

## **Capstone Experience in Political Science** ***Senior Level Paper or St. Mary's Project***

Your capstone experience in Political Science occurs near the end of your studies in the major. How can you satisfy this requirement? There are two ways of satisfying the capstone experience for the major in Political Science: a senior level paper **or** a St. Mary's Project (SMP). It is up to you and your advisor to determine the best path for you.

One way to satisfy your capstone experience is to finish a senior level paper. This method of satisfying graduation requirements in the political science major is best for students that (1) have not focused on a specific topic of study prior to their senior year or for students that (2) have not coordinated an SMP with anyone in political science prior to their senior year.

### ***How to Satisfy a Senior Level Paper Requirement***

You can finish your senior level paper anytime during your junior or senior year when you are enrolled in a 400 level seminar class in political science. A student selecting a senior level paper option must: (1) file a declaration of that intent with the course instructor and the department chair by the end of the sixth week of the semester in which she or he is enrolled in the political science seminar for which the paper is written; (2) the student must demonstrate her or his competence in political science by identifying and engaging with the concepts, problems or controversies in that subfield and by making a contributions to those issues; and (3) submit a copy of the seminar paper to the department chair no later than the last day of exam week for that semester.

Another way to satisfy your capstone experience is to complete a SMP. Initiating a St. Mary's Project requires preparation on the part of a student before their senior year and this document gives you some information about how to begin that process.

### ***How to get started on your St. Mary's Project in Political Science***

The best way to start a St. Mary's Project is to discuss your ideas during your **junior year** with faculty members in political science. Since SMPs are student generated and self-initiated, you need to approach us with your ideas. Students usually have one or two ideas that they are interested in pursuing and then develop those ideas with a faculty member during the Spring semester before your senior year. In some cases faculty members mention topics in their classes as potential SMP projects that students may want to pursue. Discussing ideas with a political science faculty member is an important first step in an SMP and it should be part of your junior year preparations for graduation.

Once you have identified a topic with a faculty member, you need to agree on how you will accomplish the project. This requires developing an action plan with your faculty mentor on the workflow associated with your project. This can be done before you leave for the summer or when you return in the Fall semester of your senior year. We like to develop an action plan to make sure that there are "no surprises" and that we are all "on the same page".

The requirements for the first semester are generally process oriented with scheduled due dates for providing research and drafted work on a regular basis. Mentors expect students to attend scheduled meetings, to formulate a viable research question or thesis and to make sustained progress toward a first draft of your SMP. Since this project is self-initiated, we leave considerable leeway for students in arriving at these goals.