Brandeis University
The Heller School for Social Policy and Management
Master of Arts in Sustainable International Development

HS338a
SID Masters Paper Writing Seminar
Syllabus: Fall Semester 2019
Wednesdays, 2:00-4:50 Room TBD
Instructor: Professor Joan Dassin
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Phone: 781-736-2207
Email: jdassin@brandeis.edu
Office hours: By Appointment

UNIVERSITY NOTICES

1. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

2. You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty are subject to possible judicial action. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about these policies, please ask me.

Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person – be it a world expert or your roommate – without proper acknowledgement of the source. This means you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, data or ideas found in published volumes, on the Internet, or created by another student. If you are in doubt, you must ask for clarification.

This course meets Wednesdays from 2:00 PM to 4:50 PM during Fall Module I on August 28, September 4, 11, 18, 25 and October 2 and 16 (last session during exam week). It continues during Fall Module II on the same day and time. The Fall M2 dates are October 23, October 30, November 6, 13 and 20, and December 4 and 11 (last session is during exam week).

This course is required for advanced study students in the MA/SID degree and is open to MA/SID concentration students on campus in the Fall semester. The course is open to SID/MS students who are writing an SID paper. SIDCO students should work with their COEX advisers on their masters paper, and will be admitted on a case-by-case basis. The course is open to Accelerated SID students with permission from the instructor.
COURSE INFORMATION

Course description:
The course focuses on developing the SID Master’s paper within the broader framework of strengthening students’ research skills, critical thinking and professional writing. It introduces students to scholarly resources and diverse examples of effective writing in the development field, and builds their understanding of how development knowledge is produced and communicated.

All required readings and online links are posted on Latte.

Readings and written assignments may be added and/or substituted, depending on the progress of the class. Students will be advised well in advance of any changes.

The course will enable students to work on their masters papers section by section, receiving guidance and critical assessments from the professor and their classmates. The goal of the course is for students to produce a rough draft of their paper by the end of the Fall 2020 semester. Students will then have a solid basis to produce their final paper, due in April for graduation in May 2020.

Core competency statement:
This course teaches concepts and skills that have been identified as core competencies for a degree in SID, particularly in regard to contextual analysis, problem solving, evidence and communications. The program’s core competencies are addressed as follows:

• Developing critical thinking skills to improve the effectiveness of arguments, persuasion, advocacy, problem-solving and professional communication, especially written documents;
• Understanding the political and historical context surrounding a development issue or problem;
• Building capacity in the interpretation, analysis and use of data and evidence to present information, strengthen arguments and translate research into action;
• Learning methods of critical thinking and professional writing to support, produce, influence and disseminate development policy and practice, recognizing that communications are a powerful engine for social change.

Sustainable development statement:
This semester-long course has the immediate practical application of supporting second-year SID (and some dual degree) students as they develop their masters papers. Beyond that, the course will develop advanced critical thinking skills, models of logical presentation of information, reading comprehension and advanced writing skills that are essential for development professionals in multilateral and bilateral organizations, foundations, NGOS, intergovernmental and governmental sectors and civil society organizations. The course will also help students to identify online resources to improve their writing skills. Readings will include a variety of texts by key development thinkers and practitioners, adding to students’ substantive knowledge in the field.
Gender perspective and diversity statement:
Students will be encouraged to incorporate a gender and social inclusion perspective into their masters papers. In addition, the course will enhance their ability to think critically, present information and write in a manner that is sensitive to differing gender roles and social relations in development work, while taking into account value-systems, practices, beliefs and social relations in diverse cultures. Through assigned readings and class discussions, students will enhance their awareness of how development discourses are shaped differently by different institutions, regions, countries, traditions and social groups. The aim is to communicate information in ways that respect diversity, promote tolerance and increase mutual understanding. These processes help to create more equitable societies and improve the well-being of women, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Learning Goals:
I – Improving Critical Thinking Skills
• Framing a development problem or issue
• Enhancing reading comprehension
• Identifying, presenting, and analyzing ideas, data, evidence and recommendations from scholarly articles, research and policy studies and organizational reports
• Recognizing underlying assumptions
• Identifying models of argument, persuasion and demonstration
• Discussing normative approaches, or the distinction between describing what is and arguing what should be
• Acknowledging the legitimacy of diverse opinions and different ways to look at issues while advancing your own position
• Becoming aware of cross-cultural perspectives in international development related to gender and to ethnic and indigenous groups.

II – Strengthening Writing Skills
• Overall structure, cohesion, and coherence of written work
• English grammar and style
• Clarity and concision
• Proper use of quotations and citations, when to cite and how often (avoiding plagiarism)
• Strengthening one’s personal voice and not just repeating the ideas and assumptions of other authors
• Timing, or when to introduce certain main points in the paper or within a paragraph
• Presenting views objectively through the use of data and evidence while advancing an argument
• Complying with standards for academic rigor in case studies and project evaluations

III – Completing First Draft of SID Masters Paper
The following sections are included:
  o Executive Summary and Abstract
  o Introduction – Introducing the development problem or issue; describing the context, study location and other information needed to understand the topic
Sources and Methods – Identifying and explaining how information was gathered and analyzed, limitations of the study

Literature Review – Presenting and analyzing different references and sources, describing the current state of knowledge about the topic; identifying gaps in the literature

Discussion – Distinguishing between the literature review and the discussion; applying analytical frameworks from the theoretical literature; organizing data and presenting information, including the use of tables, figures, maps, charts, graphics, etc.

Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion – Explaining evidence-based findings and framing policy recommendations to improve sustainable development policy and/or practice; framing concluding arguments

Other – references, acronyms, acknowledgments, etc.

Course requirements:
1. Attendance at all sessions.
2. Preparation of all readings and writing assignments.
3. Participation in class discussions.
4. Helpfulness to other students.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Attendance and class participation – 20%
In-class and online exercises – 20%
Writing assignments - 60%

Specific grading criteria for the writing assignments are:
• For those related to your master’s paper:
  o Is your English grammar correct?
  o Are your sentences complete?
  o Do you have a clear topic sentence in each paragraph or section?
  o Do your ideas and sections flow smoothly, and in logical order?
  o Do you use evidence to support your points?
  o Is your development problem or issue precisely framed and clearly stated?
  o Do you demonstrate an understanding of the basic concepts in your sources by putting them in your own words and not just repeating the technical jargon of the references or authors consulted?
  o Do you use citations and quotations properly?
  o Do you achieve an in-depth analysis in your discussion section?
  o Are your conclusions and recommendations a logical outcome of your analysis?

Grading System and Scale:
• Attendance and class participation: 1.43 points per session; total 20 points (1.43 x 14 = 20.02)
• In-class and online exercises: 1.43 points per week; total 20 (1.43x14=20.02)
• Writing assignments: Assignments are individually graded on a scale of 1-10; final score is the average of all 9 assignments x 6. (60 is the perfect score.) Score of “0” if not submitted
within 24 hours of due date, except with written permission of instructor.)

• Grading scale based on final point total:

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CLASS SESSIONS

Requirements:

I = Weekly reading assignments from:

• Articles and books on critical thinking and scholarly writing, including academic research and policy studies
• Articles and books on development theory and practice
• Articles from peer-reviewed development journals – *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities; Development in Practice*, etc.
• Reports from development organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations and various UN agencies
• Past SID master’s papers and SID Program Guidelines

II - Weekly exercises in class or with online resources. Links on syllabus and course Latte page.

III - Writing assignments, due as indicated. Please post all assignments on LATTE by the due date and time (24 hour grace period permitted) and bring hardcopies with you to class, if requested. The instructor will make every effort to return writing assignments within one week after they are submitted.

All written assignments should use the following format:

Font: Times New Roman font size 12
Spacing: Single
Margins: 1” on each side

Class Schedule:

Development policies, actions, best practices, and lessons learned are created, initiated, disseminated and replicated through books, scholarly articles, reports and similar publications. To build students’ analytical ability and capacity to communicate about sustainable development, class sessions will focus on three types of resources: (1) guides, manuals and exercises to improve scholarly and academic writing; (2) sections of books, articles and/or development case
studies; and (3) student writing, either written by class members or from other SID master’s papers. Class sessions will also include workshops by guest presenters on practical skills such as library searches, citation systems, research methods and data presentation.

**WEEK 1 (AUGUST 28): INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL THINKING AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING**

This session will introduce the goals of the course and its expected learning outcomes. We will discuss the tasks involved in researching and writing the SID masters paper. We will review the basic principles of clear professional writing and identify the common pitfalls of academic and professional writing.

Students will be introduced to online resources that can support them during the paper writing process.

**Required Readings**

**Exercise #1: Small Group Discussion**
Write and post short answers to the following questions (see Discussion link on Latte page):
1) What are Pinker’s main criticisms of academic writing?
2) What is the most frequent kind of poor writing that you read in your professional work?
3) What are the biggest challenges in your own professional writing?

**Exercise #2: Classic Style Passage**
Select and post a short passage from a book or journal, magazine or newspaper article in your primary field of interest. The passage should be an example of good ‘classic’ style.

Be prepared to explain in class why you have selected the passage and what is ‘good’ about it.

**Exercise #3: Concept Mapping**
We will review in class.

**Written Assignment #1:** Begin to frame your development problem by writing one or two paragraphs (3 sentences minimum) that address the following points:

1) State your topic
2) Formulate your main research question
3) Explain why it is important (and to what or whom).

*Use the Concept Mapping tool.  
Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Tuesday, Sept. 3.*

**Additional Resources**
Editorial Help Online
http://www.grammarly.com


**WEEK 2 (SEPT 4): FRAMING DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS* (*VIRTUAL CLASS VIA ZOOM)**

Students will start thinking about how to frame their research problem by examining different conceptual approaches to development. We will contrast the human development and capability approach with a radical critique of modernity based on post-development theory.

**Required Readings**


**Exercise #1: Using Research Resources:**

Read through the following materials and post 3 “tips” on the Latte discussion link that you think will be useful for your research:

**Research Overview:**
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/index.html

**Evaluating Sources of Information:**
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/index.html

**Searching Online:**
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/conducting_research/index.html

**Exercise #2: APA Citation**
Read through the following materials. We will review the exercise and handouts in class.

- APA Style Guide
  [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_overview_and_workshop.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_overview_and_workshop.html)

  Practice: APA Citation
Preventing, Contextualizing and Avoiding Plagiarism:
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/teacher_and_tutor_resources/preventing_plagiarism/index.html

Link to Exercise Instructions:
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/teacher_and_tutor_resources/preventing_plagiarism/avoiding_plagiarism/summary_paraphrase_and_quotation_in_context.html

Link to Exercise Handout:
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/teacher_and_tutor_resources/preventing_plagiarism/avoiding_plagiarism/handout_summary_paraphrase_and_quotation_in_context.html

Understanding the Turnitin Report:
http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/ASCtii/ASCtiioriginality

Written Assignment #2: By Tuesday, September 10, write short answers to the following questions:

1. How do you define and envision development?
2. Are you primarily interested in human development and capabilities or exploring possibilities for more radical transformation?
3. What is your normative framework, and how will it affect policy decisions and outcomes related to your topic?
4. Do you envision your study as normative, positive, or predictive? (Or as a combination of these approaches?)
5. What types of institutions will you analyze?
6. What effect(s) will the political context have on your study?
7. What kinds of uncertainties, trade-offs and complexities will you be dealing with for your topic?

WEEK 3 (SEPT 11) WRITING A POLICY-ORIENTED RESEARCH PAPER
This session examines the differences among different types of basic and applied research, and their role in development studies. What are some of the differences between academic research questions and problems as framed for policy studies or development interventions? How do we meet standards of academic rigor to analyze policy impacts and development practice?

Required Readings:


Exercise #1a and #1b:
Organization and Paragraph Development

Use this source for Exercise #1a:
Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: Paragraph Development:
http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/paragraph

#1a: Post your answers to the following questions and your sample paragraph on the discussion link for this week:

1. What is the general structure of a paragraph?
2. What are the key features of an effective paragraph?
3. Write a sample paragraph on a topic related to your professional interests.
4. Test your paragraph by making sure it has:
   a. Introduction with a topic sentence
   b. Body
   c. Conclusion

Use this source for Exercise #1b:

#1b: Improve the coherence of your paragraphs by using the following devices:

1. Repeat key words or phrases
2. Create parallel structures (2 or more phrases or sentences with the same grammatical structure)
3. Be consistent with point of view (pronouns), verb tense (present or past) and numbers
4. Use transition words between sentences

Tip: Read the sample paragraph in this source to see how it is constructed!

Written Assignment #3: Write a preliminary outline of your Master’s paper. Based on the outline, develop a draft of the introduction. Introduce your topic and its significance for development. Include background information and context as necessary. Indicate the specific issues you intend to cover in the paper. Text should be 500-750 words, single-spaced. Drafts of your introduction must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Tues, Sept 17. (Tip: Write a reverse outline when you’re done! Outlines do not need to be submitted.)

WEEK 4 (SEPT 18) STRUCTURING YOUR RESEARCH PAPER AND BUILDING AN ARGUMENT

We will discuss students’ draft introductions and continue our analysis of research papers with a policy and/or programmatic focus. We will use examples of case studies to how different elements are combined to build an argument, present evidence and draw conclusions.

Required Readings:
Exercise #1: Argumentative Essays
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/essay_writing/index.html

Study Questions:
1. What is the difference between an argumentative essay and an expository essay?
2. What are the main elements of an argumentative essay?
3. What is a common method for writing an argumentative essay?

Exercise #2: Building and Organizing Academic Arguments. See:
https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/webinars/scholarlywriting

Make a list of three practical tips that will help you in your writing. Post these on the discussion link for this week.

Written Assignment #4: Identify a scholarly article on your Master’s paper topic. In a maximum of 2 pages, analyze how the article is organized. What structure does it follow, and what types of evidence does it present? Is the argument in the article clear and convincing? Explain why or why not. Assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Tuesday, October 1.

WEEK 5 (SEPTEMBER 25): WORKSHOP ON SOURCES AND METHODS

Students will identify the types of sources available for research papers and case studies. Examples include secondary data of all types, including policy briefs, organizations’ annual reports, scholarly articles and books, census reports and databases. We will also review the types of methods (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed) that are commonly used to identify or generate relevant information for research papers and case studies.

Required Reading:

Exercise #1: Increasing Reading Comprehension
See: https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/ASCsuccess/ASCreadingretention

Apply one or more of these techniques to your reading of scholarly articles and other sources for your paper. Which technique works best for you? Write a post about it on the discussion link for this week.

Written Assignment #5: Develop a list of the types of sources that you will use for your paper and consider the methods you will use to analyze them. Based on this information, prepare your your Sources and Methods section (500-750 words). This assignment must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Tuesday October 8.

WEEK 6 (OCT 2): LITERATURE REVIEWS

Development practitioners must be able to research and situate their development problem in the
context of previous work on the problem, including how it has been understood in various contexts and settings, and what has been learned over time. A literature review situates a problem in a framework of writings by other authors, analysts and experts. We will discuss techniques for preparing literature reviews.

**Required Readings**


SID Masters Papers, as examples

**Written Assignment #6:** Begin gathering sources for your literature review (1500 to 2000 words). You will have approximately three weeks to complete the first draft of your literature review. *The literature review section of your paper must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Tuesday, October 29.*

**WEEK 7 (OCT 16): REFLECTIONS ON FIRST MODULE**
This session will look back at the first half of the course. We will review all the writing and research techniques and topics covered thus far, to clarify any unresolved issues and assess students’ progress on their MA papers. We will also review progress on the literature review section.

Continue work on your literature review.

**WEEK 8 (OCT 23): SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEWS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**
We will continue our discussion of literature reviews, not just as generic exercises but as they are specifically formulated in development studies. A working paper by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) provides useful input on the stages of a rigorous, evidence-focused literature review. These types of literature reviews are designed to provide "robust and sensible answers to a focused research question." An example might be: Are RCTs the best experimental technique for assessing the impact of particular anti-poverty programs?

We also review the purpose, structure, and form of the discussion section and how it differs from previous sections of the paper, particularly the literature review. The discussion is where results including data, evidence, and perspectives, based on the literature review but focused on your selected development problem, are presented and analyzed in relation to the topic.

**Required Reading:**
**Written Assignment #7:** Begin drafting the discussion section of your paper (4000-4500 words). The discussion section is due in approximately three weeks, and must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Tuesday, November 19.

**WEEK 9 (OCT 30): DISCUSSION SESSION CLINIC**
Students will discuss challenges of drafting their discussion sections.

**Required Reading:**

**Exercise #1: Grammar Review (in class)**
Grammar Review: Practice OWL Exercises
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl_exercises/grammar_exercises/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl_exercises/grammar_exercises/index.html)

**WEEK 10 (NOV 6): CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE AND PRESENTING RESULTS: USING AND PRESENTING QUANTATIVE DATA**
This session will examine the definition and examples of data visualization. Students will identify effective ways to present quantitative data in scholarly and professional writing.

**Required sources:**
Data Visualization Field Guide: A definition, examples, and learning resources.
[https://www.tableau.com/learn/articles/data-visualization](https://www.tableau.com/learn/articles/data-visualization)

Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative: Infographics
[https://ophi.org.uk/infographics/](https://ophi.org.uk/infographics/)

Students continue work on discussion section of papers, adding tables, figures, maps, charts, photos and other graphics, as needed.

**WEEK 11 (NOV 13): FORMULATING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**
This session focuses on examples of policy recommendations as found in different types of research articles and organizational reports. How are effective recommendations formulated? In your view, what is the best way to influence policy makers? In the age of instant access to information, are policy briefs still necessary? What other communications strategies can be used to communicate research for policy influence?

**Required Readings:**
Results 4 Development. *How to Produce a Policy Brief.* (On Latte)

**Study Questions:**

1. What is the difference between a policy brief and a scientific research article?
2. What questions should you ask when planning your policy brief?
3. What is the structure of a policy brief?

Study Question:

If policy briefs are no longer the 'go-to' communications format for policy and research organizations, what other types of media are useful for getting research results into the hands of decision makers and the public?

Written Assignment #8: Students have approximately two weeks to finalize their Findings and Recommendations (750-1000 words). This section must be posted on Latte by 11:55pm on Tues Dec. 3.

WEEK 12 (NOVEMBER 20): DEFINING AND COMMUNICATING IMPACT
Students consider how ‘impact’ is defined in international development and the implications for effective communications strategies.

Students complete their Conclusion section (500-750 words). Begin drafting the Cover Sheet, Table of Contents, Abstract, Acknowledgments, List of Acronyms and Abbreviations, Appendices and other remaining sections of papers.


WEEK 13 (DEC 4): COMMUNICATIONS FOR POLICY IMPACT: KEY TOOLKITS
This session provides an overview of the tools that can be used to document development issues and advocate for specific solutions.

https://www.researchtoaction.org/2015/04/research-communication-for-policy-influence-key-toolkits/

Study Question:

This resource provides 5 different 'toolkits' on how to communicate research for policy influence. Select one and dive deeply into the content.

Written Assignment #9: Complete drafts of the papers are due on Latte by noon on Wednesday, Dec. 11.

Students prepare presentations on their Master’s papers.

WEEK 14 (DEC 11): REFLECTIONS ON CRITICAL THINKING AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING
Students reflect on course and hold a practice session for their Capstone presentations.