Planning and Public Policy Program, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University

Senior Seminar, 10:762:494:01, Spring 2014, 3 credits

Thursday, 1:10-3:50, Room 253, Civic Square Building, College Avenue Campus

Instructor is Frank J. Popper, Room 356, Civic Square Building, College Avenue Campus, fpopper@rutgers.edu, fpopper@princeton.edu. Instructor’s website is policy.rutgers.edu/faculty/popper, where more copies of this syllabus are available.

Office hours: Tuesday morning, before or after class, or by appointment.

In this seminar you do a senior thesis on a topic of planning and public policy. Your paper should be in the range of 20 double-spaced pages, represent your best work and serve as a possible writing sample for employers or graduate schools.

One goal of the course is to engage your imagination to produce original work. Another is to teach you to help each other do good work. Thus the course offers you serious intellectual, professional and personal opportunities.

Your thesis can be on any topic of planning and public policy that you choose and I approve. The thesis goes through at least six stages: a proposal, a first draft, a class presentation, a second draft, a public presentation and a final version. (In some cases more drafts may be needed.) Previous experience with your topic helps but is not required.

Your thesis should review existing literature and offer an original analytic contribution, not just a descriptive one. Your analysis may be a case study, a fieldwork investigation, a policy suggestion, an assessment of an ongoing program, a test of a new idea or a creative mix of these and other approaches.

Half your grade comes from the final draft of the thesis. 10% comes from the proposal, 20% from the presentation to the class and 20% from class participation and general conscientiousness, including getting work in on time. I expect all written work to meet advanced collegiate standards of writing and will lower the grade if it does not.

To help class communications I’ve set up a closed Facebook group, “Senior Seminar, Spring 2014, Popper,” which you should join. Go to it, ask me to let you in, and I will. If you have a reason not to join, perhaps because you’re uncomfortable with Facebook, please let me know, and we’ll make other arrangements.

You should attend all classes. If you must miss one, please get in touch with me.

I expect you to know, understand and live up to Rutgers’ standards of academic integrity explained at academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/policy-on-academic-integrity. See also plagiarism.org. If you have a question about these standards, please ask me. Rules of thumb: if
you think you may be doing something academically dishonest, you probably are. Your conscience or sense of safety is telling you so. To avoid plagiarism, do original work.

Our class may deal with sensitive matters: issues of race or ethnicity, economic disparities and fairness, gender and sexuality, or simply differences between cities and suburbs or varying kinds of each. Our class should be a safe place to talk about these often-uncomfortable subjects. Let’s be civil to each other. There are, and always have been, unpleasant nearby, national and global models of political behavior. We should not be that way. We should do our good-faith best to learn from each other and from our differences, and to help each other in our work. These possibilities are among the main assets of academia.

**Schedule**

January 23  Introduction.

January 30  No class: individual meetings in my office on possible topics.

February 6  Class meeting on possible topics 1.

February 13  Ditto.

February 20  Class meeting on topics 2. Discussion of what a thesis is and how it works.

February 27  No class: three-page proposals due.

March 6  No class: individual meetings in my office on proposals.

March 13  Class meeting on topics 3.

March 20  No class: spring vacation.

March 27  Class presentations/.

April 3  Ditto. First drafts due.

April 10  Peer editing, plus critiques of rehearsals for public presentations and individual meetings in my office on drafts. I will meet with you individually at least once between April 10 and May 1, so you will do at least two drafts.

April 17  Ditto.
April 24  Ditto.

May 1  Public presentations.

May 5  Final version of thesis due in instructor’s office at noon.

A note on sources

I do not know all the planning and policy fields because no one does. So I will often refer you to specialists, in the Bloustein School and elsewhere including beyond Rutgers, who know more about particular subjects than I do. I’m not putting you off. Instead I’m putting you on to specific sources of knowledge.

For those doing a thesis in or near my specialties of environmental, land-use, natural-resource and regional planning, I offer intellectual/bibliographic help in my courses. If you go to my website, policy.rutgers.edu/faculty/popper, and click on the courses, at the end of some syllabi you will find “A note on sources” much longer than this one. If you are considering other subjects, see if you can find comparable material. If you need help, ask me.

Probably the leading English-language guide to writing is William Strunk, Jr., and Stanford K. Pritchard, “Elements of Style: Updated and Annotated for Present-Day Use” (2012), available on Kindle or at the Barnes & Noble/Rutgers University Bookstore. Early editions, with E. B. White as the second author and without the subtitle, would also work, and some are online.


Jane Miller at Bloustein has written two excellent guides to presenting numbers, “The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers” (2004) and “The Chicago Guide to Writing about Multivariate Analysis” (second edition, 2013). Edward Tufte has written several wonderful books on the presentation of visual information. (He’s not a PowerPoint fan.) Kate L. Turabian’s books and the associated “The Chicago Manual of Style” (sixteenth edition, 2010 or later, also online) offers style and bibliographic instruction beyond Strunk, White and Pritchard.

Wikipedia, other encyclopedias, and dictionaries, online or off-, are good places to begin research and terrible places to end it. Use them as starting points. Please don’t cite them. It always makes your work look bad.