Capstone Seminar: Guantanamo

What is a Capstone? Course Objectives

The Political Science Department designed the Capstone Seminar to be a culminating experience for students. As majors, you complete a common set of courses early in your program of study that establishes the foundation of the discipline and initiates processes of skill building. You then branch off into different subfields (American Politics and Process, Global Politics and Space, Politics of Ideas) and take a variety of courses with different substantive and skill emphases in the “middle” of the major. The Capstone provides a venue where you will be able (and expected) to draw upon the ideas and skills you have gained thus far to explore a new and overarching topic or set of related topics in Political Science that has relevance to your futures. Capstone seminars provide an integrative experience that substantively allows you to employ insights and ideas from work in different subfields and includes skill intensive writing, critical thinking, independent research and oral presentation opportunities to apply theories and concepts to new problems and cases, as well as practice in articulating and defending your own views.

This seminar will use the myriad of issues surrounding the US detention center at Guantanamo Bay Cuba to accomplish the Capstone’s goals. It will allow you to employ critical thinking and analytical skills while using US counterterrorism (CT) policies as exemplified by GITMO—along with other concepts and theories specific to Political Science—to evaluate pressing contemporary concerns as a pathway to forming and substantiating your own perspectives on these issues. As part of this effort, you will engage in independent research, investigating a contemporary topic of concern and evaluating different components of the issues surrounding the detention regime at Guantanamo Bay prison as you complete your work.

Another driving motive behind this Capstone topic is to encourage you to look deeply at how both the US Government and the American public reacted to the attack on the homeland. Especially during the first years after the attack, as the Government committed the US to the “War on Terror,” there was significant political and societal consensus on a strong arm response aimed at neutralizing individuals associated—or suspected of being associated—with Al Qaeda and other Sunni Muslim extremist groups, while demanding the loyalty test of whether other nations—allies or competitors alike—would join with the US in this war. Part of this consensus included acceptance of increasingly invasive domestic surveillance methods and dependence on aggressive military and CIA-led covert activities internationally. Only by the second half of the decade would significant numbers of critics begin to question some of the motives and decisions behind US CT policies. Even so, Guantanamo remains open today, housing “forever prisoners” from al Qaeda, and the citizens and government of the US largely continue to at least passively support counterterrorism policies that appear to contradict many US values and democratic commitments. Some scholars argue that a consensus has again solidified that allegedly extrajudicial measures associated with war are necessary and appropriate to keep the Islamic extremist threat at bay.
As suggested above, this course will point to Guantanamo Bay prison and US policies and practices there as the hub of an array of international and domestic developments—ranging from issues of politics, legality, wars, population displacement, ethics, foreign relations, and societal disruption—that are still driving events in the contemporary world. Besides investigating these past and current threads in a seminar environment, you will decide which of the course’s multiple themes you will want to drill down deeply as your Capstone research area.

Each week we will attack a thicket of issues, largely in chronological order in terms of when they became part of the discussion of US CT policy, but given the plethora of players and the array of domestic and international repercussions from US detention, military, and intelligence methods, we will make detours aimed at weaving together an understanding of how these practices and decisions impacted the US and the rest of the world both as they happened and today. All the while, we will keep an eye on the issue of political and societal consensus governing counterterrorism. Whether we judge these CT policies as consistent with US values, laws, and commitments, or we do not, we need to step back and gauge whether such practices continue because a majority of Americans accept them as valid and necessary.

**Method of Presentation**

This course will be run as a seminar. Formal presentations by the instructors will be rare. Class sessions will serve as a venue for exploration and informed discussion of the materials we are reading and otherwise considering. We will also spend considerable class time working on aspects of your research throughout the semester.

**Learning Objectives and Skills This Course Will Seek to Improve**

This course has several learning outcomes and objectives. Substantively, you will emerge from this course with a deeper understanding of a number of pressing current and likely future concerns in domestic and international politics and, given the integrative intent of the course, you will be able to apply insights developed by different subfields of political science to these issues while appreciating the contributions made by other disciplines as well. You will also have a more sophisticated and rigorous appreciation for how the 911 attacks had a watershed impact on the trajectory of US politics in general, on US national security precepts and policies in particular, on societal expectations of how the US Government should keep them safe, and indeed on issues of ethnicity, religion, and citizenship. Given the integrative intent of the course, you will be able to apply insights developed by different subfields of political science to these issues, while appreciating the contributions made by other disciplines—particularly history—as well.

This course will also attempt to challenge and improve a number of your skills that future employers consider vital for students of Political Science (and students of the Liberal Arts and Sciences more broadly) to master. These include:

** oral communication (through regular class participation and class discussions, group exercises);

** reading comprehension (through regular reading assignments that will provide the basis for class discussions);

** critical thinking and analysis (through class readings, discussion of scholarly work about the course themes, group exercises, research paper assignment);
**effective, concise writing (through responsiveness to evaluators’ comments and systematic improvements in the quality and clarity of each written assignment);**

**research and hypothesis writing, testing (through research paper assignment);**

**comprehending the views of others and articulating and defending one’s own position (through class readings and discussions, group exercises, research paper assignment);**

**working collectively to develop and communicate an idea through oral presentation (group exercises, components of research assignments).**

**Intended Long-Term Impact of the Course**

Beyond helping you refine your skills as a Political Science major, this course seeks to make a more lasting impact on your professional development in anticipation of your transition to the workplace. As one employer of college graduates recently observed, young employees “are very good at finding information but not as good at putting it into context … they are really good at technology, but not at how to take those skills and resolve specific problems.” Skills and abilities that employers repeatedly say they most value in their young employees include: written and oral communication skills, adaptability and flexibility, the ability to deal with ambiguity and complexity, managing multiple priorities, collaboration and interpersonal skills, the capacity to make decisions, and the ability to creatively solve complex problems. Firms want graduates with such skills in addition to core expertise – people who can work well in teams, write and speak clearly, engage in critical thinking, adapt quickly to changing conditions, solve problems on the fly, handle pressure effectively, and interact with colleagues from different backgrounds and cultures. Another employer said such skills tend to differentiate good college graduates from exceptional college graduates.

**Class Participation**

Given the purposes of the Capstone and the way class sessions are structured, class participation is a vital component of this course and your ACTIVE involvement in all class sessions is essential. Participation in class discussion is expected and will be considered carefully in the final course grading. Such participation includes listening carefully and critically to the views expressed by classmates and instructors, as well as the expression of your own ideas. It is also expected that you will be willing to periodically take the lead in discussing issues and ideas based on the materials you are reading and researching. You should always be prepared during each class session to discuss current political events as they relate to the subject of the course.

Due to the structure of the course, you should not expect to do well without regular class attendance and consistent, active participation. If you do miss a class session, you are still responsible for all the material covered.

**Special Circumstances**

If you have any kind of special circumstances that we should know about, please make us aware right away. For example, if you have a diagnosed (or undiagnosed) learning challenge, if you have a physical condition of any kind that affects your learning, or if you are an athlete or a club member who will travel during the semester, we need to know that at the start of the term in order to make certain that your needs
can be met. Confidentiality will be respected in all instances. In addition, if you are a student who has problems writing papers, taking class notes, presenting material orally, etc., there are many resources and programs you can take advantage of to improve your class performance. All you have to do is ask and we can direct you to the appropriate help.

Please note: If you are a SNAP student eligible for accommodation, you MUST provide us with a copy of the notification letter you have been given by the SNAP office well before the need for any accommodation arises. If you are a student athlete who will miss class time due to away events, you MUST follow the procedures set out by the College in order to expect due consideration. In both cases, we will not guarantee granting your request if we have not received proper notice.

**Office Hours**

Your instructors have designated sets of office hours that are established for you to use in order to meet with us outside of class. Do not be reluctant to come by at these times, especially if you have questions that are left unanswered from class or if you are experiencing any difficulties or uncertainties in the course. If these times conflict with your schedule, we can work out a mutually convenient time to meet. While both Dr. Creed and Dr. Desjeans are available to discuss any issues tied to the course, as a veteran Capstone instructor, Dr. Creed is particularly well-versed on issues involving the mechanics of the process, particularly in terms of Political Science department regulations. Given her long tenure working on national security issues at the Central Intelligence Agency, Dr. Desjeans has special familiarity with many—but not all-- of the substantive issues laid out in the course schedule. That said, the instructors will take a priority or secondary lead based on the nature of the topic under review; including in terms of your research projects.

**Course Ground Rules**

*Attendance:* You are expected to be present for all class sessions in this course. Absence from more than three class sessions during the term, whether excused or unexcused, is excessive. Students missing more than three class sessions (including arriving late or leaving early from class sessions) will lose ten points from the participation portion of their total average for each additional absence.

*Late Work:* Given the nature of this Capstone and its structure, late work will not be tolerated. Work that is turned in after the date and time due will lose ten points off the total automatically (i.e. a paper with a numerical grade of 85 becomes a 75) and an additional ten points will be subtracted for each subsequent extra day. Work is considered late (and the clock begins ticking) if it is not handed in at the time requested. All due dates and times are listed in the syllabus – you know right now when everything you are expected to produce should be finished so there should be no excuse for late work.

*Hard Copy and Electronic Submission:* 1) In terms of the weekly reading assessments, you will deliver your discussion suggestions both via the OAKS portal and directly to your two instructors via email; 2) In terms of the Independent Research Assignments, you will deliver a copy to the OAKS portal and in hard copy to Dr. Creed.

*Academic Honesty:* You were bound by an Honor Code when you enrolled at the College of Charleston. We expect you to abide by that code. If you are found to have plagiarized any of your written work, you will automatically fail this course and be turned over to the Honor Board for further disciplinary action. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating of any kind, ask before you act.
**Courtesy and Tolerance:** As this course progresses, you will doubtlessly find that your ideas about politics, national security, and societal values do not always match the views of your fellow students, the authors of your texts, or your instructors. However, if this course is to prove rewarding for everyone, it is absolutely essential for each participant to respect and tolerate the ideas and opinions of others in the class. It is equally important for everyone to discuss issues on the basis of information and analysis rather than emotion and volume. By adopting such a posture, you will hopefully find the course will be a challenging and enlightening experience where you will have many opportunities to rethink what you know or believe to be true about politics today and in the future.

- In keeping with courtesy and tolerance, all cell phones and other personal electronic devices must be turned OFF before class and remain OFF throughout the class session.

**Time Spent Outside of Class:** We have high expectations for you in this course and have crafted it with that in mind. Given the nature of a Capstone experience, you will need to spend at least two to three hours working outside of class for every hour you spend in the classroom in order to successfully complete the work in this course. Some weeks may require more time. Students who are not committed to spending that kind of time studying and preparing for class should expect to struggle. It is important to note that time alone does not automatically ensure success – the kind of time you devote to your work and how you approach the endeavor may be just as critical. You can devote time to preparing and studying that is effective and ineffective. If you ever wish to discuss these issues, feel free – there may be important changes to make to your approach that can maximize your effort.

**Warning:** There is really only one way you can get yourself into serious trouble in this course – and that is not to do the work. This would seem obvious – but it is telling how often it happens and how often the consequences turn out to be a surprise after the fact to students who chart this course. The way to assure you succeed in this course is simple – just do what is asked of you when it is asked of you – and if you begin to struggle in some way, let’s talk about it. If someone is burying themselves, we will not intervene. In the world you are about to enter, nobody will be coaxing or prodding you to fulfill the requirements of the workplace; they will simply expect it of you and respond accordingly if you fail to produce. The same rules apply here.

**Readings and Texts**

The three required texts are available at the College of Charleston Bookstore. These are:


Additional required readings are marked with an asterisk (*) in the course outline. These are available in the course content page on OAKS.

It is also important for you to keep up with current events as you take this course. Unfortunately, the Charleston Post and Courier will not be much help in this regard. We urge you to subscribe to The New
York Times, Washington Post, or The Economist and read it as often as possible. All three of these publications allow discounts for students on their websites.

**Method of Evaluation**

Grades for this course will be determined as follows:

1. **Class Participation (15%)**: Your constructive input is an essential component of this course. It is expected that you will attend class consistently and that you will be prepared to discuss the required readings on the day they are assigned. At the end of the semester, you will receive a grade based on the contribution you have made to class proceedings.

2. **Weekly Reading Assessments and Discussion Questions (15%)**: Each week by Sunday at 1200 (noon) prior to our Monday meeting, you will input both to the OAKS drop box and in a direct email to the two instructors a reaction to the upcoming week’s readings along with at least two thoughtful discussion questions. Your reaction narratives should encompass at least two paragraphs of reflection discussing the week’s readings and may go beyond that minimum depending on how much you have to say. What struck you? What did you find interesting? Or not interesting? What—if anything—did the readings make you think about? These reactions are designed to be fairly casual and promote some class dialogue—no need to stress about whether you are saying something profound. Your reactions should, however, demonstrate that you have carefully read and critically assessed the material assigned for our upcoming class sessions. You may choose to focus on one of the readings or several of them in your narrative.

3. **The Capstone Independent Research Assignment (70%)**: Over the course of the entire semester, you will be engaged in your own independent research on some aspect of the issues associated with Guantanamo Bay detention—the list of acceptable topics is endless but the one proviso must be that your issue and the way it is framed makes substantive use of the concepts under consideration—it is not enough to simply invoke “Guantanamo” in the context of some issue and consider your assignment direction sufficient. After completing an initial exploratory essay early in the term, you will be conducting your research in stages throughout the semester. Each of the components listed below will be graded and the final integrative paper will be turned in at the end of the semester. The components of the research paper include:

   a. an annotated bibliography (5%)
   b. a formal proposal (5%)
   c. a literature review (10%)
   d. an empirical essay (10%)
   e. a normative essay (10%)
   f. an integrated final research paper (20%)
   g. active participation during in-class research work and peer review (10%)

Due dates for each of these assignments are listed below and in the course outline that follows. More information on the research project is contained in an accompanying handout and instructions/guidelines for specific portions of the paper will be distributed during the semester.

Opportunities for “extra credit” are not available.
Grading

Grades for individual assignments will be numerical on a 100 point scale and the final grade will be calculated according to the percentage value of the assignment based on the following scale: 93-100 A; 90-92 A-; 88-89 B+; 83-87 B; 80-82 B-; 78-79 C+; 73-77 C; 70-71 C-; 68-69 D+; 63-67 C’ 60-62 D-; below 60 F

Dates to Remember

- Academic Autobiographical Essay due Monday, September 2 by 4:30 p.m.
- Guantanamo Project Narrative due Wednesday, September 11 by 4:30 p.m.
- Annotated bibliography due Monday, September 23 by 4:30 p.m.
- Research paper proposal due Wednesday, October 2 by 4:30 p.m.
- Literature review due Monday, October 21 by 4:30 p.m.
- Empirical essay due Monday, November 4 by 4:30 p.m.
- Normative essay due Monday, November 18 by 4:30 p.m.
- Integrated Capstone Research papers due Wednesday, December 4 by 4:30 p.m.

Class Outline and Assignments (*) Indicates Text Is in OAKS

I The Whats and Whys of a Capstone Exercise (21 August)

Reading:

Start Eichenwald 500 Days

II The Watershed of 11 September 2001 (26-28 August)

Reading:

Finish Eichenwald, 500 Days


III Why Guantanamo Bay? (2 September)

Academic Autobiographical Essay due Monday, September 2 by 4:30 p.m.

Reading:

Greenberg, “World Gone Wrong” and “First Team”


IV The Bush Administration’s Counterterrorism Vision (4 September)

Reading:


(*) Public Law 107-40, 107th Congress, 18 September 2001

V The Administration’s National Security and Legal Justifications (9-11 September)

*Guantanamo Project Narrative due Wednesday, September 11 by 4:30 p.m.*

Reading:


(*) US Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel, “Memorandum for John Rizzo, Acting General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency” 1 August 2002, pp: 1-18


VI What Do US Laws and Treaty Obligations Require? (16-18 September)

Reading:

Greenberg, “The Petting Zoo” and “The Caribbean Hilton”

(*) Steven Ratner, “Think Again: Geneva Conventions” *Foreign Policy*, 8 October 2009, pp: 1-17


VII The CIA’s Pivotal Role (23 September)

Annotated bibliography due Monday, September 23 by 4:30 p.m.

Reading:


VIII The Congressional Point of View (25 September)

Reading:

(*) Elisa Massimino and Avidan Cover, “While Congress Slept” Human Rights, 33 (1) pp: 5-10


IX The View from Abroad (30 September – 2 October)

Research paper proposal due Wednesday, October 2 by 4:30 p.m.

Reading:


(*) Council of Europe , Parliamentary Assembly, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers involving Council of Europe member states, Draft report, 7 June 2006, pp: 1-19

X Critics Gain Traction (7-9 October)

Reading:


(*) Central Intelligence Agency Inspector General Special Review, Counterterrorism Detention and Interrogation Activities, 7 May 2004, pp: 1-8, 15


XI US Courts Become Involved (16-21 October)

Literature review due Monday, October 21 by 4:30 p.m.

Reading:


(*) “Guantanamo Litigation – History” Lawfare, 21 January 2013, pp: 1-14


(*) Mike Sacks, “Supreme Court Declines Guantanamo Bay Cases: It’s Been 4 Years of Silence” Huffington Post, 11 June 2012, pp: 1-2

XII Some Changes in CT Policy (23-28 October)

Reading:

(*) Bill Adair, “More than 500 Guantanamo Detainees were released or transferred under Bush” Politifact, 18 June 2009, pp: 1-2


(*) Candace Gorman, “My Experience Representing a Guantanamo Detainee” Litigation, 35 (3) (2009), pp: 10-16

XIII  The Obama Administration Promises Changes (30 October – 4 November)

Empirical essay due Monday, November 4 by 4:30 p.m.

Reading:

Goldsmith, “The New Normal”, “After the Next Attack” and “Forces Bigger Than the President”


(*) Trevor McCrisken, “Ten Years On: Obama’s War on Terrorism in Rhetoric and Practice” International Affairs, 87 (4) pp: 781-801

XIV  Pushback from the US Public and Congress (6 November)

Reading:


(*) Justin McCarthy, “Americans Continue to Oppose Closing Guantanamo Bay” Gallup, 13 June 2014

XV  GITMO Stays Open (11-13 November)

Reading:


(*) “Peter Margulies on Law, Ethics, and the GTMO Hunger Strike” Lawfare, 17 May 2013, pp: 1-3

(*) “In Force-Feeding Detainees, Obama Has Courts on His Side” Reuters, 26 April 2013, pp: 1-6


(*) “It’s Time to Admit That the Military Commissions Have Failed” Lawfare, 16 April 2019, pp: 1-2

(*) “Guantanamo Redux: Why It Was Opened and Why It Should Be Closed (and Not Enlarged)” Lawfare, 12 March 2017, pp: 2-3


(*) “Remarks by Brigadier General Baker on Military Commissions” Lawfare, 15 September 2016, pp: 1-6


(*) “Prisoners: Who’s Still Held?” Close Guantanamo, 2019, pp: 1-6

(*) “Congress Weighs Whether to Allow Guantanamo Prisoners to Travel to the US for Medical Care” The New York Times, 2 June 2019, pp: 1-9

XVI Why This Still Matters (18-25 November, 2 December)

Normative essay due Monday, November 18 by 4:30 p.m.

Reading:


(*) Robin Wright, “The Dangerous Dregs of ISIS” The New Yorker, 16 April 2019, pp: 1-14


(*) “Justice Breyer’s Question in Al-Alwi: Is Detention Still Justified?” Lawfare, 10 June 2019, pp: 1-3


*Integrated Capstone Research papers due Wednesday, December 4 by 4:30 p.m.*