

# PPL Capstone Seminar

PPL 4010 – Spring 2017

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Time: Thursday, 6:00-8:30  
Room: Cocke Hall 101

Instructor: Christopher D. Berk  
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Office Hours: Wednesday, 3:30-5:00  
Gibson Hall, Room S342

## Description

The capstone seminar is designed to help students carry out their fourth-year Political Philosophy, Policy, and Law (PPL) thesis and offer feedback on their progress. Over sixteen weeks, students will draft, revise, and complete a thesis in collaboration with myself, a faculty advisor, and classmates.

## Course Objectives

Our weekly meetings afford you the opportunity to receive constructive criticism on your central claims and arguments, and the course assignments will guide you through the process of completing a research project. Your thesis should be between 7,500 and 10,000 words. It should strive to make an original argument that addresses a narrowly tailored topic. PPL prizes clarity, not loquacity; brevity, not bloat. You should seek increasing precision and concision in successive drafts of your paper.

## Course Structure

We will have three presentation cycles this semester. At our first meeting, we will divide our class into four groups, A – D. The timing of your presentation, and that of your fellow group members, will be determined according to [the schedule](#) at the end of this document. The cycles are structured as follows:

1. **First cycle:** In the initial cycle you will share with the class a short (500-1000 word) statement of your topic and thesis, along with an article or book chapter relevant to your proposed line of argument. The article/chapter might support your argument, or it might present important objections to it. Either way, you will have to explain how you propose to defend or rebut the position taken in the piece you've coupled with your statement. You should circulate your statement no later than midnight on the Sunday before the Thursday class in which you are due to present. This is to give your classmates adequate time to read

your work. If it is possible, the outside reading material (book chapter or article) should be made available sooner.

For this first presentation, you should prepare a 5-minute talk based on your short statement and outside article. You should explain your topic and your principal arguments in as plain a form as possible.

2. **Second cycle:** At this second stage, you'll submit a first draft of your paper (4000 words) and receive comments from assigned commentators, as well as from the rest of the class. As before, you should circulate this draft to the entire class by midnight on the Sunday prior to the session in which you're due to present your work.

3. **Third cycle:** This cycle is exactly like the second, except that you will now present a full-length draft. You will then integrate comments from myself, advisors, and in-class commentators to produce a final version, which will be due at **5pm on Friday, May 5th**.

## Assignments

### Participation (30%):

First, and most important, students are expected to read the assigned material before class and to contribute to discussion regularly and thoughtfully. Attendance is mandatory. Students with three unexcused absences will fail the participation section of the course. If you do not feel able to participate on a given day for whatever reason, you can email me by noon the day of class to let me know. Please do not do this more than two or three times over the term.

Second, if you're presenting in the seminar that week you must submit your draft **by the Sunday prior, before midnight**. For the second and third cycle assignments, I expect you to include a brief summary of the changes you've made from the previous round at the top of your paper.

Third, over the term you'll serve as a paper discussant twice – once in the second cycle and once in the third. As a commentator, your primary responsibility is to the author – what's your reaction to the paper? And why? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Most importantly, what can be done to improve the paper? Paper discussant presentations should run between 5 and 10 minutes.

Fourth, you're expected to post a thoughtful question or comment on each paper assigned that week in Collab **by 12pm the day of the session**. These comments should be no longer than a few sentences. Ideally, these comments will be a resource to help you (and your peers) identify potential opportunities, ambiguities, and issues in your draft ahead of the next round of revisions. If you're commenting on a paper that week, you do not have to post to the discussion board.

## Thesis (70%):

No matter your assigned group, you will be expected to submit a complete draft *by spring break*. This requirement is intended to preempt the tendency to leave the PPL research project to the last minute. The expectation is that students should spend the second half of their final semester *polishing up* an already existing draft, rather than struggling to produce a complete draft before the semester ends.

Final grades for your thesis are agreed between myself (your capstone instructor) and your thesis advisor, subject to the review of Professor Bird.

## Submission Requirements

Except in documented cases of illness or emergency, late papers will lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day. However, each student may, at his, her, or their discretion, take a 48-hour extension for one of the drafts, no questions asked. This offer does not include the final draft. If you are using your extension please indicate this on the first page of your paper.

Please submit all papers electronically in an *editable* format (.doc, .docx, .odf, etc.) to [chrisberk@virginia.edu](mailto:chrisberk@virginia.edu).

## Disability Accommodation

If you are in need of accommodation for an impairment or disability, contact me as soon as possible. You should also contact the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC) to document your needs and determine a reasonable accommodation. They can be reached at [sdac@virginia.edu](mailto:sdac@virginia.edu).

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including the UVa Writing Center and the Office of Health Promotion, are available to all students.

## Plagiarism

Document all of your source material. If you use any text from someone else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain data, ideas, or other material. *This includes others' material that you adapt or summarize in your paper.* If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, please ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be

treated lightly. Fortunately, it is also easy to avoid if you are careful to give credit where credit is due.

## Reading & Assignment Schedule

This course is self-contained. All material will be available through the course UVA Collab page.

*Practical notes on reading:*

Assignments will grow in length as the term progresses, and you're required to read each others' work. The reading load for this class will, as a consequence, increase over time. You should expect to spend at least four hours reading per class session.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Week 1

1.19

- \* Course introduction, group lottery

#### CYCLE 1

#### Week 2

1.26

- \* Short statement + presentation A

#### Week 3

2.2

- \* Short statement + presentation B

#### Week 4

2.9

- \* Short statement + presentation C

#### Week 5

2.16

- \* Short statement + presentation D

#### CYCLE 2

## **Week 6**

2.23

- \* First Draft A

## **Week 7**

3.2

- \* First Draft B

## **Week 8**

**Complete draft due, Sunday [3.5] at midnight**

- \* No session, spring break

## **Week 9**

3.16

- \* First Draft C

## **Week 10**

3.23

- \* First Draft D

## **CYCLE 3**

## **Week 11**

3.29

**Note, we meet on Wednesday [3.29] this week**

- \* Second Draft A

## **Week 12**

4.6

- \* Second Draft B

## **Week 13**

4.13

- \* No session

## **Week 14**

4.20

\* Second Draft C

## **Week 15**

4.27

\* Second Draft D

**ALL THESES DUE by 5pm on Friday, May 5th**