

WASHINGTON SEMESTER PROGRAM

American University
Washington, D.C.

SPRING 2007
Professor Beatrix Siman Zakhari

Justice Semester
Research Project Syllabus
Course No. 73.490.61

The research project provides an opportunity to conduct original research on a subject which interests you. It permits a more in-depth inquiry on a legal, criminal justice, or related policy issue. The project represents a more detailed investigation into a topic within your field of study, and is generally expected to grow out of your involvement in the seminar and internship. In emphasizing original research utilizing the unique resources offered by Washington, D.C., the research project presumes a focus that will reflect the value of location. The research project is not typical term paper built upon hours and hours of library research, rather it is a fresh, innovative endeavor using PRIMARY SOURCES, GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTATION and INTERVIEWS with decision-makers and practitioners.

EXPECTATIONS AND BASIC REQUIREMENTS

- A. **ORIGINALITY:** The project is to focus on original first-hand research. The researcher is expected to move beyond mere examination of secondary sources and to investigate primary and documentary sources, pursue interviews with decision-makers, and initiate direct contact with relevant individuals and agencies concerned with the topic.
- B. **CURRENT WASHINGTON-BASED RESEARCH:** The project is to focus on a contemporary policy issue, and/or the government process for addressing policy concerns. That is: it should not be a historical essay or a theoretical discourse. Such approaches do not utilize the Washington environment to its greatest potential and can be accomplished at your home campus.
- C. Although the topic of the project will be of your choosing, it must be approved by the instructor. The topic may be derived from the seminars, your

internship, the media, or may be an outgrowth of an issue considered previously in a term paper or class. Once you have found a topic that interests you, a research design must be developed; this also needs to be cleared by the instructor. A final research outline must contain a detailed overview of your research project and designate the approach to be taken in investigating the topic.

- D.** You are expected to consult closely with the instructor during the semester.
- E.** The complete project should be a minimum of 35 double-spaced, typed pages. It should not exceed 60 pages. Footnotes and appropriate scholarly style should be employed. One resource is Kate Turabian's *MANUAL OF STYLE*. If you are more comfortable with another style manual, that is also acceptable. *UNIFORM SYSTEM OF LEGAL CITATIONS* is also a good source.

The end result of your efforts will be a project which can be used as a writing sample, reflecting your abilities to clearly communicate your ideas, conduct research, and organize your work. It is also a very important marketing tool for you in terms of your future career.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

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| Thursday, January 18, 2007 | Introductory meeting and discussion of syllabus. |
| Friday, January 19, 2007 | Individual meetings, times posted on office door. |
| Friday, February 2, 2007 | Submit hypothesis and initial outline. |
| Friday, February 16, 2007 | Submit literature review. |
| Friday, February 23, 2007 | Submit revised outline and introduction. |
| Friday, March 2, 2007 | Submit research design and methodology |
| Friday, March 23, 2007 | Submit results and analysis |
| Friday, April 20, 2007 | Submit conclusion and rough draft. |

There will also be a time scheduled to visit the reference librarian at Bender. As needed, we may also have a few class sessions.

The deadlines are necessary to keep the project moving throughout the semester, and to allow enough time for proper feedback and prompt turnaround. Therefore, the timeliness of material submitted and the quality of work presented in terms of both content and neatness are very important. There will be points taken off for significant tardiness.

RESEARCH PROJECT GUIDE

I. Choosing a Topic

This is perhaps the single most important step in the entire process. Some of you may have arrived here with some specific topic in mind. Choose your topic carefully. I should be something that meets the following criteria:

- a. It should utilize the resources of Washington, D.C. – not be a something you could have done at your home school.
- b. It should be something that is manageable, and can be completed in the allotted time frame. For example, research on capital punishment should be refined and narrowed to topic areas, e.g. deterrence, discrimination, etc.
- c. It should be significant. Is this a useful finding? Ask yourself if the results of your research will be useful to government agencies, lobbying or public interest groups, consumers, voters, etc.
- d. It should be something that seriously interests you – you will be spending an enormous amount of time thinking and reading about this issue.
- e. For those of you who anticipate job-hunting in Washington, it should be marketable. Many students use the research project to become “expert” in a chosen area, and to meet others already working in that area. Some students link the research project to their internships – an approach which often increases their success in both

II. Developing a Research Hypothesis

Once you narrow down the subject, the next step is to develop and define a research hypothesis. A research hypothesis is an introductory statement in the form of a question. That is, the hypothesis is a formal statement that the research seeks to prove or disprove. Therefore, the hypothesis becomes a specific statement or explanation of your topic.

Examples of Hypotheses:

- Pretrial drug testing is a cost-effective measure.
- The federal sentencing guidelines have placed too much power in the hands of the prosecution.
- Marijuana should be legalized for medical purposes.
- The death penalty is an effective deterrent to crime.
- Higher education should be mandatory for laws enforcement personnel.

III. Outline

The outline is the next step in the research project. You will rely on your outline to guide you through the remainder of the semester. It is your roadmap. The first version of the outline should be approximately one page long and should include the following elements:

- Concise statement of your research question, phrased as a question.
- Justification of your topic – explain why your chosen topic is significant and interesting.

- Explain how you can answer the question – be sure that your question can be answered.
- General description of how you plan to gather the necessary data to test your hypothesis (including interviews) – Demonstrate that you have considered how you will conduct your research.

The second version of your outline requires you to demonstrate progress on your project. In addition to noting changes from the original outline, you must elaborate on your research plan (how you will test your hypothesis and gather your data). Include as much information about the details of your plans as possible. The more details you can give at this stage, the more feedback I can provide. This outline should adhere to the following basic structure.

- Introduction
- Literature review
- Research Design/Methodology
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter introduces the hypothesis and sets the stage for the rest of the project. That is, it provides the backdrop in which the question arises and then tells the reader how that question will be answered. *Approximately 4-6 pages*

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review evaluates previous work in the area that is relevant to your research question. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a discussion of the past issues or events that developed regarding the status of the issue you are researching. One way to begin might be to look at the way the issue evolved in the policymaking arena. Then you should determine the current status of the issue. It is important to examine the current status of the main issue described in the research question. Then, the paper must describe the primary issues associated with the research question.

The literature review must explain the areas of controversy in the literature and areas of agreement. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a compare and contrast section. *Approximately 4-10 pages.*

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

In this section, you should explain exactly how you intend to test your hypothesis and why this method is appropriate. Describe the primary

source material you intend to gather (interviews, documentary evidence, congressional testimony, etc.) You must be specific at this stage. For example, if you are doing interviews, you need to provide a list of people you plan to interview. Give names and titles as well as how you intend to contact them. For other sources, you need to explain exactly what information you will request and from whom. Moreover, you must verify the dates when the information will be available to you. *Approximately 3-5 pages.*

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Originality is the basis for this section of the research paper. At this point, you must speculate about the implications of your paper's findings and propose any alternative solutions. Remember, however, that you must always support your argument with evidence, explain, and analyze the implications of your findings. For example, do you have any suggestions to improve a given policy or ameliorate a particular problem? The analysis section is a major part of the paper. Explain and analyze the data you have collected as it relates to your hypothesis. Is your finding significant? Why? What are the implications for policy? How can you or others expand on your work? *Approximately 14-18 pages.*

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION (s)

Briefly summarize your project and your findings. Describe how you (or someone else) could extend the project in the future. Did you develop additional questions in the course of your research? Are there other people you would like to interview? What additional documents do you wish you could have incorporated in your research? Provide future direction for research regarding your topic. *Approximately 4 – 6 pages.*

CHAPTER 6: BIBLIOGRAPHY

This is a list of works cited for the study. Following the American Psychological Association's *Publication Manual* for the proper formatting for all sources of information (AU Citation Style Guides: <http://www.library.american.edu/subject/citation.html>). Interviews citation must include the name of the person interviewed, the organizations, the place of interview (city and state) and the date.

THE FINAL PRODUCT: GUIDELINES

The final paper is due Thursday, May 3, 2007.

- Submit TWO hardbound copies.
- Make a copy for yourself.

- Footnotes and endnotes shall conform to the standard set in the *APA Publication Manual*.
- The paper shall be divided into chapters.
- Chapters shall include: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Design, Analysis and Conclusion
- Chapters shall contain appropriate headings and subheadings.
- The paper shall also include a Title Page, Table of Contents, and Bibliography.
- Title Page shall conform to the requirements of the *Washington Semester Research Guide*.
- Text shall be typed/word processed, double-spaced, in black, 12 point font on white paper with 1 inch margins.
- The paper shall include citations to all authorities. Citations shall take the form of footnotes and shall conform to the standard set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.

INDIVIDUAL STATUS MEETINGS

Throughout the semester, you must meet with me to discuss your progress on your research project. Meetings should occur **AT LEAST THREE TIMES** during the semester. Please email or call to schedule meetings at a mutually convenient time. It is your responsibility to check in with me throughout the semester!

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

By registering as a student at AU, all students acknowledge awareness of the school's *Academic Integrity Code*. Read the code at <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm>. It is your responsibility to know and abide by the code

Please be sure to check in with me whenever you have any question or concern. Note that we will not have classes per se, other than in the beginning. Consequently, this project is run like an independent study. It is critical that you contact me as frequently as you wish.

BEST OF LUCK!