International Studies 367.01
Writing for the U.S. Intelligence Community

GEC Rationale #1: Writing and Related Skills

1. How does this course build on fundamentals of expository writing set forth in the first course in writing?

Once students have satisfactorily completed the first writing course, this course will build on those skills by giving them experience writing in new expository forms, for new purposes, and for varied audiences. Students in this course will be introduced to forms that are not normally included in the first writing course, such as précis, formal oral presentation, and a formal research paper. Students will receive in-depth instruction in the importance of audience expectations for their writing. The U.S. intelligence community (CIA, NSA, etc.) utilizes a specific set of writing forms. Some of these forms are common to other contexts (e.g., the corporate world, social sciences, etc.), but the specific needs of U.S. policymakers have shaped the writing conventions of the intelligence community. Students will learn to organize and execute a research paper, but they will also learn to do so in the style of analytical intelligence products. They will learn to foreground the most important conclusions of their work and then offer supporting evidence for those claims later (a writing style colloquially known as BLUF – Bottom Line Up Front). They will practice making their writing clear, concise, and as unobtrusive as possible. They will practice several different ways of using concrete evidence to support inductive reasoning, and they will learn how to do so while also conveying an accurate sense of the uncertainty that goes along with inductive analysis. In this course, students will not only learn how to convey expository information to an audience in writing, but they will also learn how to transform that information into an oral presentation (modeled on an intelligence briefing), one which will allow for the give and take of immediate audience questions and feedback.

2. What major topics and writings pertaining to the United States are addressed in this course?

This course is designed to introduce students to the writing forms and conventions of the U.S. intelligence community. In addition to learning about writing for the intelligence community, students will learn about the history, organization, functions, and ethical/legal issues surrounding the intelligence community. These topics (and especially the first and last in the list) touch on issues of the U.S. and its foreign relations, how the government deals with the tensions between openness and secrecy in a democracy, how the government has used its security apparatus in domestic affairs, and how the three branches of the federal government interact.

3. How will components of this course constitute significant writing experiences?

This course is designed entirely around giving students a clear and compelling context in which to practice their writing. Students in this course will complete three major assignments with significant writing components: an intelligence information report, a report meant to be delivered orally as part of a group presentation (designed to mirror an intelligence briefing), and an analytical "think piece," which is a research paper emphasizing inductive analysis based on extensive though limited evidence. In addition, students will participate in various in-class writing exercises such as crafting précis of short articles or synthesizing multiple sources into a single report.

4. How will opportunities for revisions by students of their written work be provided?

Revision is key to writing in all its forms. In this course, revision is built into the syllabus for two of the three major assignments (i.e., the intelligence report and the analytical think piece). The first drafts of both of these assignments will receive comments from both the course instructor and a small group of the student's peers. Students will also be encouraged to discuss subsequent drafts of the writing assignments with the instructor during office hours and/or during scheduled conferences.

5. What opportunities for the oral expression of students' ideas will be provided in this course (e.g., formal presentations, debates, discussions)?

Students in this course will be reminded constantly that written expression as a crucial mode of communication in the intelligence community, but it is not the only one. Students will be expected to contribute to class discussions throughout the quarter. They will also be expected to participate actively in small-group writing workshops, where they will critique early drafts of their peers' assignments. Periodically, the class will engage in moderated debates designed to encourage them to think both dialogically and collaboratively. Finally, all students will participate in formulating and delivering a group presentation (intelligence briefing). Students will be expected to use the same skills at crafting clear and concise expository language for the oral presentation that they use for their written assignments.

6. How will students' work in this course be evaluated?

Students in this course will be evaluated based on the written assignments they turn in as well as on their verbal participation in the classroom experience. All written assignments will be evaluated based on how well the students achieve clearly defined goals for each assignment. In addition, students will be evaluated based on their fluency with grammar, style, and structure. Where appropriate, students will also be evaluated based on formal conventions such as proper methods of citation, proper document form, etc. All students will also be evaluated based on their oral participation in the intellectual life of the class. Regular and meaningful class participation – which may also include an active presence in any online forums used in the course – is expected of every student. Evaluation of class participation will also include the evaluation of the oral component of each student's oral presentation/intelligence briefing.