

Catalogue Description:

This course is a writing practicum based on the comparative analysis of conceptual and practical distinctions found in writing for various social scientific disciplines: history, sociology, linguistics, psychology, government, economics and anthropology. Students will analyze essays in these disciplines and focus on the conceptual bases for formulating and solving problems, asking and answering questions. Primary emphasis is on writing practice. Requirements include several short essays and at least one paper of journal length. Students will model their own writing on high quality examples of writing in the various disciplines and will practice writing for the general reader rather than for the advanced specialist. Attention will be given to the student's major field.

Rationale:

Writing in the different disciplines is merely the surface expression of deeper variation. Conceptual, even epistemological, distinctions affect the writing process. Writing is different because of what practitioners of the disciplines believe about what they know, how they know it, and how it can best be presented to their audiences.

Students already involved in advanced study of various disciplines may accept most of these distinctions, may already have internalized the assumptions in their field of study. They may or may not be aware of these assumptions or of how they relate to writing. What this course must do is make clear how those assumptions affect the works that students will read and write. It is important that they read outside their own disciplines, but about similar subjects, so that patterns of thinking and writing which are "unfamiliar" may be dealt with. This should lead to more self-consciously produced and, with practice, better writing.

Possible Course Outline: (very general and tentative)

Part One of this course should raise and examine the conceptual questions mentioned above. Writing exercises in this phase should probably focus on clear, standard expository analysis in which students write about various forms of social scientific writing. General topics that should be covered include: the distinctions between essays and experimental reports, the nature of evidence, the nature of inference, and the use of statistical analysis.

Following this we recommend a course structure based on a topic study method. Topics such as the city, the family, or violence can be examined from the perspectives of all the social scientific disciplines. This will lead to practical analysis of the concepts studied in Part One. Students should practice writing in different disciplinary modes.

The final part of the course should allow the student to produce a journal length paper in a particular discipline. This paper, too, may focus on the central topic. Students will find it necessary to examine current and classic scholarship on the topic, thus increasing the breadth of their reading in the course.