one paragraph), and in language suited to an audience composed of colleagues who are not specialists in your field, what it means to be competent in oral discourse at the undergraduate level in the discipline(s) appropriate to the major. *The text boxes in this form will expand as you type.*

Oral discourse is intimately connected to the civic engagement and public service ethos at the core of our discipline. A student who has completed the Political science major will have experience developing positions using information, evidence and text as support. Deeply connected to critical inquiry and writing development students completing our major will advance their discourse skills in opportunities to engage in informal classroom exchanges, teamwork and discussion groups, formal oral presentations, and responding to queries from peers and instructors to explain the positions they take. We expect students to listen and evaluate claims and articulate their own positions. Among the learning objectives of our curriculum is the goal that “the student develops and uses evidence based reasoning and argumentation skills”. (see Appendix 2).

Part 2: Please briefly describe how your major curriculum meets each one of the learning objectives for Oral Discourse. Please attach a description of major requirements, sample syllabi, and any other relevant materials as appendices to this document.

Students completing educational experiences that satisfy the Oral Discourse competency as part of the requirements for graduation in the major will:

1. communicate ideas effectively appropriate to a specific context and according to a specific set of criteria;
All three of our Introductory level courses use discussion sections with the purpose of providing students a small group opportunity to ask questions and engage the course material with their peers and in each of the discussions participation is a key component of the grade. The upper level courses in the major rely on this foundation of give and take and practice at formulating and evaluating arguments. Students also learn to distinguish normative from empirical claims and how to sort out and counter statements of fact and opinion. In examining all the available syllabi in the major, 67% of the 300 level courses offered in this past academic year have a required participation component. It is a requirement in 100% of the 400 level courses.

2. establish and maintain an appropriate performer/audience relationship in a given oral exercise, and actively engage with listeners/audience;

The major provides a range of different, structured oral performances. In RPOS101, Introduction to American Politics, students are required to participate in structured debates or simulations; in RPOS102 students engage in a simulation. A number of instructors in the major use team based learning; others use the Socratic method or require students to assume the role of discussion leaders. In each of these different types of oral exercise, instructions and models are provided. According to the syllabi for 300 level courses, over 20% of our 300 level courses require students to make a formal class presentation. Appendices 4 and 5 provide examples of presentation and debate assignments from syllabi (Appendix 5) and detailed instructions to prepare students with clear expectations (Appendix 6).

3. respond to, and where appropriate, incorporate listener’s comments and questions;

Debates, simulations, team based learning courses, and in courses in which students direct small group discussions they are called upon to respond to questions and comments of classmates and the instructor. Appendices 5 and 6 provide examples of presentation and debate assignments from syllabi (Appendix 5) and detailed instructions to prepare students with clear expectations (Appendix 6) as both a participant and an active member of the audience.

4. evaluate, orally or in writing, an oral performance;

Students listen and evaluate classroom discussions as part of their active engagement in any course. Asking questions of an instructor or a classmate, being required to reflect on the content of a presentation, rating the presentations of teams in courses using team based learning, engaging roles and responses in a simulation --all of these are ways in which students routinely engage in evaluation. Among the examples of participation policies and structures from Appendix 5 and 6 are ones in which students provide feedback to classmates’ work.
5. *regularly practice communication skills through questions, discussions, debates and/or presentations (both formal and informal).*

A student passing through successive levels of our curriculum will be called upon to participate in and evaluate a range of oral presentations. Debates, simulations, group and team problem solving exercises, the Socratic method, and research presentations are all present in our curriculum. In small classes they will engage in structured and unstructured discourse. Asking questions and responding to the ideas of their classmates and those presented by instructors is a key component of the discipline.
This form must be completed and submitted to the office of the Dean of your College/School by December 1, 2012. Once your Department's plan for implementing this academic competency in your major is logged by your Dean's office it will be forwarded to the UAC for review. Please complete the form using 12-point font and do not exceed 3 single-spaced pages (not including any appendices).

**Competency: Information Literacy**

Information literate individuals are able to gather, evaluate, use, manage, synthesize, and create information and data in an ethical manner. They also understand the dynamic environment in which information and data are created, handled, and enhanced. Students demonstrate information literacy through finding information from appropriate sources; evaluating, using and managing information; and appreciating the role of information literacy in learning. Learning is understood here as the constant search for meaning by acquiring information, reflecting on and engaging with it, and actively applying it in multiple contexts. To this end, each academic major will offer increasingly sophisticated research assignments that rely upon diverse information sources. Students will find, process, evaluate, and cite information sources, creating and sharing information presented in multiple formats from multiple sources in a form appropriate to the discipline.

Part 1: In the text box below, briefly describe (in about one paragraph), and in language suited to an audience composed of colleagues who are not specialists in your field, what it means to be competent in information literacy at the undergraduate level in the discipline(s) appropriate to the major. *The text boxes in this form will expand as you type.*

Political science majors will need to be able to assess the authority of information to formulate and assess arguments. The range of the discipline – including a diversity of theories and approaches embracing both normative and empirical claims – ensures students will recognize that argument and position-taking may stem from a variety of viewpoints, each of which can be critically engaged and evaluated. Competency in information literacy will include practice in gathering and synthesizing information and the production of new arguments or critical perspectives.

Part 2: Please briefly describe how your major curriculum meets each one of the learning objectives for Information Literacy. Please attach a description of major requirements, sample syllabi, and any other relevant materials as appendices to this document.

Students completing educational experiences that satisfy the Information Literacy competency as part of the requirements for graduation in the major will:
1. understand the information environment and information needs in the discipline in today’s society, including the organization of and access to information, and select the most appropriate strategies, search tools, and resources for each unique information need;

The study of politics and political puzzles require students to navigate current information sources and be careful consumers of the information environment. Politics is about choices and differences of opinion and facts are the typical starting point for student discourse. In the introductory courses students learn the difference between scholarly and media sources and the importance of evaluating the source and purpose of information. The intro courses assess current political issues with conceptual tools to help students gain an appreciation for the ways in which information can be key resources in understanding political problems and differences in perspectives.

2. demonstrate the ability to evaluate content, including dynamic, online content if appropriate;

The curriculum in the major is focused on unfolding political events and power. Our subfields -- American politics, International Politics, Political theory and Public law -- evaluate developing political. In courses like the Presidency (RPOS332), Building Democracy (RPOS364), Mass Media (RPOS365) Information Technologies and International Politics (RPOS368) we would be hard pressed not to include current information and competing claims for students to assess.

3. conduct ethical practices in the use of information, in ways that demonstrate awareness of issues of intellectual property and personal privacy in changing technology environments;

Making students aware of the University policy on academic integrity and the singular importance of the community of scholarship to the academy is evident in all of our courses. On syllabi, assignments, and in our classes we point students to the University Library’s helpful tutorial on plagiarism, on how to cite, and on the importance for students to develop their own voice in academic discourse. In each of our Introductory courses, when students are producing their first political science papers and often their first college papers, time in discussion section is devoted to a demonstration of these library resources and to answering questions about citation.

4. produce, share, and evaluate information in a variety of participatory environments;

The Political Science major includes a variety of research and participation contexts. The Introductory courses include case studies where students gather and assess competing claims (in RPOS101 and RPOS102) and debates and simulations. The upper level courses continue this variety, with team based learning and group work in which students work together in research and problem solving. Many faculty members use blackboard and blended learning so that students also get practice in
posting and cooperative work in the online environment as well.

5. *integrate learning and research strategies with lifelong learning processes and personal, academic, and professional goals.*

The major seeks to prepare students to be critical readers, thinkers and citizens. From the introductory courses on students are confronted with important political questions that can be considered from a variety of perspectives. They are given the conceptual tools and research strategies to assess claims and evaluate evidence (see Appendix 4). By engaging in their own research and evaluating the research of others our students develop skills that they can apply to their lifelong learning (Appendix 5).
Critical thinking is the systematic process of analyzing and evaluating data, hypotheses, arguments, or critiques. It is an essential component of any academic major. The research, scholarship, and creative activities of university faculty ensure that our academic disciplines are constantly evolving. The facts and theories in academic disciplines are essential knowledge our students must learn, but it is mastery of critical thinking that will allow for lifelong educational and occupational development, and facilitate students’ functioning as engaged citizens. Students’ coursework in the major will cultivate in them habits of critical thinking, as they learn to approach questions and problems in critical, logical, and reflective ways.

Part 1: In the text box below, briefly describe (in about one paragraph), and in language suited to an audience composed of colleagues who are not specialists in your field, what it means to be competent in critical thinking at the undergraduate level in the discipline(s) appropriate to the major. *The text boxes in this form will expand as you type.*

In the course of our major students will be exposed to a variety of research traditions and ways to approach political puzzles. Exposure to questions in practical politics and scholarship from different disciplinary traditions will help inform students’ ability to participate in the evaluation of research as well as the production of creative projects. Political Science majors will acquire a range of tools to assess and evaluate claims from sources ranging from peers to authorities in and outside the classroom.

Part 2: Please briefly describe how your major curriculum meets each one of the learning objectives for Critical Thinking. Please attach a description of major requirements, sample syllabi, and any other relevant materials as appendices to this document.

Students completing educational experiences that satisfy the Critical Thinking competency as part of the requirements for graduation in the major will:

1. formulate complex questions, problems, and hypotheses clearly and precisely, and apply familiar and new concepts in developing solutions and conclusions;
As indicated in Appendix 2, we expect students in our major will obtain information, understand perspectives about information, critically evaluate perspectives, and use these skills to design, execute and produce their own research. Beginning at the Introductory level, students are expected to recognize, assess, and analyze key components of political practice and argument (see Appendix 5). The paper guidelines presented from the introductory and gateway courses in Appendix 3 illustrate the expectations and models provided for how to develop and evaluate political research.

2. gather and assess relevant information/data;

Again, in the writing assignments reflected in Appendix 3, students in all of the introductory and gateway courses are required to engage in a variety of forms of analysis. In the RPOS101 policy memo students use the detailed Congressional Quarterly research provided to learn the details of the policy case, engage the range of positions, and apply the factual details to support their own position. In the RPOS102 example students illustrate their understanding of the theory by applying details of the appropriate case. In the RPOS103 example student use the different theoretical texts to illuminate the meaning of the core concepts of justice and equality. In RPOS326 the students apply their skills of reasoning, argument and evidence gathering and engage in role playing in the hypothetical dispute.

3. test hypotheses against relevant criteria and standards, accounting for the facts;

See answer 2, above. In each of these cases students are provided with different models of testing and assessing competing claims with evidence.

4. develop well-reasoned arguments and communicate them effectively to others;

Because the answer to question 2 above is grounded in the requirements for written assignments in our lower level and gateway courses it is clear that students have ample practice in the major to develop well-reasoned arguments using the range of evidential material commonly used across the Political Science discipline. Appendix 4 describes the writing assignments in the 400 level courses from a single term and the common practice in the major of expecting students to situate questions in a body of work and communicate them in papers and presentations. Appendix 6 was created to illustrate the range of oral discourse opportunities our student have; each one includes careful construction of argument and the consideration of counter argument.

5. demonstrate habits of reflection upon their own and others’ thinking—identifying, analyzing, and evaluating their own and others’ arguments; and challenging conclusions with alternative explanations or points of view.
Appendix 4 details the paper assignments included in the syllabi for our Spring 2013 400 level research and writing courses. These capstone courses rest on the foundation of critical inquiry skills developed from the introductory level courses through to the more in-depth classes of their concentration. The syllabi describe a full range of sophisticated tasks consistent with sophisticated reflection including the expectation that students give presentations to the class that assess the course reading in light of broader theoretical questions (RPOS419Z) or present their own research progress (RPOS437Z). Students engage in the application of case precedent to a hypothetical set of facts (RPOS426Z), formulate research questions and methodology plans (RPOS439Z and RPOS469Z) and use course readings to produce discussion questions (RPOS419Z). Each of these tasks reflects the acquisition of habits of critical inquiry.