Radford University
Syllabus – Spring 2019

POSC 292: Political Science Careers
Mondays 10-10:50am
HB 3002

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Introduction

We know what Political Science is, but what do political scientists actually do? POSC 292: Political Science Careers serves students in multiple ways. The course will guide students through the process of job and graduate school search as well as required documents for those searches like résumés, cover letters, and personal statements. In addition, the course will invite alumni speakers in various fields to talk with students about their jobs: the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as the day-to-day of doing the work. The course will help students look into specific career tracks and inquire which one might be the right one for them. The course is not the end of students’ job search. It is intended to be part of a life-long process of students understanding their goals and learning the means to reach those goals.

This course is the first part of a two-part careers sequence in Political Science. We also offer POSC 293: Professionalism in the Public and Non-Profit Sector. In that course, we learn about lifetime career development, how to sell skills and experiences to employers, and how to behave professionally in the workplace.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Think critically about personal values, knowledge, skills, and abilities and link with relevant career goals.
• Develop skills in job search and apply those skills to searching for jobs reflecting student values, knowledge, skills, and abilities.
• Improve job search documents and develop an electronic portfolio to present to potential employers.

Required Course Materials

• APSA. Careers and the Study of Political Science. APSA, 2003. Distributed free in class.

Course Requirements

The grade in this course will be determined as follows:

• Class participation: 20%
• Self introduction paper: 10%
• “Jobs I want and how to get them” paper: 10%
• Résumé: 10%
• Cover letter for a job application or personal statement for graduate school: 10%
• “Big Interview:” 10%
• E-Portfolio: 30%

NOTE: No excuses, no late work.
POSC 292 is your initiation into the world of work.

Class participation: You are expected to be in class with a maximum of ONE absence for the semester. This class meets only once a week, so you absolutely positively must be here to get something out of the course. Zero absences would be advisable. You must also be an active and engaged participant when you’re here, asking questions of Dr. Tan and our guests. Class participation includes occasional homework assignments.

Self-introduction paper: Two pages. Topics should include what you hope to gain from this course, where you stand in your career search process, and how you would describe yourself to someone who does not know you. You may include formative experiences, major(s), minor(s), clubs/organizations, and extra-curricular activities. You might see this as practice for a two-minute “elevator speech” about yourself. Imagine you’ve got someone who can give you a job in an elevator for two minutes; what do you tell them about yourself to interest them to give you a meeting, a job, a chance?

“Jobs I want and how to get them” paper: Find five jobs you would like to have (complete with print-outs/pdfs of the job descriptions) and write a summary reflection of what knowledge, skills, and abilities you would need to manifest in order to get the jobs. If you are going to graduate school, you may search the jobs you wish to have AFTER you complete graduate school. The best efforts on this paper will include interviewing people who work in that company or industry or interviewing alumni and current students. At a minimum, check company websites in addition to other sources of information to learn more. If you want a job that stands out, your work has to stand out. Do more than just the basics!
Résumé: The résumé should be a one-to-two page statement of your knowledge, skills, and abilities geared to obtaining a professional position. Follow instructions given in class and on Career Services’ website http://www.radford.edu/content/career-services/home/students/resumes-coverletters.html. An additional resource is Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) which has extensive advice on producing a variety of written products. See, https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/.

Tips from Dr. Tan for the résumé:

- Résumé standard is reverse chronological.
- Don’t lie.
- Be aware of keyword searching (many times the first cut of résumés will be by a computer, get the right words from the job advertisement in your résumé and cover letter).
- The résumé should be skim-readable by a human reviewer in 30 seconds. That’s all the time you have to grab their attention.
- Take anything from high school and earlier off (unless it’s completely amazing, Olympian!).
- No reference list or “references available on request.” This is wasted space. If the employer can’t figure to ask for references, s/he might not be good enough for you!
- Appearance must be perfect: Periods at the end of all lines. Bullets all line up. Dates line up. Spelling flawless.
- Résumés are usually submitted electronically these days, but if you submit a hard copy, remember, no crazy colored paper.
- No extraneous personal information (love football, single, hope to travel).
- Advice from a former student: “When I hire undergrads, a visually perfect resume is a minimum.”
- NOTE: Rehashing your old résumé from a drug store job won’t do. You must update your résumé based on the information presented in class. The résumé must be tailored toward obtaining a (preferably specific) professional position or admission to graduate school.

Interview: Students will be given guidelines in class about interviewing. Students will then go online or to Career Services to access Big Interview and conduct a mock interview. Make sure your interview is sent to etan3@radford.edu for review. Make sure your responses are set to “public,” so that I am able to access your answers. The Big Interview is your “first draft” (it counts as homework) for the final, graded interview conducted in class.

Good advice for interviewing (now and for the future).

- Whatever you’re asked, add “in relation to the position” to the question. So, the interviewer says “Tell me about yourself,” and then you add “in relation to the position” to decide how to answer.
- Going in to the interview, be sure you can talk about your strengths (5-8 of them!) and be able to illustrate each with a number of examples.
- Be able to address anything negative in your background. Talk about how you’ve moved past it, how current grades reflect your abilities now,
- You’ll be asked why you want to work with the employer. Have a good answer. Do research and be able to discuss the job in relation to your own personal/professional goals.
• Advice from a former student: “Get to the point fast and avoid repeating yourself when you get there. Start high-level and then fill in richness of detail when you get the cue that you should. Everything you say should be insightful/valuable.

• A final question most interviewers ask is “What questions do you have for us?” What questions you ask reveals something about your interests and priorities. You should have questions of substance to ask: about advancement opportunities, potential training opportunities, not all about how much vacation time (that suggests you’re thinking more about not being at work than being at work!).

Other standard types of questions:
• “Tell me about a time when you’ve persuaded others to adopt your ideas.”
• “Give me an example of your ability to make decisions under pressure.”
• “Tell me about your experience in dealing with a variety of different people.”
• “Tell me about a time when your first solution didn’t solve a problem. What did you do?”

Cover Letter or Personal Statement for a Graduate School Application: Create a cover letter (if you plan to look for a job after Radford) or a personal statement (if your ambition is graduate school). Follow instructions given on Career Services’ website http://www.radford.edu/content/career-services/home/students/resumes-coverletters.html. See also Purdue’s OWL (address above, under résumés) on cover letters and, especially for guidance on writing the personal statement.

“The Standard Tips” for the structure of your cover letter:
• Sentence 1: How I found out about the job.
• 1st paragraph. Why them? Show you’ve done research on the company/organization.
• 2nd paragraph. Why you? Highlight important aspects of your résumé, but go more in depth. Don’t just repeat.
• 3rd paragraph. How to contact you.

Important note: Letter writers sometimes focus on their attitude toward the proposed job. “I am so excited to work for XXXXX.” The company doesn’t care how excited you are. Focus in your letter on the company’s needs, the requirements of job, and how you can fill those needs/do the job.

Personal note re: the standard tips: When I write cover letters, I focus on the key competencies from the job ad (four to five) and show how I meet them with extensive examples. I do not use the 1st paragraph above from the standard tips. I find as this is typically written it usually turns into drivel about how much you’ve dreamed about working at the company since grade school. It does nothing to sell your candidacy. It is useless to both you and the hiring organization. And, if it’s useless to the hiring organization, it might just get your application materials tossed out for failure to make your case well enough and quickly enough. Remember, you’ve got 30 seconds to get their attention.

Please note these common issues with the cover letter:
• Dear Ms. Jobgiver: [colon].
• Create a personal letterhead with a striking font of your name, address, phone, and e-mail address [striking, not freaky].
• Résumé [insert, symbol, accent é].
• Under recipient’s address, before salutation, use Re: Legislative Intern Position.
E-Portfolio: The e-portfolio should have all of the written work prepared for this class revised and corrected in response to comments received. It should also cover the important liberal arts education skills and demonstrations of your mastery of those skills. Minimal skills to include are: critical thinking, collaborative learning, information literacy, oral and written communication, problem solving, diversity and global learning, and ethical citizenship. The e-portfolio should also include a final reflection paper that covers what you have learned about yourself in this class (assessments, experiences, etc.), what you have learned about career fields (or grad school), and how you are using this information to plan your next steps. This will include reflection on specific topics as well as developing a detailed plan for the future (i.e. what do I need to do to make my career goals a reality?). In addition to all materials for the course and the final reflection paper, the e-portfolio should also have three further relevant content items that you would wish to present to potential employers/graduate schools. Find information on the portfolio at: http://www.radford.edu/content/dam/departments/administrative/career-services/PDF/portfolioGuide2015.pdf.

**Important Notes and Policies:**

- **Grading in this class is in keeping with the work world.** If you get an “A” on an assignment like your résumé, that means I’d hire you with the quality of work you submitted. If you get a “B,” that means your work looks good, but it’s not a sure thing that you would be selected in a competitive pool of applicants. If you get a “C,” your work is middling and not likely to be noticed in a competitive pool. If you get a “D,” your application document/writing is coming across poorly to a reviewer. If you get an “F,” your application is being thrown in the trash after cursory review.

- The philosophy of this course is that all work produced in your professional context should be as close to perfect as you can make it. That means writing, re-writing, and checking over with a fine-tooth comb. It also means having a pride in yourself and how you present yourself as a graduate of the Department of Political Science at Radford University. **You are ENCOURAGED to have your mother, roommate, neighbor, or favorite professor help you proofread every assignment that comes in for this course** (This is as it should be in the real world; always get a second pair of eyes (preferably more) to help you improve your résumés, cover letters, and personal statements).

- This course also requires your active learning and participation. If we show you how to search for jobs online, you must use this skill and practice searching out jobs, exploring, and expanding your knowledge. This is the way you will improve your career savvy and knowledge base.
Internet Resources

Careers in National Defense [http://godefense.cpms.osd.mil/]
Careers in Political Science from the American Political Science Association [http://www.apsanet.org/content_6457.cfm]
Careers in Political Science from the UNCW Career Center [http://uncw.edu/career/politicalscience.html]
Center for Career and Talent Development at Radford University [https://www.radford.edu/career/services/home.html]
Career Center Links: [https://www.radford.edu/content/career-services/home/students/choosing-a-major.html]
Consulting Firms, see Chemonics [http://www.chemonics.com/career/default.aspx]
Eldis [http://www.eldis.org/]
Global Policy Forum (NYC, internships) [http://www.globalpolicy.org/internships-mm.html]
Idealist.org [http://www.idealista.org]
Informational interview why and how [http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html]
Internationally focused jobs from the Foreign Policy Association [http://www.fpa.org/jobs/]
Job search writing resources from OWL/Purdue [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/]
Law School Admission Council (for recommendation letters) [http://www.lsac.org/]
Military, civilian positions at [http://www.cpol.army.mil/]
North Carolina state jobs [http://www.osp.state.nc.us/jobs/]
NYTimes Jobs (jobs resources and news) [http://jobmarket.nytimes.com/pages/jobs/]
OWL from Purdue [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/]
Peace Corps [http://www.peacecorps.gov/]
Public Service Careers [http://www.publicservicecareers.org/]
Reuters Alert.net [http://www.alertnet.org/thepeople/jobs/index.htm]
State Department [http://www.state.gov/careers/]
Think tanks, see Center for Strategic and International Studies, DC [http://www.csis.org/about/jobs_interns/], Brookings [http://www.brookings.edu/about/employment.aspx], Heritage Foundation [http://www.heritage.org],
Working (podcast that takes you into a variety of jobs) [http://www.slate.com/articles/podcasts/working.html]
Schedule

1 JAN 28 COURSE INTRODUCTION

- Overview of the syllabus and assignments.
- Distribute APSA’s *Careers and the Study of Political Science*.
- AAC&U Skills: critical thinking, collaborative learning, information literacy, oral and written communication, problem solving, diversity and global learning, and ethical citizenship.
- Resources to Use Often: Writing Well handout in our class D2L. OWL from Purdue University [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/).

Assignment for next time: Write a two-page statement introducing yourself (the self-introduction paper). Topics should include what you want out of this course and where you stand in your career search process. Introduce yourself to someone who does not know you. Include formative experiences, major(s), minor(s), clubs/organizations, and extra-curricular activities.

Tips from a grad: Research careers and have a plan, “even if it’s vague. Keep your résumé looking excellent. Oh yeah - be able to shake hands firmly while looking someone in the eye, speak clearly without salad falling out of your mouth, basic typing and general hygiene should also be on the list.”

2 FEB 4 ONLINE ASSESSMENTS

Discuss: Gallup Strengthsfinder, Myers-Briggs, Focus 2, O-net online, 16 Personalities (look up your type on humanmetrics or personalitypage).

First visitors next time. Discuss informational interview questions. For information on informational interviewing, check [http://www.quintcareers.com/informational-interviewing/](http://www.quintcareers.com/informational-interviewing/).

Due to D2L by the time class starts today: Self-introduction paper.

Tips: Always respond to your e-mail in a timely and polite fashion. Sloppy e-mailing creates a bad impression. Also, e-mail is FOREVER. Imagine every e-mail you send being read by your mother, your boss, and a police officer. Then decide if you’re really going to click “send.” Keep your work and personal e-mail as separate as possible. NEVER send an e-mail when you’re angry. Store the e-mail in drafts for a while and think long and hard about whether to send.

3 FEB 11 POLI SCI DAYS

Normally, we do . . . PROFESSIONALS: CONGRESS/PARTIES.

Reading: APSA Careers, section on Campaigns and Polling.

Low-down on jobs in Congress. Entry-level jobs in Congress don’t often pay well (sometimes, people have to take second jobs waiting tables to make ends meet in Washington, DC). However, these jobs are GREAT for getting your foot in the door, meeting people, developing your skills, and discovering follow-on careers. Jobs in Congress could have you working on constituent services (helping people in the district interface with the federal government) or policy (whatever areas the Congressperson works on). Good for people who are all about the job. There won’t be much time for a personal life with one of these jobs.
Tip: You don’t have to load up on majors and minors; take an interesting major/minor combination. Define your own areas of concentration. Follow your passion, whatever it is. Add in study abroad, internships, languages, and volunteer experiences.

Homework for next class: Google yourself. Review your social media. Describe what you find. If you were an employer looking at these materials, would an uptight you hire the you that you see?

4 FEB 18 E-PORTFOLIO. Guest: Dr. Samantha Blevins, Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, Radford University.

What is an e-portfolio? How is it useful in the job hunt? What is expected of you in this class?

Homework for today: Discuss self-Google. How does online-you look to a prospective employer?

Tip: You may like to communicate via text message, but your boss may prefer e-mail. Make sure you understand the workplace communication culture and that you attempt to develop yourself to fit in with that culture.

5 FEB 25 PROFESSIONALS: VIRGINIA STATE HOUSE. Guest: Thomas McIntire, Legislative Assistant, Virginia House of Delegates.

Normally we do: PROFESSIONALS: NGOs.

Tip from a grad: Meet with your professors and other “adults” regularly, so you can learn how to have adult conversations and relate to adults. This is expected of you in the work place.

6 MAR 04 POLITICAL SCIENCE INTERNSHIPS, JOBS AND SEARCH

- Internships spreadsheet.
- Potential Jobs for Political Science majors. See http://uncw.edu/career/politicalscience.html
- Job search, including networking.
- Jobs outlook for Political Science grads (POSC annual report, Labor Department).

Homework for next time: “Jobs I want and how to get them” paper is due next class.

Tip from grad: Get an internship in the field you are interested in. This will help you to gain real world experience and to network in your field. Think about a hard science or math major or minor to complement political science. Consider working with a professor on developing a paper to present at a political science conference. Set yourself apart!


MAR 11 out for Spring Break. Enjoy!

7 MAR 18 PROFESSIONALS: INTERNATIONAL. Guest: Pending.

Reading: APSA Careers, section on non-profits and international.

“Jobs I want and how to get them” paper due today.

Low-down on NGO/International jobs. Opportunity to work for a cause that is near and dear to your heart: human rights, the environment, combating human trafficking. Potential for global placements in international development, intelligence, foreign policy, and defense jobs. Pay may be low with some NGOs but can be solid in many of the international, governmental, and consulting areas. Education: undergraduate, MPA, MPP, and MA in International Affairs.
Tip: Understanding of economics and foreign languages is vital. The act of learning a language expands your horizons and re-wires your brain. In many job areas, knowledge of Spanish is a plus. Think, too, of work with expanding powers like China. Interested in intelligence work? Give yourself a leg up by speaking a strategic language. The Department of Foreign Languages offers Chinese, Russian, and Arabic. For many international affairs graduate programs, you are required to have exposure to macroeconomics for admission.

8 MAR 25 RESUMES, COVER LETTERS, AND GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATIONS
Common error in the personal statement: The personal statement shouldn’t explain why you want to do X. It should explain why you are the best candidate to be admitted for X. It should discuss how your background and interests prepare you to succeed in X and how you plan to use the training you receive in X to achieve your long-term goals.
Tip from someone with the FBI: Make good decisions when you’re in college. If you want to work for the government in defense or law enforcement, you need to be drug-free and able to pass a tough security clearance/background check. Live right now, so you can get the job you want in future.
Résumé due next class.

9 APR 1 PROFESSIONALS: LAWYERS. Guest: Pending.
Reading: APSA Careers, section on law.
Low-down on jobs in the law. Jobs in the law can run the gamut from high-pressure, long hour corporate work that pays handsomely to high-stakes, long-hour public interest work that pays minimally. Lawyers can work for government agencies, private firms (large or small), and interest groups. Content areas could include highly technical and specialized shipping law or impactful work on family law; it’s not all prosecutors and defense attorneys. Pressure can be high to develop business for the firm. Skills required vary based on the many different fields, but often: oral and written communication, logic and reasoning. Education and credentials: Law degree known as a J.D. and passing the bar in the state in which you hope to work.
Tip: No matter what you study, you can benefit by studying abroad. Do one or more study abroad experiences: a summer, a semester, a trip traveling with a UNCW faculty member. Some programs even have internship opportunities, so you can get work experience overseas. How’s that for distinguishing yourself from the pack? Interested in law? How about studying our British legal heritage in England or international law in The Hague, Netherlands?
Résumé due today.
Cover letter or personal statement due next class.

10 APR 08 INTERVIEWING
Reading: Take a look at the Radford Career Development Resource Guide (2018) in our class D2L.
- Discuss preparing for an interview.
- Phone interviews.
- Job interview etiquette.
- Practice your elevator speech.
- Mock interviewing.
- Activity: shake hands.
Tip: Consider starting now reading the Economist magazine weekly or another broadly focused news periodical, so that you can come across as an interesting, well-read candidate in oral interviews. Know what’s going on in world and national politics, economics, sci/tech, and the arts. Begin to draw links between what you’re learning in class and what’s going on in the world. Broad generalist knowledge is also necessary to pass the State Department foreign service examination.
Cover letter or personal statement due today.

11 APR 15 PROFESSIONALS: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. Guest: Pending.
Reading: APSA Careers, section on Federal Government.

**Low-down on Federal Jobs:** These jobs can be great for establishing a solid salary right out of the starting block. Your educational attainment will be recognized in your pay. Over the course of a career, you can get up to $100,000, maybe $150,000 if you rise to a senior level, but this won’t make you a millionaire. You can do absolutely ANYTHING with the federal government. The sky’s the limit. Work is relatively secure. Time is relatively inflexible (you must be in the office from 8-5 or 9-6). Be prepared for bureaucracy and rigid rules. You will have the opportunity to help people and serve the public interest. This could be good for work-life balance or not, depending on what area you choose to go into. Education: POSC undergraduate, MPA, MPP, and JD (law degree) are all possible.  

*Tip from a grad:* Long term, if you’re interested in a job that requires a security clearance, sometimes you need to take a less-than-ideal job to get the security clearance and then move into a more ideal job later. It’s hard to get organizations to invest in getting a clearance for someone just out of school and untested.

**Big Interview due to Dr. Tan’s e-mail today.**

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**12 APR 22 PROFESSIONALS: LOBBYISTS. Guest: Pending.**

Reading: APSA Careers, section on State/Local Government.

**Low-down on Lobbying/Government Relations jobs.** These jobs will require you to be good at communication (oral and written) and networking. Opportunity to work for special interest groups such as industry associations as well as activist groups such as environmental advocacy organizations. Pay will be higher with industry groups but often so will the “selling your soul” quotient.  

**Looking ahead:** E-Portfolio due during our exam slot.

Another tip: “Your first job will never be the ‘one’ unless you are really lucky. Making connections is important, but it will only get you the interview. Most international development companies are looking for overseas experience, and the Peace Corps is a good option after school to get that experience. I am currently hiring associates, and if they do not have two years overseas in a developing country and a Master’s degree we aren’t even considering them. Tough market sadly and companies can be picky.”

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**13 APR 29 E-Portfolio**

E-portfolio due today. Meet with Dr. Samantha Blevins to get feedback on your websites. You may make revisions to your website before the final due date, the day of our exam slot.

**TBA Final Exam**

Final job interview today.  

Concluding discussion:

- You’ve been offered the job, now what? Negotiate.
- Millennials in the workplace.
• Professional behavior in the workplace.
• The importance of grit in success.
• Concluding discussion on students’ career readiness.

**Final draft of e-portfolio due.**

**FOR THE FUTURE:**

• Please link to me on LinkedIn or friend me on Facebook. Start building your network!
• Read Donald Asher’s *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn’t and Why: 12 Things You’d Better Do If You Want to Get Ahead*, Berkeley: Ten Speed, 2014. This one isn’t at the library, but it should still be helpful. Maybe ask for a little graduation gift?