WRITING IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Erin B. Jensen, University of Utah

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Writing in the Social Sciences is an undergraduate upper division writing course required for social science majors (including anthropology, sociology, and psychology), and the course also fulfills the upper division writing requirement for the university. While the majority of students enrolled in the class are social science majors, students with other majors including computer science, economics, education, health sciences, and business take the course as well. The writing class is taught every semester and is offered as either an online or a classroom-based course. The following syllabus is for the online version of the course.

This version of the course is influenced by my experiences helping social science majors in the University Writing Center with their writing and with applications for graduate school. The course introduces upper division students to undergraduate publication opportunities, research-focused essays, and graduate school applications and materials.

The benefits of undergraduate research and publishing are well documented, as the benefits include helping students gain confidence in their writing, providing them an opportunity to establish a mentor relationship with professors, and helping them to apply for graduate school and financial aid (Abdul-Alim, 2012; Berry, 2016; Burns & Ware, 2008; Matten & Teitge, 2003). Burns and Ware (2008) provide a literature review on the benefits of undergraduate research and publication and identify six reasons for undergraduate publication: it helps students develop critical thinking skills, participate in collaborative learning, refine communication skills, become enthusiastic about scholarly pursuits, become familiar with the research process, and develop better writing skills (p. 255). Burns and Ware (2008) argue that having students write for a specific journal increases students’ writing ability and skills because they know there is a purpose behind the writing assignment (p. 255).

Undergraduate publishing can also lead to successful graduate school applications and increased financial help. Abdul-Alim (2012) relates the experience of an undergraduate co-authoring a paper based on her experiences studying plants and then receiving a $100,000 scholarship to attend graduate school. While this may be an extreme example, undergraduate students appreciate knowing that undergraduate publication can be financially beneficial. Mark Kantrowitz, a publisher with fastweb.com, emphasizes that students should certainly "mention being published as an undergraduate, because people who have been published as an undergraduate are seen as having a lot of promise as a future researcher" (cited in Abul-Alim).

During the course, students read articles about the benefits of undergraduate publishing to help them better understand the course’s focus on such publishing. It is important for students to understand why the course is focused on undergraduate research and why such research could be beneficial to them. Course feedback has established that the majority of students enrolled in the course are unaware of the possibilities of undergraduate publications and that there should be an increased awareness among social science majors of the benefits of undergraduate research and publishing.
The Writing in the Social Sciences course is structured around two main categories of assignments: (1) graduate school applications and financial aid opportunities and (2) undergraduate research and publishing. The course has five major assignments: writing a personal statement, writing a resume or CV, reviewing an undergraduate journal, writing an annotated bibliography, and writing a journal article.

The first two assignments are focused on preparing for graduate school and so are focused on writing a personal statement and writing a resume or CV. Students are required to find a personal statement prompt from an application for graduate school, a scholarship, or a study abroad program, and then write a personal statement in response to that prompt. The resume or CV assignment requires that students develop that document in response to the same prompt or another prompt related to their graduate school application or another opportunity. Student feedback on these two assignments has established that students find them to be very helpful in learning how to apply for graduate school or similar opportunities and that many students had been unaware of how to write a personal statement or what to include on a resume or CV.

The remaining assignments focus on helping students write a researched argument essay or article that can then be submitted to a journal for publication. Course feedback has also established that many students have limited understanding of the publishing process, and the course is designed to help them gain a better understanding of how to get published. During the semester, students view several PowerPoint presentations about how to evaluate a journal, how to read and understand the author guidelines, and how to identify and understand the requested formal and citation style. The presentations include examples of specific journals and provide screen shots of journal requirements to help students better understand the process. Students are also provided with a list of undergraduate journals and are told they can pick one from the list or find an undergraduate journal that is not on the list. Once students select a journal, they write a two-page review of the journal, including information about the required format, length, citation style, thesis format, and other important information.

The other major assignments are connected as students compile an annotated bibliography of sources that they will use in the writing of their journal article. For the annotated bibliography assignment, students compile ten sources and then provide a paragraph of summary and a paragraph of how they plan on using the source in their paper. Students are allowed to pick any topic that is associated with either their major or with their other interests. The journal article has to be at least twelve pages long with a cover page and a references page. Students are required to use the citation style and format required by the selected journal. While students are not required to submit their papers to their selected journals, they are strongly encouraged to do so.

This course focuses on student learning and is organized to help students successfully complete all assignments. Five major writing assignments in a semester does require students to write, draft, and revise weekly. Four of the five assignments (with the exception of the review of the undergraduate journal) require at least one rough draft and one writing workshop peer-review. This approach helps students learn more about the writing process, provides them with helpful feedback on their writing, and helps them stay on schedule. The assignments themselves are spread over the semester with due dates for rough drafts and final drafts at least a week apart. The course emphasizes a process approach to writing with students working systematically to complete the writing assignments. The deadlines for all major assignments do not overlap with any other major assignment deadlines. For example, students are introduced to the idea of a personal statement in Week 1, but are not required to submit a rough draft until Week 3. In Week 3, students submit a draft and then participate in a peer-review writing workshop. After the workshop is completed, students take the feedback from both the other students and the instructor and revise the document. The final version of the personal statement is turned in during Week 4. For the two assignments that require the greatest amount of writing, the annotated
bibliography and the journal article, students are given several weeks between the rough draft deadline and the final version deadline. The purpose behind these deadlines is to give students time to revise their writing. The deadlines are also spread out over the semester to help students meet the writing demands of this upper division writing course.

The course is influenced by a social constructivist approach as students engage with one another in online discussion posts, responses, and peer-review writing workshops. All major assignments go through the writing process and are peer reviewed by other students. The online discussion posts are in response to class readings, and students are required to comment on each other’s posts.

The majority of student feedback about this course has been positive. Students appreciate the opportunity to write for a specific journal with the possibility of being published within that journal. They appreciate having a clearly defined purpose and audience and learning how to target a specific journal and to meet specific guidelines related to content, format, and style. Many of the students have submitted their journal articles to undergraduate journals, and several have been successful at getting published. Students also appreciate how the first two assignments help them better understand how to apply for graduate school and other opportunities. Many of the students in the course have applied to graduate school and have used their personal statements and resumes from the course.

Students learn much about writing within the course, and they gain a better understanding of how purpose and audience guide their efforts when writing. The course goals are echoed in the various writing assignments and in the student-to-student online interactions that focus on writing issues and that help students improve their writing skills.

**SYLLABUS: WRITING IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES (ONLINE SECTION)**

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

Writing in the Social Sciences is an upper division writing class focused on writing skills important to the social sciences. The course will focus on undergraduate journal publication opportunities, preparing for graduate school applications, using sources to develop critical thinking on issues, forming an argument about a specific topic, and using revising skills to improve documents. In this class, you will:

1. Develop your own critical thinking about issues and problems and how to structure a research based argument
2. Research undergraduate publishing by selecting a journal, analyzing the format of the journal, and then formatting your writing to fit the journal requirements.
3. Improve academic writing skills through participating in the writing and peer-review process.

As a class, we will read a variety of texts to explore academic writing in the social sciences. Individually, you will perform research to support your arguments and explore the possibilities for your own contribution to academic conversations.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

2. Additional articles available on Canvas and online.
RECOMMENDED TEXTS
American Psychological Association: *Concise Rules of APA Style*

ASSIGNMENTS
Several major assignments, outlined below, work toward achieving a better understanding of undergraduate research and preparing for graduate school. As part of these major assignments, you will participate in collaborative peer review groups to improve your writing assignments. All major assignments will be completed in several drafts that you will submit to Canvas (the university’s online learning platform). Additionally, you will be graded on your completion of weekly assignments. Please note that assignments may change according to our needs throughout the term.

DISCUSSION POST ASSIGNMENTS: 5 POINTS
Informal, exploratory writing is a good way to improve your writing skills. You will need to write a response to the readings assigned for homework. Unless otherwise stated, these homework responses should be at least 2 paragraphs in length. Please do not summarize, instead provide your response to the readings. The responses can be a response to what you have read or you can include questions that you still have about the readings. You can include what you liked or what you learned from the readings. You can include how the information applies to what you are doing for this class or how the readings apply to other classes.

You can receive either full credit or no credit on the responses, and they are due every Wednesday at 11:59 pm. You will also be required (unless otherwise stated) to respond to at least 1 other post from a fellow student. Those posts must be at least 3 sentences long. Both your 2 paragraphs and your 1 response is due Wednesday at 11:59 pm. Please post your homework (2 paragraphs) and your 1 response to Canvas under the Discussion tab.

FORMAL PAPERS

1. PERSONAL STATEMENT: 75 POINTS (MINIMUM 2 PAGES)
Most graduate programs and many scholarships require a Personal Statement. However, most students are unclear in what should be included or how to format a Personal Statement. As many of you are planning on graduate school, an understanding of how to write a Personal Statement is important. Even if you are not planning on graduate school, knowing how to write a Personal Statement can still be helpful as working on writing skills is important.

The assignment: Write a two page personal statement in response to a specific application question. Find a scholarship, graduate school application, or general application to answer (examples of questions that you can use will be posted on Canvas). More details will be provided on the assignment handout.

2. RESUME/CV: 50 POINTS
Write a Resume/CV in response to a specific application question. Find a scholarship, graduate school application, or job posting to answer. More details will be provided on the assignment handout.
3. UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL REVIEW: 50 POINTS (MINIMUM 2 PAGES)

This course encourages undergraduate students to publish. There are hundreds of undergraduate journals that publish class papers, research projects, etc. from undergraduate students across all majors and disciplines. I will provide a list of websites and journals to aid in your search for an undergraduate journal to choose. However, there are many undergraduate journals that only publish papers from undergraduates that attend their university (ex. University of Florida Undergraduate Journal only publishes papers from students that attend their university. Please do not chose a journal that only publishes papers from a specific university). Every journal has a specific format and style that is required for the papers. The purpose of this assignment is to choose a journal that you would want to get published in and in order to publish your paper, you need to know about the format and the requirements of the journal. If, after selecting a journal and completing this assignment, you decide a different journal would be better, you are welcome to switch journals. Just make sure to let me know.

The assignment: Select an undergraduate journal that publishes articles in your major (a list of acceptable journals will be provided). Write a two page review of your chosen journal thinking about the history of how the journal was established, who the audience is for the journal, who gets published in the journal, the types of papers that are published (research studies? opinion papers? class research papers? etc.), the format required (headings, levels of headings, no headings, two column, cover page, etc), the citation format requires (APA, Chicago, MLA, etc.), the topics of the papers that are published, and any other information that you would like to include about the journal. Please focus on the journal itself and NOT on specific articles published in the journal.

4. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: 100 POINTS

Your final project in the class is to write a research paper to potentially get published. In preparation for that final paper, you will prepare an annotated bibliography. The purpose behind annotated bibliographies is to help in the research process by helping you to start thinking about the main points of the research and then start thinking about how you plan to use that research in your paper.

The assignment: Prepare an annotated bibliography that provides a one-paragraph introduction to your research topic and then lists and annotates TEN credible and authoritative sources that you could use in your researched argument. At least SIX of these sources must be peer-reviewed journal articles. For each source, include complete bibliographic information in APA style (unless your journal requires a different citation style) and provide a two-paragraph annotation that first provides a summary of the source and then includes a paragraph on how you plan on specifically using the content of the article in your paper. Summarize overall content, analyze the authoritativeness of the source (authority, accuracy, currency, objectivity, and/or coverage), and evaluate its usefulness and relevance to your researched argument topic. Evaluative comments on the limitations of the study may be appropriate as well.

Your purpose is to establish that you have done the necessary research and have found authoritative sources that you could use in your journal article. Refer to http://library.njit.edu/researchhelpdesk/instruction/rr102-annotatedbibinstructions.pdf for examples of how to write an Annotated Bibliography.
5. CONTRIBUTION JOURNAL – ARTICLE: 200 POINTS (MINIMUM 12 PAGES OF TEXT, NOT INCLUDING COVER PAGE OR REFERENCES)

Through your completion of the Annotated Bibliography, you will take on more authority as a writer in your discipline. You have moved from summarizing the work of others to evaluating it.

The Journal Article assignment asks you to take on even more authority by constructing a position and then using your research to support your position. Consider some of the issues or problems relevant to your discipline that you would like to pursue. You should begin to think about your research problem early in the semester. For this assignment, you will need to find an undergraduate journal (a list will be provided in class) and write your paper in the style required by that undergraduate journal.

COURSE POLICIES

- All homework assignments (unless indicated on the syllabus) are due on Wednesday night at 11:59 pm. Many main assignments are due on Saturday at 11:59 pm. Please check the Weekly Schedule for all deadlines.
- NO late papers will be accepted without prior arrangement. Please let me know BEFORE the assignment is due of any circumstances that may contribute to turning in the assignment late.
- Respect for others is absolutely mandatory. Disrespectful behavior and language have no place in this class.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & PRACTICES

1. Freshman writing is a prerequisite for this class, you should be familiar with terms such as rhetoric, analysis, and argument.
2. The default format style for this class is the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Please refer to the Concise Rules of APA Style textbook.
3. You are expected to know how to navigate the Canvas website and to check it regularly. Weekly assignments will be posted on Canvas. You are expected to check the Calendar weekly. All assignments will be posted by Saturday night.
4. Drafts will be graded and commented on. Submit all your formal assignments with attention to grammar, punctuation, spelling, style, and appropriate format.
5. All formal papers (including drafts) must be formatted in APA or the appropriate citation style for your chosen journal. Please let me know if you are using a citation style that is not APA

INCOMPLETES

The University Writing Program offers Incompletes only under extraordinary circumstances and only when 80% of the course work has been completed.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

Plagiarism, the willful copying/presenting of another person’s work as your own, and other forms of cheating are not only unacceptable, but also illegal. The University Writing Program’s standard penalty for plagiarism is a failing grade (E) for the assignment, and possibly the course. In certain cases, the penalty is expulsion from the University. If you have any doubts as to what constitutes plagiarism,
please refer to sections II and V of the Student Code, or talk to me.

EXTRA CREDIT
Some extra credit will be given for going to the Writing Center. Please email me the day, time, and tutor that you met with in order to receive extra credit. The Writing Center info can be found at (specific website). Appointments are required, but this resource is free for all students.

GRADING SCALE
100-94%  A, 93-90%  A-, 89-83%  B+, 82-80%  B-, 79-77%  C+, 76-73%  C, 72-70%  C-, 69-67%  D+, 66-63%  D, 62-60%  D-, 59-lower%  E

ADA NOTICE
The University seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services located in X Building. They can be contacted at 801-581-5020. CDS will work with you to make arrangements for accommodations.

TIMELINE OF COURSE

Main Assignments Due

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Rough Draft:</th>
<th>Final Draft:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Statement</td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume/CV</td>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Review</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Week 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Article</td>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Week 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All Homework Assignments, Rough Drafts, and some of the Formal Assignments are due on Wednesdays at 11:59 pm. All peer-review workshop comments (and some of the formal assignments) are due on
Saturdays at 11:59 pm. This weekly schedule may change and all changes will be emailed to you and posted as an announcement on Canvas.

All weekly materials and readings (other than the textbook readings) can be found under the Modules section on Canvas. Modules will be updated every Saturday by 11:59 pm. A more complete schedule can be found under the Files section and is named “Semester Schedule”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overview of Class and Syllabus</td>
<td>Find a graduate application or scholarship that requires a Personal Statement (PS)</td>
<td>-Discussion Post #1 -Post the PS question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Week 1 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introduction to textbook</td>
<td><em>Craft of Research</em> (Craft), Prologue and Chapter 1.</td>
<td>-Discussion Post #2 -Outline due of PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Week 2 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Rough Draft of Personal Statement and Peer Review. Complete two peer reviews of rough drafts. Make comments on the paper.</td>
<td>-Post rough draft Peer-review of rough draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Week 3 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Read <em>Craft</em> Ch. 3 and 4 Week 4 Lecture Notes</td>
<td>-Discussion Post #3 -Final Personal Statement Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Read Berry - Read Abdul-Alim - Read Matten and Teitge Week 5 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Resume/CV Topic Selection</td>
<td>Evaluate 2 Resumes and complete the handout Chose a topic for Journal Article assignment</td>
<td>-Resume/CV handout -Post about topic chosen -Final Journal Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Week 6 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rough Draft of Resume/CV</td>
<td>Peer-Review of rough draft</td>
<td>Rough draft of Resume/CV -Start drafting Annotated Bib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Week 7 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Journal Topics</td>
<td>Read <em>Craft</em> Ch. 5 and 6 Read the following PPTs: -How to use the library -How to read an academic journal -How to read a journal article</td>
<td>-Discussion Post #5 -Final Resume/CV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Week 8 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Complete two peer reviews of rough drafts.</td>
<td>-Peer-review of Rough Draft of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Week 9 Lecture Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Syllabus

**E. B. Jensen, “Social Sciences”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Annotated Bibliography Continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Thesis, Introductions, Quote Sandwich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Outlines and Organization of Journal Article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rough Draft and Peer Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Conclusions and revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>End of the semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Annotated Bibliography**

**Discussion Post #6**

**Week 11 Lecture Notes**

**Discussion Post #7**

**Revise Annotated Bib**

**Discussion Post #8**

**Integrating Quotes Assignment**

**Due: Final Annotated Bibliography**

**Discussion Post #9**

**Week 13 Lecture Notes**

**Discussion Post #10**

**Week 14 Lecture Notes**

**Rough Draft of Journal Article**

**Week 15 Lecture Notes**

**Journal Article Final**

**Course Review**

*Thanks for a great semester. Email me with any questions or concerns.*

---

### REFERENCES:


