



Penn in Washington

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

PSCI 4993: Preparing for Policy Work in Washington

Spring 2024

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[Appointments](#)

While the Penn in Washington program allows students to apply what they are learning in the classroom to their internships in real time, some amount of preparation in advance of the semester would make students both stronger applicants and employees, more able to take advantage of learning opportunities, and develop meaningful connections with mentors and peers in the policymaking world. In this course, students will learn what Washington reads, how Washington writes, and what Washington expects from interns and entry level staff. Students will learn for example why congressional hearings matter, will map the actors in policy subsystems, and will explore the importance of the budget process to every policy issue. Hearing directly from Penn alumni working across Washington, students will also spend time learning who the employers in Washington are, how Congressional offices are staffed, what role interns and entry level staff play in different institutions, and how to communicate effectively in the internship search process. Finally, a substantial part of the course will be devoted to learning how to write for policy audiences. Assignments will be devoted to practicing writing think tank reports, congressional memos, State Department after action reports, and other products common in Washington.

This course includes in-class research; please bring your laptop to all class meetings.

Class Meetings

January 24: Introductions and What Washington Reads

After introductions we'll get you signed up for a variety of publications, have you set up your LinkedIn page, we'll review expectations for a DC resume, and you'll complete a survey summarizing your policy experience so far and your hopes for this course.

January 31: Building Relationships

In this class we'll talk about how networking happens in Washington, how to keep track of your contacts, and how to engage in meaningful conversations with people at various stages of their careers.

February 7: Building Relationships Part 2

This week you'll practice informational interviewing with Dr. Martinez. There is no in person class meeting in lieu of one-on-one Zoom meetings by appointment over the course of the week. Prepare questions in advance and have a plan for what you want to learn.

February 14: Money in Washington

This week we'll learn about campaign finance and the budget process. There will be speakers on both topics. Please prepare questions based on their biographies and any questions you have once you have completed the readings. We'll also talk about applying to internships and how to write a DC cover letter.

February 21: How Washington Writes

Today we'll start our conversation about policy writing and the various forms of writing that are typical in Washington. Your first assignment, due next week, is a talking points memo.

February 28: Working in the House

Class today is focused on the structure and staff in the House of Representatives. We'll talk to a variety of House staffers, discuss the work in a personal vs a committee office, and prepare you for your next writing assignment, due next week, the constituent letter.

March 6 NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

March 13: Working in the Senate

Today we turn our attention to the Senate. We'll talk to staffers and talk about a common task for interns, the hearing memo. I'll be in DC so our class meeting will be via Zoom.

March 20: Working at a Think Tank

This week we'll look at a range of think tanks in Washington. We'll explore their political leanings and their role in the policymaking process. Your writing assignment will be a leave behind, a common product at think tanks and advocacy organizations.

March 27: Working at the State Department

The State Department is a highly bureaucratic organization with a very particular writing style. We'll talk to foreign service officers and entry level civil servants to learn more about how work gets done in diplomacy. Your writing assignment will be a decision memo.

April 3: Working for a Lobby Firm and in Advocacy

In this class we'll talk to lobbyists about their work, their career paths, and how they influence Congress. Your writing assignment will be materials for a congressional hearing.

April 10: Congressional Hearing

This week you'll play a role - either as a member of the committee or as a witness - in a congressional hearing. As a group we'll choose the topic and you'll choose your roles the week prior. Assignments include the written opening statement/testimony and your public delivery of comments.

April 17: Press

This week we'll talk about managing press from inside government, the jobs in political news, and speechwriting. Your writing assignment will be a press release for the hearing last week, from the perspective of the position you played. I'll be in DC so this class will be by Zoom.

April 24: The Issue Brief

Your final writing project will be a group one, preparing an issue brief for a think tank on the topic we've been exploring all semester. We'll take time in this class to learn more about issue briefs and give you time to work in your groups.

May 1: Careers in Public Policy: Student's choice

To cap off the class we'll ask a panel of alumni to answer your lingering questions. Some possible choices include how to use a law degree in Washington, how to break in to national security, and how long does it take

to become a foreign service officer. We'll discuss your preferences a few weeks in advance so that I can secure the right speakers.

Assignment Details

For all of the assignments you'll be writing about the same issue arena. This semester we'll do tech policy. Each assignment is worth 10% of your grade.

Talking Points Memo (2 pages, 500 words)

Scenario: You're preparing your primary for a meeting with industry leaders. What do they need to know?

Constituent Letter (1 page, 250 words)

Scenario: You work in a congressional office and you need to respond to constituents concerned about AI.

Hearing Summary (2 pages)

Scenario: You work in a congressional office and you have been asked to attend a hearing and provide a summary to your LD.

Leave Behind (2 pages)

Scenario: You work for an advocacy organization doing Hill visits. This might be physically handed to the person you're lobbying or you might email it. This is an easy to read summary of what you are hoping will happen on a particular issue.

Decision Memo (2 pages)

You work at the Department of State in the Office of the Special Envoy for Critical and Emerging Technology. You've been tasked with making an argument for action on a topic that we'll choose in the prior week based on current events.

Testimony (2 pages)

You'll either be preparing testimony from the private sector or an advocacy organization or you'll be writing opening remarks and questions for a member of the committee.

Press Release (1 page)

You'll prepare a press release based on your role in the hearing last week.

Issue Brief (5 pages, jointly created)

Scenario: you work for a think tank and your organization is ready to produce a longer piece on a tech topic that we'll choose based on current events. This exercise will give you an opportunity to learn how to productively work in groups.

Internship cover letter (1 page)

DC cover letters aren't like a cover letter you might write for finance or consulting. Early in the semester we'll talk about the elements of a strong cover letter. The due date for this assignment is the end of the semester, so that you can submit this whenever you actually need the letter for an application. I'll edit these and get them back to you before you need to submit.

Participation

Participation in this class means being prepared to ask good questions of speakers, volunteering your thoughts on current events, and focusing on class rather than what might be happening on your laptop.

Expectations and Grading

I expect all assignments to be submitted on time. Late papers will automatically lose points. On grades, your papers should reflect your enthusiasm for the topic and should be free of grammatical errors. I will be looking both for high-quality writing and a deep understanding of the topic, as well as a polished and professional looking memo. As we will discuss, short papers are harder than longer papers. Your writing must be clear, concise, and authoritative. Make sure you proofread your document before submitting. Memo format is very different from an essay. Please don't submit essays unless you were specifically asked to do so. Please read Penn's policy on plagiarism and if you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please feel free to ask. Final grades of incomplete will not be given except under extraordinary circumstances such as medical emergencies. Outside these extraordinary circumstances, if work has not been completed by the end of the course, a final grade will be assigned based on the best information available at the sole discretion of the professor. In addition, a final grade of A (vs A-) is only given for truly exemplary work, including error free and on time assignments, strong participation, and ability to follow instructions with limited additional guidance. For this and all PIW courses, failure to communicate in advance with faculty about missing assignments will result in significant point deductions. Finally, while we will explore the uses and applications of AI during this course, all writing assignments should be completed by you alone.