

The George Washington University
Elliott School of International Affairs

IAFF 6502.23
Writing for International Policymakers
Spring 2014

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Office Hours: By appointment
Course Meets: 5:10-7pm, Tuesdays, January 14-March 4
Location: Room 217, Phillips Hall, 801 22nd St., NW

Course Description

Clear, concise, and persuasive analytical writing is an essential skill for international affairs professionals. Effective analysis for policymakers succinctly assesses matters in ways that provide information, context, and insight and makes useful recommendations. Key characteristics include focus, relevance, brevity, and readability. This course will involve short written assignments, as well as group discussions, aimed at developing the analytical and writing skills necessary to support, inform, and influence policymakers and to implement policy. Required readings and writing samples will be posted in the Files section of Blackboard.

To develop a common platform, initial sessions of class will revolve around current international events. Students should come to the first session of class prepared to discuss top international issues in the news. Subsequent classes will consider the crisis when North Korea invaded the South in 1950 and the collapse of the Mubarak regime in January-February 2011. Students will write US National Security Council-style briefing memoranda, press statements, demarche points, and talking points.

For the final assignment, students will select and write on a foreign affairs topic in which they are interested. It can be a crisis (e.g., a conflict, disaster or other immediate problem) or an on-going policy matter, but it must be a current issue in which the United States has a stake, whose outcome is unclear, and on which actions must be taken. Final assignments should not duplicate what students submitted for the first segment of the course. International students wishing to do their final assignment from the perspective of and for their home country may do so, but should discuss this with the instructor. Recent examples of final assignment topics include:

- change in Burma
- Syrian refugee crisis
- potential hydrocarbon development in the Arctic

- the crisis in Mali
- the South China Sea

Writing and briefing assignments are outlined below and will be discussed further in class.

Learning Outcomes: Successful students will emerge from the class better able to analyze, write, and advocate in ways appropriate for supporting policymakers and, more generally, in the professional/applied world. Specific skill sets include identifying key issues from confusing or complex data; developing policy advice and recommendations applicable in the real world where policymakers must choose among competing priorities; articulating policy in an interagency setting, to the public, and to other governments; and writing concisely, persuasively, and in a lively manner with proper syntax and grammar, an effective format, etc. Non-native speakers of English and those who need writing help may wish to consult the University Writing Center, information on which can be found at <http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter>.

Evaluation and Participation: Submissions for the course should be clear, brief, analytical, free of jargon, typographical, and grammatical errors, and in the format parameters described below. The best grades go to those papers that most comprehensively and insightfully assess the substantive issues and are well written. Evaluation criteria include:

Substance

- Problem/issue clearly defined
- Complete and objective analysis relevant to the policy problem
- Recommendations: realistic and consistent with analysis
- Press piece: what is our policy, what do we want, what are we doing
- Demarche: explain policy, what we want, & what we are doing to foreign government
- Talking points: advocate for and elaborate recommendations in internal USG setting
- Consistency

Writing

- Clear, active, analytical, and interesting language
- Syntax, grammar, and spelling
- Format that guides/focuses reader on essential elements
- Follow requirements spelled out in syllabus

Standards

- A Excellent: substantively complete, no major writing issues
- A- Excellent with minor substantive and/or writing issues
- B+ Very good with limited substantive and/or writing issues
- B Good: some substantive and/or writing issues
- B- Fair: significant substantive and/or writing issues
- C Fair: many substantive and/or writing problems

- C- Poor: major lapses in substance and serious writing problems
- D Substantively unserious and sloppy

Students will receive evaluations of their assignments by email prior to the following session of class. The instructor may ask several individuals briefly to present on their assignments. All students will make brief oral presentations in the last two sessions of class on their individually-selected topics. Participation throughout the class is extremely important and accounts for one-third of student grades. Given the compressed nature of this six-week class, absences are strongly discouraged and should be reported prior to a given session or accounted for as soon as possible after a missed one. Final grades for the course as a whole will be calculated as follows:

- Final writing assignment (one-third)
- All other writing assignments (one-third)
- Class participation (one-third)

Format and Submission: Papers should have margins akin to the default settings for Word – i.e., one-inch margins on all sides – making the text about 9x6½ inches in size. The font must be Courier New 12, and the text should be single-spaced (like this syllabus). Students should, if possible, do their work in Microsoft Word or a compatible program, which facilitates its assessment. Instructor comments will appear in the Review function of Word when assignments are emailed back to them. Those lacking a Word-compatible processing system can email their work as a PDF file, but the review/feedback will be handwritten and perhaps not as accessible. Due dates are indicated below. Late submissions will be penalized.

University-wide resources and policies are noted at the end of the syllabus. Students should note in particular the importance of academic integrity. Writing that is or appears to be extensively cribbed from other sources and not written by the student is unacceptable and may result in a failing grade or other consequences.

Session 1: Introduction to the Course (January 14)

- Introductions
- Overview of course objectives, content and requirements
- Current events discussion: what matters to policymakers
- Nature, purpose, and formats of briefing memo and press statement

Assignments for next class

Writing

- Two-page briefing paper for a meeting of the US National Security Council (NSC) on one of the foreign policy issues discussed in session 1 of class
- Short (3-5 sentence) public US government statement on that topic
- Due via email to wilsonrl@gwu.edu on Friday, January 17

Reading

- Halberstam, David, The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War (Hyperion, 2007), pps. 47-101.
- Acheson, Dean, Present at the Creation; My Years in the State Department (Norton, 1969), pps. 402-425.

Session 2: Outbreak of the Korean War (January 21)

- Discussion and examples of first assignment submissions
- Outbreak of the Korean War: events, issues, and items for decision
- Nature, purpose, and format of demarche points

Assignments for next classWriting

- Two-page briefing paper on the Korea crisis for a US NSC meeting on Sunday night, June 25, 1950
- Up to one page of demarche points on the crisis for delivery to a specified regional government selected by the student
- Short (3-5 sentence) public US government statement on the crisis
- Due via email to wilsonrl@gwu.edu on Friday, January 24

Reading

- “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (I): Egypt Victorious?” Middle East/North Africa Report No. 101, International Crisis Group, February 24, 2011, pps. 1-14.
- Hamzawy, Amr, “The Day of Anger – a New Protest Scene in Egypt,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 28, 2011.
- Remarks by the President on the Situation in Egypt, The White House, February 1, 2011.
- Sanger, David E., “As Mubarak Digs in, US Policy in Egypt is Complicated,” New York Times, February 5, 2011.
- Wood, David, “At Risk in Egypt’s Turmoil: US Military Access to the Middle East,” Center for a New American Security, February 5, 2011.
- Landler, Mark and Mark Mazzetti, “Obama Faces a Stark Choice on Mubarak,” New York Times, February 10, 2011.

Session 3: Fall of Egyptian President Mubarak (January 28)

- Discussion and examples of the Korean War submissions

- Egypt and Mubarak: events, issues, and items for decision
- Nature, purpose, and format of talking points
- Students describe (1 minute) their proposed final assignment topics

Assignments for next class

Writing

- Two-page briefing paper for a February 10, 2011 US NSC meeting on the situation in Egypt
- One page of talking points for use by a US Cabinet member (who should be identified) at this meeting
- Short (3-5 sentence) public US government statement
- Due via email to wilsonrl@gwu.edu on Friday, January 31

Session 4: Review and Discussion of Final Paper Topics (February 4)

- Discussion and examples of the Egypt assignment
- In 3-4 minutes each, students brief on their planned final assignment topics, key facts and issues, and possible recommendations/outcomes; discussion

Assignments for next class

Writing

- Two-page draft briefing paper for a US NSC or other senior-level interagency meeting on the individual issue selected by the student
- Short draft public USG statement
- Draft talking points for an identified US government principal at an internal USG meeting **or** draft demarche points for presentation to one or more foreign governments
- Due via email to wilsonrl@gwu.edu on Friday, February 7
- Submissions will receive commentary and suggestions, but no grade

Session 5: Individual Topics (February 11)

- Presentations by students on their individual topics and draft papers; discussion

Session 6: Individual Topics; Wrap-Up (February 18)

- Conclusion of presentations by students on their individual topics and draft papers; discussion
- Wrap-up

Final Writing Assignment

- Final version of a two-page briefing paper for a US NSC or other senior-level interagency meeting on the individual issue selected by the student
- Final version of a short public statement
- Final version of talking points for an identified US government principal at an internal USG meeting **or** demarche points for presentation to one or more specified foreign governments
- Due via email to wilsonrl@gwu.edu on Monday, February 24

University Resources and Policies

[a] Class Policies

- Attendance policy: Students are required to attend all sessions, to arrive on time, to have completed the assigned reading and to complete the written assignments by the due dates specified in the schedule above. Students who must miss class should advise the instructor prior to that class or immediately thereafter. Failure to do so will affect the grades awarded.
- Late Work: Writing submissions are due via email on the days noted in the class schedule above. Failure to submit assignments on time will affect the grades awarded. Students who must submit their assignments late due to reasons beyond their control should advise the instructor within 24 hours of the due date.
- Make-up Exams: This class has no exams.
- University Policy on Religious Holidays:
 1. Students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance;
 2. Faculty should extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations; and
 3. Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday should arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities

[b] Academic Integrity

- Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For the remainder of the university's academic integrity code, see: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

[c] Support for Students Outside the Classroom

- *DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)*. Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>.
- *UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER (UCC)* 202-994-5300. The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include crisis and emergency mental health consultations, and confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. See <http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>.

[d] Security

- In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location to be agreed upon at the first session of class.