

**Final Report for the Quality Enhancement Project
Researching Congress in D.C.: Applied Methods in American Politics**

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Project Overview

The project engaged honors students and advanced political science graduate students in conceptualizing, managing, and delivering an applied research project in American politics. The project goals included: 1) incorporation of an active-learning component into the curriculum; 2) development of student applied research and project management skills; 3) refinement of student oral and written communication skills through an integrative process of research design, development, and delivery; and 4) enhancement of strategies for authentic assessment of student project management skills. The anticipated student learning outcomes included: 1) development of applied research-based skills, 2) refinement of oral and written communication skills; and 3) demonstrated learning of project management knowledge, skills, and values.

In sum, the QEP grant facilitated a course in which students identified their own theoretical questions about the U.S. Congress and answered these questions through field research in Washington, D.C. Students not only explored the types of research methods available to political scientists, they focused on the ins and outs of one type of research methodology – that of elite interviewing. The reading material and tentative course schedule guided students through the conceptualization of a research question, the identification of an interview set, the execution and transcription of elite interviews, and the oral and written communication of research findings.

Project Rationale

This project engaged honors students and advanced political science graduate students in conceptualizing, managing, and delivering an applied research project in American politics. This approach utilized a student engagement instructional strategy that links concepts of research design and execution with application and practice of research project management. Six graduate students, having previously taken both POS6045: Seminar in American Politics and POS6704: Political Science Research Methods as prerequisites for participation in this course, worked with six honors students in teams to design a research project with an elite-interview component. These student-led research teams scheduled the elite interviews, developed and honed their interviewing strategies, and traveled to Washington, D.C., to conduct interviews in person. The results of their research were presented both on campus as well as at a subsequent political science conferences.

The project goals included: 1) incorporation of an active-learning component to the graduate curriculum; 2) development of graduate student applied research and project management skills; 3) refinement of graduate student oral and written communication skills through an integrative process of research design, development, and delivery; and 4) enhancement of strategies for authentic assessment of graduate student project management skills. The anticipated student learning outcomes included: 1) development of applied research-based skills; 2) refinement of oral and written communication skills; and 3) demonstrated learning of project management knowledge, skills, and values.

Prior to this project, I led two separate research teams to Washington, D.C., to gather interview data for a manuscript on Congress. Both of these trips were a seeming success, but they lacked assessment

mechanisms for measuring student learning. In addition, these previous trips (summer of 2005 and summer of 2006) were focused on gathering interview data for my personal research project. While students provided me with anecdotal evidence of intense learning from the process, I felt that they were not as actively engaged as they could have been given a self-directed research question. This QEP project, “Researching Congress in D.C.: Applied Methods in American Politics,” addressed both of these weaknesses. It included assessment mechanisms as well as active student learning in the formative stages of the research design. These changes have led to a course design that readily is available for incorporation into the curriculum and institutionalization by other departments.

This project was a particularly important addition to the graduate curriculum in political science because it complemented our programmatic strengths across the five domains of student learning outcomes. As a department we have created an Academic Learning Plan for the Master of Arts in Political Science (see Appendix A). It includes a mission statement, student learning outcomes, an assessment plan, and an articulation of job prospects for graduates of the program. While this plan is a work in progress, we have developed a core curriculum map to suggest the emphasis on student learning outcomes across our required courses (see Appendix A). Column totals suggest that we place the strongest emphasis on content (17), critical thinking (20), and communication (19).¹ We place less direct emphasis on the integrity/values (10) and project management (10) domains. For this reason, this project provided a valuable addition our graduate students’ learning experience across the full range of learning outcomes.

Goals of the QEP

The goals of the Quality Enhancement Plan are presented in the “Executive Summary” (January 2006) as:

- *Goal 1: Improve student learning of knowledge, skills, and values relevant to Project Management.*
- *Goal 2: Increase use of active learning and student engagement instructional strategies for development of Project Management skills, knowledge, and values.*
- *Goal 3: Provide opportunities for faculty and staff development related to improving student learning of Project Management.*

As a domain of student learning outcomes, project management includes “development of self-regulatory behavior, collaboration, reflection and self-assessment, and project planning and execution skills consistent with a particular discipline” (“Project Proposal Packet” 2007). In the following rubric, the broad outcomes of the project management domain are correlated with their associated specific student learning outcomes and the related project elements of the instructional design of this course (see Table 1).

¹ This is out of a possible total of 21.

Table 1: Relationship of Project to QEP Goals		
Broad Outcomes	Specific Student Learning Outcomes	Related Project Elements
Project Conceptualization	Selects and defines realistic problem to be solved	Formulates research question in light of relevant literature
	Identifies relevant resources and potential obstacles	Identifies interview subjects
	Develops strategies for execution in relation to constraints	Develops of timeline for interview schedule
	Integrates discipline concepts appropriately	Formulates interview questions appropriate to research question
	Identifies criteria for successful completion	Identifies appropriate interview sample size and methods of interviewing from literature
	Accurately assesses quality of plan	Assesses project conceptualization phase through assessment mechanism and comparison with instructor's assessment
Self-regulation	Sets appropriate goals for completing project	Creates reasonable timeline for completion of interviews in D.C. and research project over summer
	Manages appropriate timeframe	Illustrates ability to meet timeline benchmarks
	Executes appropriate priorities	Recognizes the different ranks of elites and prioritizes interview times accordingly
	Shows flexibility by planning back-up strategies	Organizes interview schedule and adjusts as conflicts arise
	Accurately identifies quality of individual process	Evaluates individual process through assessment mechanism and compares with instructor's assessment
Team-work Skills	Completes responsibilities as team member	Participates in tasks assigned in research development phase, interview phase, and final analysis phase
	Practices appropriate ethical judgment	Observes IRB standards, elite interview standards, and information literacy standards
	Contributes positively to task completion	Actively participates in all three phases of project management
	Manages conflict among team members	Engages when necessary in productive conflict resolution
	Assesses quality of contribution accurately	Assesses individual contribution through assessment mechanism and compares with instructor's assessment
Project Delivery	Delivers acceptable product on time	Illustrates ability to meet deadline for course with finished research product
	Effectively presents results using appropriate oral, written, and/or visual means	Disseminates results through oral and written communication using appropriate media in public presentations
	Responds effectively to constructive feedback	Discusses with professor expectations for professional presentation of research and fields audience questions about project
	Makes valid suggestions for improvement in process and product	Assesses process and product through assessment mechanism

Source: Adapted from the "Project Proposal Packet" (2007).

To meet the goals of the QEP project management domain, the project 1) targeted specific student learning outcomes distributed across all four broad outcome areas, 2) emphasized active learning and student engagement instructional strategies, and 3) included mechanisms for student self-assessment as well as faculty assessment. The following rubric demonstrates the correlation of student skill development with specific related project elements. The description of these project elements combined with the project rationale further illuminates the emphasis of the project on active learning and student engagement. As the included assessment mechanisms demonstrate later in this report, the project also incorporated instruments designed to provide opportunities for faculty development of instructional strategies in the project management domain.

Student Learning Outcomes, Assessment Mechanisms, and Project Results

Project Student Learning Outcomes

While the table presented above suggests the relationship of project activities to the QEP's student learning outcomes associated with the project management domain, the department of government has established discipline-specific student learning outcomes for the M.A. in political science. The Academic Learning Plan for the Master of Arts in Political Science specifies the program mission statement, student learning outcomes (specific to the discipline), assessment plan, and job prospects. The student learning outcomes of the graduate degree program cross the five major domains: content, critical thinking, communication, integrity and values, and project management. The QEP project, "Researching Congress in D.C.: Applied Methods in American Politics," incorporated learning activities aimed at student learning outcomes across several of the major domains, particularly critical thinking, communication, and project management. Table 2 identifies the SLOs identified in the M.A. Academic Learning Compact, the learning activities, and the student learning outcomes integrated into the QEP project. (See Appendix B for a presentation of the undergraduate and graduate student learning outcomes provided in the course syllabus.)

The syllabus clearly outlined learning activities associated with project management that were integrated into the course design. The syllabus differentiated between undergraduate and graduate tasks related to project management (as presented in Table 3). In addition, these tasks were separated into pre-trip tasks and post-trip tasks.

Table 2: Student Learning Outcomes for the M.A. in Political Science Associated with Project

M.A. ALC Student Learning Outcomes	Learning Activities	Student Learning Outcomes
<i>Critical Thinking Domain</i>		
Identify relevant theories from the scholarly literature that are helpful for understanding the selected question, problem, or puzzle.	Prior to travel, students met with Dr. Evans to review relevant literature on congressional politics and identify as a group a research question.	Identification of the competing theories of legislative process. Understanding of the limitations of existent literature.
Generate a plausible hypothesis or logical argument to address the question	Based on the literature as well as observation of legislative behavior, students worked with Dr. Evans to generate a set of hypotheses to guide their inquiry.	Recognition of the conceptual development of research design. Illustration of critical thought. Formulation of original hypotheses.
Develop a coherent and comprehensive plan for evaluating the hypothesis using the tools of political science.	Students developed interview questions appropriate to their hypotheses and covered the methodological advantages and disadvantages to interview-based research designs.	Recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of different research methodologies. Demonstration of oral communication and specifically interview skills.
Use appropriate resources to collect evidence for assessing and evaluating hypotheses.	After preparing intellectually as well as administratively for the research trip, students joined Dr. Evans in travel to Washington, D.C., to conduct field research including elite interviews to address their research questions.	Discovery of the resources required for original research and the time, energy, and focus necessary for quality data collection.
Synthesize theory, evidence, and applications to produce an intelligible conclusion or solution to the original question.	Upon return, students worked in teams to synthesize theory and interview data to reach conclusions that addressed their original research questions.	Composition of research paper. Integration of the theory and practice of political science.
<i>Communication Domain</i>		
Write coherent, intelligible, systematic, and potentially persuasive papers.	Students presented their research in the form of papers incorporating theory, data, analysis, and findings.	Preparation of research paper.
Accurately present findings orally with appropriate visual tools.	Students presented their findings in class and at state and regional political science conferences utilizing appropriate media.	Presentation of research paper.
Defend details of oral presentations.	Students defended their findings in class and at state and regional political science conferences.	Defense of research paper in public forum of academic peers.
<i>Project Management Domain</i>		
Design and execute an appropriate work plan, using outlines and timelines, to complete project obligations.	Students led in the mapping of the research agenda and data collection, including: prioritization, scheduling, completion, transcription, and analysis of interviews.	Collaboration in development, execution, and analysis of project obligations.
Anticipate and overcome obstacles in project completion.	Students led in correspondence with office schedulers, accommodation of conflicting schedules, negotiation of Hill office space, and completion of elite interviews.	Recognition and accommodation of necessary flexibility and teamwork in the completion of project tasks.
Advocate and engage in appropriate civic participation.	Students gained firsthand exposure to political life and firsthand engagement in dialogue with policymakers.	Evaluation of quality of civic engagement offered by project.

Table 3: Undergraduate and Graduate Tasks Related to Project Management		
Pre-Trip Tasks	Undergraduate	Graduate
	* Articulation of Research Question	* Articulation of Group Research Question
	* Development of Open-Ended Questionnaire	* Development of Open-Ended Questionnaire
	* Completion of Practice Interview	* Completion of Team's Practice Interview
	* Preparation of Personal D.C. Schedule	* Preparation of Personal/Group D.C. Schedule
		* Submission by Leaders of IRB Forms
Post-Trip Tasks	Undergraduate	Graduate
	* Transcription of Individual Interviews	* Transcription of Individual Interviews
		* Compilation of Group's Transcribed Interviews
	* Identification of Tasks Related to Paper	* Assignment of Paper Tasks to Group Members
	* Completion of Tasks Related to Paper	* Compilation and Revision of Group Contributions to Paper
	* Presentation of Research at Final Meeting	* Presentation of Research at Final Meeting
		* Finalization and Submission of Group Paper Abstract for Political Science Conference

In order to ensure that students prioritized project management throughout the course, the instructor heavily weighted activities associated with project management in the grading scheme for both undergraduates and graduates. Undergraduate students were evaluated based on class attendance and participation, project management culminating in a substantial research paper and presentation, and collaborative effort in conducting research during a weeklong trip to Washington, D.C. Table 4 presents the grading schemes for both undergraduates and graduate students enrolled in the course.

Table 4: Grading Schemes					
Undergraduate Grading Scheme					
Participation	10%	A	93-100%	C	73-76%
Trip Performance	25%	A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
Project Management	40%	B+	87-89%	D+	66-69%
- Conceptualizing the Research Design	10%	B	83-86%	D-	60-65%
- Gathering the Evidence	15%	B-	80-82%	F	0-59%
- Analyzing and Communicating the Results	15%	C+	77-79%		
Final Paper and Presentation	25%				
Graduate Grading Scheme					
Participation	10%	A	93-100%	C	73-76%
Leadership at Field Site	25%	A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
Project Management	40%	B+	87-89%	D+	66-69%
- Conceptualizing the Research Design	10%	B	83-86%	D-	60-65%
- Gathering the Evidence	15%	B-	80-82%	F	0-59%
- Analyzing and Communicating the Results	15%	C+	77-79%		
Final Paper and Presentation	25%				

Assessment Mechanisms

Assessment took three forms. First, students engaged in self-assessment of achievement of project learning outcomes. Secondly, students engaged in peer assessment of achievement of project learning outcomes. Third, the instructor assessed the degree to which students met expected learning outcomes for the course. The assessment mechanism followed the SLOs detailed in the matrix, but was structured in terms of the three phases of the research endeavor: 1) conceptualizing the design, 2) gathering the evidence, and 3) analyzing and communicating the results. (See Appendix C for a presentation of the assessment rubric and Appendix D.1-D.3 for a presentation of the assessment mechanisms.)

To ensure the ongoing success of the project, the students were required to provide formative assessment throughout the course in the three aforementioned phases. The rubrics provided students an opportunity to evaluate their own performance and their peers' performance and the opportunity to offer in first-person narrative the experience of each phase of the research endeavor. The instructor used these individual assessments throughout the semester to identify adjustments that needed to be made to better achieve learning outcomes. This project as well as the assessment mechanisms incorporated into its instructional design aimed to contribute to the university's continued efforts at improving outcome assessment and the QEP's ongoing efforts to improve outcome assessment in the targeted area of project management.

Project Assessment

The results of the student self assessment and faculty assessment of student performance were tabulated to provide an overall assessment of the success of the project. The self, peer, and faculty

evaluations of student performance provided both formative and summative elements of assessment by which to measure the success of the instructional strategy.

Conceptualizing the Research Design

The results of the assessments (student self assessment, student peer assessment, and instructor assessment of student performance) are presented in Tables 5-7. The assessment rubric was coded accordingly: “fails to meet expectations” = 80; “meets expectations” = 90; and “exceeds expectations” = 100. Given that the students enrolled in the course included advanced graduate students and honors students, this coding scheme was appropriate. The following tables present the average assessments provided by members of the class across the three phases of the project. They further present the standard deviations from the mean of member responses.

Table 5 presents the results of the assessment of the first phase of the project – conceptualizing the research design. The results reveal that student assessments were lowest in this phase of the project. Students did suggest, on average, that they and their peers adequately met expectations of performance, but they were least content with their performance in selecting and defining the research problem, identifying relevant resources and obstacles, and accurately assessing the quality of the plan. It is possible that students were the least familiar with the research design component of the project, and thus were more inclined to undervalue their performance on tasks related to this phase. Nonetheless, students contributed positively to task completion and developed impressive research questions including the impact of the first female Speaker of the House (Nancy Pelosi), the impact of race and gender on legislative behavior, the role of Dear Colleague letters in the legislative process, and the relevance of political science to practical politics.

Table 5			
Assessment of Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design			
	Student Self Assessment	Student Peer Assessment	Instructor Assessment
	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)
Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design			
Selects and defines realistic problem to be solved	91.92 (4.0452)	93.75 (4.9187)	92.50 (4.5227)
Identifies relevant resources and potential obstacles	91.82 (6.0302)	94.38 (5.6440)	92.50 (4.5227)
Develops strategies for execution in relation to constraints	92.73 (4.6710)	92.50 (5.0800)	94.17 (5.1493)
Integrates discipline concepts appropriately	93.64 (5.0453)	93.44 (6.0158)	92.50 (6.2158)
Identifies criteria for successful completion	93.64 (5.0453)	94.69 (5.6707)	93.33 (6.5134)
Accurately assesses quality of plan	90.91 (3.0151)	93.44 (5.4533)	90.83 (9.0034)
Sets appropriate goals for completing the project	92.73 (4.6710)	92.50 (5.6796)	92.50 (9.6531)
Completes responsibilities as team member	94.55 (5.2223)	95.00 (5.6796)	93.33 (8.8763)
Contributes positively to task completion	93.64 (5.0453)	95.94 (5.5992)	97.50 (6.2158)
Valid N	11	32	12

Table 6 presents the results of the second phase of the assessment – gathering the evidence. Average evaluations were higher in this phase of assessment. Most notably, students seemed to overestimate their performance in managing an appropriate timeframe in D.C. The intense schedule of elite interviews conducted by each research team required extreme discipline and time management.

Overall, students did a remarkable job in balancing competing demands and dealing with scheduling obstacles. Students were particularly critical of their performance during this phase of the project in terms of managing conflict among team members. While there was room for growth in this area, students were much more critical of their personal performance in conflict management than they were of their peers' performance in this same area.

Table 6			
Assessment of Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence			
	Student Self Assessment	Student Peer Assessment	Instructor Assessment
	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)
Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence			
Manages appropriate timeframe	97.27 (4.6710)	95.63 (6.1892)	92.50 (8.6603)
Executes appropriate priorities	95.45 (5.2223)	93.75 (6.0907)	92.50 (8.6603)
Shows flexibility by planning back-up strategies	94.55 (5.2223)	92.81 (7.2887)	93.33 (8.8763)
Manages conflict among team members	91.82 (7.5076)	94.06 (6.6524)	94.17 (7.9296)
Practices appropriate ethical judgment	94.55 (5.2223)	93.44 (6.5300)	94.17 (6.6856)
Completes responsibilities as team member	95.45 (5.2223)	93.91 (7.2662)	95.00 (6.7420)
Contributes positively to task completion	94.55 (5.2223)	93.59 (7.2105)	96.67 (7.7850)
Valid N	11	32	12

Table 7 presents the results of the assessments conducted after the third phase of the project – analyzing and communicating results. The student self assessments and student peer assessments are notably higher in this table than in the previous two tables. It is possible that students felt most comfortable with the project management skills required in this phase of the project. It is also possible that students realized at this point in the project that the assessments constituted an important part of their grade for the course. Overall, students did surpass expectations in their analysis of research findings and in their communication (both oral and written) of the results of their research activities. The one exception to this general observation involves student response to constructive feedback during this phase of the project. As with any course including a travel component, students tired of each other and the course requirements by semester's end. The lower instructor evaluation of student performance in this domain reflects this reality.

Table 7			
Assessment of Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results			
	Student Self Assessment	Student Peer Assessment	Instructor Assessment
	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)	μ (s.d.)
Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results			
Practices appropriate ethical judgment	95.00 (5.2705)	95.71 (5.0395)	93.90 (4.4833)
Completes responsibilities as team member	97.00 (4.8305)	96.07 (5.6695)	95.00 (7.0711)
Contributes positively to task completion	98.00 (4.2164)	96.07 (6.2889)	93.50 (6.6875)
Delivers acceptable product on time	96.00 (5.1640)	95.00(6.3829)	93.00 (6.3944)
Effectively presents results using appropriate oral, written, and/or visual means	96.00 (5.1640)	95.00 (6.3829)	93.70 (4.6200)
Responds effectively to constructive feedback	96.50 (4.7434)	95.36 (6.9293)	90.70 (5.0783)
Makes valid suggestions for improvement in process and product	94.00 (5.1640)	95.71 (6.3413)	93.00 (4.9216)
Valid N	10	28	10

Student Evaluations

A final form of assessment is provided by the student evaluations completed at the end of the course. These evaluations of the quality of instruction throughout the course are summarized in Tables 8-9. In Table 8, the percentages represent the collapsed categories of “Excellent” and “Very Good” on state university items. Given that the course emphasized somewhat learning domain of project management, it is not surprising that the lowest evaluations involved course requirements, testing procedures, and grading practice. A sizeable portion of student grades reflected performance along dimensions of project management rather than performance on standardized tests. In addition, the course included advanced graduate students and honors students, making it somewhat difficult to balance the level of discussion and level of expectation for collaborative team efforts.

Nonetheless, students were pleased with the description of course objections and assignments and found the course to be stimulating. The assignments and course materials were appropriately suited to the audience (also requiring a difficult balance between graduate and undergraduate students). Finally, students found the work required of them and the utilization of class meetings to be appropriate.

Table 9 reflects these general observations. The organization of the course combined with the course materials and fieldwork provided amazing opportunities for members of the class to apply principles and tools of research to the practical world of politics. Students found the experience to be invaluable. The class stretched students in new and challenging ways.

Table 8: Student Evaluations			
Item	Undergrad	Graduate	Total
Expression of expectation for performance in this class.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)
Description of course objectives and assignments.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)	100% (11/11)
Communication of ideas and information.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)
Stimulation of interest in the course.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)	100% (11/11)
Facilitation of learning.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)
Respect and concern for students.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)
Availability to assist students in or out of class.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)
Overall, assessment of instructor.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)
Course requirements.	100% (6/6)	60% (3/5)	82% (9/11)
Course assignments.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)	100% (11/11)
Course materials.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)	100% (11/11)
Provides feedback.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)
Testing procedures.	67% (4/6)	100% (5/5)	82% (9/11)
Grading practice.	67% (4/6)	100% (5/5)	82% (9/11)
Student work.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)	100% (11/11)
Class meeting.	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)	100% (11/11)
The instructor's command of the subject was:	100% (6/6)	100% (5/5)	100% (11/11)
Overall, I would rate the course organization.	83% (5/6)	100% (5/5)	91% (10/11)

Table 9: Student Comments	
Undergraduate	Graduate
<p>"*Best instructor I've had in 3 years!"</p> <p>"I would take and probably already have taken every class with Dr. Evans. She consistently commands the subject and the class itself."</p> <p>"This class was well organized. The entire course proved to be a valuable experience. Dr. Evans made it extremely interesting."</p> <p>"This class was definitely challenging and stretched me a great deal. It was completely worth it."</p> <p>"Dr. Evans was awesome, as always!"</p>	<p>"Praise for you for juggling this trip."</p> <p>"Everything was well explained, and Dr. Evans was incredibly accommodating with out-of-class questions."</p> <p>"Dr. Evans is an outstanding instructor, in addition to being a caring advisor. Her excitement for this course was felt by all. She did an amazing job!"</p> <p>"This course was amazing. Dr. Evans did an excellent job leading our class into this trip. It was a great learning experience."</p>

Project Schedule and Results

Project Schedule

Table 10 presents the timeline for the project, including events related to planning the course, delivering the course, and reporting on the outcomes, and disseminating information both internally and externally about the projects stemming from the course. Major planning, including syllabus development and student recruitment occurred in the spring of 2008. QEP funds combined with Honors Program funds provided travel support for the 12 students (6 undergraduate and 6 graduate) participating in the course.

The course was offered during the full 12-week summer term. In May of 2008, students met in class to discuss issues related to research conceptualization, theory building, and interview methods (See Appendix E for the outline of the course and Appendix F for required readings for the course.) Students also organized into research teams and secured IRB approval for their proposed projects. Finally, students communicated with office schedulers to set appointments in congressional offices to interview Members and their staff. In June, the class travelled to Washington, D.C., to conduct fieldwork. Four teams completed numerous elite interviews, ranging in number from 11 to 25. Upon return, students transcribed and analyzed interview notes. In July of 2008, teams worked to finish their analyses and draft research papers. The experience concluded with students orally presenting the findings of their research in class.

Dissemination and Institutionalization

This project benefitted the department and the broader academic community through the instructional enhancements provided by both its process and its results. The substantive research produced by the students was disseminated externally at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association in January of 2009 and the annual meeting of the Florida Political Science Association in April of 2009 (Table 11: A.1-A.2). The results of the instructional strategy were disseminated internally at the UWF Spring QEP Symposium in April of 2010 (Table 11: B.1). The final report of the project was submitted to the QEP in May of 2010 (Table 11: B.2).

Two research teams submitted paper proposals to the Southern Political Science Association and were accepted. Students from these groups travelled with the instructor to present their papers at the SPSA annual meeting in New Orleans in January of 2009. Additionally, two students were accepted to present research at the Florida Political Science Association, and one student was accepted to present research at a regional conference for honors students. One student further utilized the research skills acquired through this experience to conduct elite interviews during a separate honors-sponsored trip to D.C. for her honors thesis. As the thesis director, I witnessed her walk through the steps of scientific research – from research design and question development, to IRB approval and interview construction, to fieldwork, to analysis and presentation of findings.

All of the students involved in this project are now in gainful employment, in service work, in a PhD program, at a prestigious law program, or still at UWF. Several of them have included the project

management skills, research skills, and oral communication skills developed through participation in this course on their resumes. These skills will continue to benefit students throughout their future careers, educational pursuits, and professional activities in the years to come.

Information on the project was also disseminated internally at the UWF QEP Spring Symposium. Dr. Evans presented the results of the project and fielded questions on the funding, student experience, and possible opportunities for further institutionalization.

Table 10: Timeline for Project Activities and Events		
Preliminary Activities		
<i>Assembly of Course Syllabus</i>	Spring 08	Dr. Evans prepared syllabus and developed elearning course modules.
<i>Recruitment of Students</i>		Dr. Evans worked with Dr. Lanier to recruit honors students and graduate students to participate in class.
Course Offering		
<i>Research Conceptualization</i>	May 08	Class Time
<i>Theory Building</i>		Class Time
<i>The Interview Method</i>		Class Time
<i>Institutional Review Board</i>		Dr. Evans worked with students to secure IRB approval.
<i>Scheduling Interviews</i>		Students worked together to schedule interviews.
<i>Conducting Interviews</i>	June 08	Class traveled to D.C. to conduct interviews at field site.
<i>Transcription and Analysis</i>		Students worked in teams on transcribing and analyzing field notes.
<i>Writing the Report</i>	July 08	Students worked in teams to analyze and summarize notes and write research papers.
Information Dissemination		
<i>External Dissemination</i>	Spring 09	Students presented papers at the Southern Political Science Association Conference and the Florida Political Science Conference.
<i>Internal Dissemination</i>	Spring 10	Dr. Evans presented the project at the UWF Spring QEP Symposium
	Spring 10	Dr. Evans submitted the final QEP report.

Table 11: External and Internal Dissemination	
A) External Dissemination	B) Internal Dissemination
1) Students presented their research at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, January 2009.	1) Dr. Evans presented the results of the project at the UWF Spring QEP Symposium, April 16, 2010.
2) Students presented their research at the annual meeting of the Florida Political Science Association, April 2009.	2) Dr. Evans submitted a final report of the experience to the QEP, May 10, 2010.

Instructional / Learning Strategy Enhancements

Graduate student literacy in basic research methods and social statistics is important for the sophisticated consumption of research findings (Blalock 1987, 1989). In addition, statistics courses “provide excellent opportunities to stress the difference between an active and a passive mode of learning” (Blalock 1987: 165). Students must engage the material through lab exercises or problem solving. While most graduate curricula incorporate core courses on basic research methods, there are instructional and learning strategy enhancements offered by a more intensive research experience at the graduate level.

Intensive interviewing provides several direct benefits to graduate education. In terms of active learning of research methods, this strategy naturally raises methodological issues such as research design, question development, the role of the interviewer, and the importance of context as relevant to the research enterprise. In addition, interview-based research encourages students to think critically about issues of respondent bias and question wording. Besides mastering a research technique that might assist graduate students in future job-related tasks, intensive interviewing 1) increases student “knowledge about and awareness of communication,” 2) engages students in a form of discourse (Berg 1989; Briggs 1986; Mishler 1986), 3) increases student “awareness of implicit assumptions on the part of both interviewer and interviewee that shape questions and responses,” and 4) teaches students to “identify contextual factors that influence their respective interpretations of the events at hand” (Charmaz 1991: 385).

This approach to learning serves as an enhancement because for students conducting firsthand interviews:

1) the substantive area of inquiry becomes alive and meaningful; 2) the data elicited penetrate beneath the surface of ordinary conversation; 3) the discourse between the interviewer and the research participant becomes an object of study; and 4) relations between ethics and research strategies become clearer” (Charmaz 1991: 386).

Student engagement in the interview process holds several other benefits for the educational experience, including: active learning, self-directedness, student-faculty collaboration, appreciation for the difficulties associated with access, recognition of the importance of question phrasing and delivery, and awareness of the necessity for flexibility (ibid).

Finally, and importantly, intensive training in a practical research skill such as survey research (through either in-person interviews or telephone interviews) “can significantly improve a student’s career opportunities in a work world where knowledge soon becomes obsolete or is available outside the university” (Forde et al. 1991: 383; also see Kain 1987). While the importance of practical skills cannot be underestimated, students should be engaged in the full research enterprise – from conceptual development to gathering evidence, to analyzing and communicating results. This level of engagement “provides students with skills as well as facts and ideas” and increases the relevance of theoretical concepts by developing student-generated examples (Kain 1987: 136). According to Forde et al. (ibid),

“An understanding of the total research process helps the student to play the role of reasonable critic and to handle research problems systematically as they arise” (also see Blalock 1987).

In addition, our students from the M.A. program have accepted employment in a variety of positions, including: government, high school education, military, and retail management. Some have continued their education in pursuit of PhDs. The experiential learning of a research project that includes elite interviews prepares students in a hands-on way to embrace opportunities for project management and professional communication in the workplace.

Students not only learned to conceptualize and then materialize an original project idea, they participated in the actual labor involved in such an enterprise. These are job-related skills that students can include (and have included) on a resume. Secondly, students developed job-related communication skills through participation in this project. The practice of interviewing professionals built student confidence, poise, critical thinking, and listening skills. The process of writing the research paper and presenting the findings of the research endeavor further honed these oral and written communication skills preparing students for entry into the job market. Finally, students gleaned firsthand evidence, stories, and experiences from the elite interviews that have continued with them long after leaving the program. My students who have entered the education field upon graduating from the program often tell me of the stories they use in class about “how Congress really works.” These stories were not discovered in the classroom or from a book. They were discovered firsthand around a table or at a desk listening to Members of Congress or legislative staff talk about authentic activity on Capitol Hill.

The fundamental instructional strategy of this project holds great potential for extension beyond the department to other programs across campus. According to Charmaz (1991):

The [interview] technique is readily transportable, allows for classroom assignments that can be completed within a semester, and forces students to look at the “real” world in new ways. Then, too, students can learn firsthand about the analytic processes that transform raw data into a published product while they gather information about the substantive area (386).

The department of government is supportive of the efforts of Dr. Evans in leading graduate student research trips to Washington, D.C. This experience yields a vital active learning component to the political science curriculum at the graduate level. Future incorporation of this project into the curriculum is only limited by budgetary constraints.

In addition, the assessment mechanisms developed for the proposed project add a critical component to the learning experience of our graduate students that has been missing in previous iterations. These assessment mechanisms will be useful to the department as guides for measuring the extent to which other courses in our graduate program address the student learning outcomes of the project management domain as well.

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- Briggs, Charles L. 1986. *Learning how to ask*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- Forde, David R., Raymond F. Currie, Dave Odynak, and Harvey Krahn. 1991. "Graduate training in survey research: Two models of student involvement in area studies." *Teaching Sociology* 19(3): 379-383.
- Kain, Edward L. 1987. "Using a research team and microcomputers to teach basic sociological principles." *Teaching Sociology* 15: 136-143.
- Mishler, Elliot G. 1986. *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Appendix A: Core Curriculum Map for M.A. in Political Science

Department of Government, University of West Florida
M.A. in Political Science
Core Curriculum Map

Student Learning Outcomes					
Core Courses	Content	Cr. Think.	Comm.	Int./Val.	Proj. Man.
POT 5602 Masters of Political Thought	3	3	3	1	0
POS 6001 The Study of Politics	3	3	3	1	0
CPO 6006 Seminar in Comparative Politics	3	3	3	1	1
INR 6007 Seminar in International Relations	3	3	3	2	2
POS 6045 Seminar in American Politics	2	2	3	1	3
PAD 6275 Political Economy of Public Administration	1	3	2	3	2
POS 6704 Political Science Research Methods	2	3	2	1	2
Notation: the emphasis placed on each dimension in the course ranges from 0 (little or none) to 3 (highest level of emphasis).					

Appendix B: Student Learning Outcomes as Presented in Course Syllabus

Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes

- First, students will **understand** the basic structure and organization of the U.S. Congress.
- Secondly, students will **recognize** major fields of congressional study and identify areas for future study.
- Third, students will **analyze** principles of research design and determine the relevance of these principles to their own research on Congress.
- Fourth, students will **demonstrate** their understanding of the U.S. Congress through a research paper they will collaboratively produce from the data collected during their field research in D.C.
- Finally, students will **communicate** effectively both in written and oral form the results of their research.

Graduate Student Learning Outcomes

- Beyond the objectives articulated for the undergraduate students in this course, graduate students will **examine** the scholarship on research design and elite interviewing.
- They will **translate** these principles into a blueprint for conducting firsthand data collection and analysis.
- They will lead the undergraduate students in **articulating** a research question and **identifying** an interview sample.
- In addition, they will **supervise** teams of undergraduate students in **developing** interview questionnaires and communication skills while scheduling elite interviews.
- They will **apply** the principles of elite interviewing by personally conducting and supervising other students conducting firsthand interviews in D.C.
- They will **synthesize** their group's findings in a research paper and presentation.
- Through this experience, graduate students will **develop** their understanding of the skills required for project management.

Appendix C: Project Management Assessment Rubric

Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Selects and defines realistic problem to be solved	Works to select and define theoretically interesting and important research question.	Selects and defines realistic research question.	Fails to select and define realistic research question in timely manner.
Identifies relevant resources and potential obstacles	Provides a fairly comprehensive bibliography and actively addresses potential obstacles in conceptualizing research design.	Accurately identifies appropriate resources and assesses potential obstacles in conceptualizing research design.	Fails to identify appropriate sources; does not foresee obstacles in conceptualizing research design.
Develops strategies for execution in relation to constraints	Develops multiple strategies to accommodate the unique contexts presented by research design.	Articulates possible strategy for conceptualizing research plan given potential obstacles.	Fails to articulate possible strategies for conceptualizing research plan in face of constraints.
Integrates discipline concepts appropriately	Clearly identifies and summarizes main relevant disciplinary concepts; successfully explains connection of concepts to research problem.	Identifies and summarizes main relevant disciplinary concepts; but does not clearly explain connection to research problem.	Fails to identify, summarize, or explain the relevant disciplinary concepts to the research problem and/or misrepresents the concepts.
Identifies criteria for successful completion	Identifies detailed criteria for successful conceptualization of research design.	Identifies basic criteria for successful conceptualization of research design.	Fails to identify criteria for successful conceptualization of research design.
Accurately assesses quality of plan	Quality of research design far exceeds expectations.	Provides accurate assessment of quality of research design.	Fails to provide realistic assessment of quality of research design
Sets appropriate goals for completing the project	Project was completed on or before specified deadlines and may be used as model example for future students.	Project was well planned, meets the requirements for quality, and was completed on schedule.	Project was poorly thought out or implemented and did not meet its goals for quality or schedule.
Completes responsibilities as team member	Not only completes delegated responsibilities, but takes on leadership role in research design phase.	Completes delegated responsibilities in research design phase.	Fails to complete delegated responsibilities in research design phase.
Contributes positively to task completion	Not only contributes positively, but is central to positive experience of team in research design phase.	Helps to complete task through positive contributions in research design phase.	Fails to contribute positively to task completion either through lack of contribution or negative attitude in research design phase.

Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence			
Manages appropriate timeframe	Student not only participates in each phase of gathering the evidence but proactively backward maps research schedule to manage appropriate timeframe.	Student participates in each phase of gathering the evidence thus managing appropriate timeframe.	Student fails to participate in every phase of gathering evidence thus failing to manage appropriate timeframe.
Executes appropriate priorities	Manages time so well that not only able to execute appropriate priorities, but also able to gather unexpected evidence.	Accurately prioritizes the tasks related to gathering the evidence.	Fails to accurately prioritize tasks related to gathering the evidence.
Shows flexibility by planning back-up strategies	Not only shows flexibility in gathering evidence, but plans back-up strategies in case of scheduling conflicts.	Shows flexibility in gathering evidence.	Fails to show flexibility in gathering evidence; if plan falls through, no alternative in place.
Manages conflict among team members	Engages in successful conflict resolution where applicable; introduces conflict to faculty when necessary.	Engages in conflict resolution with team members in gathering evidence phase.	Fails to engage in conflict resolution with team members; fails to introduce conflict to faculty when necessary.
Practices appropriate ethical judgment (pass/fail item)	Clear documentation of compliance with relevant ethical guidelines (IRB review, protection of confidentiality of clients, etc.)		Evidence of failure to obtain IRB approval, to protect client confidentiality, or other transgression of scientific, professional, or academic integrity
Completes responsibilities as team member	Student displays excellent teamwork skills, provides, seeks out, and accepts feedback enhancing the quality of the gathering evidence phase.	Student is able to work with others, and accepts and provides feedback in the completion of the gathering evidence phase.	Student's interactions with others adversely affects the quality of the gathering evidence phase.
Contributes positively to task completion	Student is aware of own progress and makes adjustments in gathering the evidence; uses back-up plans or asks for assistance when necessary, while keeping faculty member well-informed regarding project status.	Student provides faculty member with project status when asked and requests assistance when appropriate to do so.	Student must be prompted to provide information on progress of the project; fails to make necessary adjustments when faced with problems; or fails to seek assistance when necessary to do so.

Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results			
Practices appropriate ethical judgment (pass/fail item)	Demonstrates academic integrity in presentation of research findings through appropriation citation of sources and avoidance of plagiarism.		Fails to demonstrate academic integrity in presentation of research findings through inappropriate citation of sources and evidence of plagiarism.
Completes responsibilities as team member	Student displays excellent teamwork skills, provides, seeks out, and accepts feedback which enhances the quality of the analysis and research report phase.	Student is able to work with others, and accepts and provides feedback in the completion of the analysis and research report phase.	Student's interactions with others adversely affect the quality of the analysis and research report phase.
Contributes positively to task completion	Student is aware of own progress and makes adjustments in analyzing and communicating research results; uses back-up plans or asks for assistance when necessary, while keeping faculty member well-informed regarding project status.	Student provides faculty member status on analysis and research report when asked and requests assistance when appropriate to do so.	Student must be prompted to provide information on the progress of the analysis and research report; fails to make necessary adjustments when faced with problems; or fails to seek assistance when necessary to do so.
Delivers acceptable product on time	Student turns in finished product, including and exceeding all the required components, on time.	Student turns in finished project, including all the required components, on time.	Student fails to turn in finished product on time or product does not include all the required components.
Effectively presents results using appropriate oral, written, and/or visual means	Word choice is particularly matched to the intended audience. No errors in disciplinary style.	Word choice is acceptable for intended audience. Minimal errors in disciplinary style.	Word choice is inappropriate to the intended audience. Writing is poor. Errors in disciplinary style detract substantially from the paper.
Responds effectively to constructive feedback	Receives and responds to constructive student and faculty feedback; incorporates suggestions into final product.	Receives and responds to constructive student and faculty feedback, but fails to integrate suggestions into final product.	Fails to receive and respond to constructive student and faculty feedback; fails to integrate suggestions into final product.
Makes valid suggestions for improvement in process and product	Offers constructive, valid suggestions for improvement of process and product.	Offers suggestions for improvement of process and product, but suggestions are not constructive.	Fails to offer suggestions for improvement of process and product.

Appendix D.1: Assessment Form for Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design

Assessment of Performance in Applied Methods in American Politics and in UWF Student Learning Outcomes Related to Project Management - Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design

Student _____
 Course _____

Faculty _____
 Date _____

To what degree do you feel (you/your peers/the student) met expectations for the course? Use the following rubric to answer the question concerning several specific student learning outcomes for the course.

Phase 1: Conceptualizing the Research Design	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Selects and defines realistic problem to be solved			
Identifies relevant resources and potential obstacles			
Develops strategies for execution in relation to constraints			
Integrates discipline concepts appropriately			
Identifies criteria for successful completion			
Accurately assesses quality of plan			
Sets appropriate goals for completing the project			
Completes responsibilities as team member			
Contributes positively to task completion			

Describe areas where you feel you might need improvement:

Appendix D.2 Assessment Form for Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence

Assessment of Performance in Applied Methods in American Politics and in UWF Student Learning Outcomes Related to Project Management - Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence

Student _____
Course _____

Faculty _____
Date _____

To what degree do you feel (you/your peers/the student) met expectations for the course? Use the following rubric to answer the question concerning several specific student learning outcomes for the course.

Phase 2: Gathering the Evidence	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Manages appropriate timeframe			
Executes appropriate priorities			
Shows flexibility by planning back-up strategies			
Manages conflict among team members			
Practices appropriate ethical judgment			
Completes responsibilities as team member			
Contributes positively to task completion			

Describe areas where you feel you might need improvement:

Appendix D.3: Assessment Form for Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results

Assessment of Performance in Applied Methods in American Politics and in UWF Student Learning Outcomes Related to Project Management – Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results

Student _____
 Course _____

Faculty _____
 Date _____

To what degree do you feel (you/your peers/the student) met expectations for the course? Use the following rubric to answer the question concerning several specific student learning outcomes for the course.

Phase 3: Analyzing and Communicating the Results	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Practices appropriate ethical judgment			
Completes responsibilities as team member			
Contributes positively to task completion			
Delivers acceptable product on time			
Effectively presents results using appropriate oral, written, and/or visual means			
Responds effectively to constructive feedback			
Makes valid suggestions for improvement in process and product			

Describe areas where you feel you excelled or might have room for improvement:

Appendix E: Course Schedule

Tentative Course Schedule				
	Topics in American Politics	Topics in Research Methods	Undergraduate Readings	Graduate Readings
5/13	Congressional Structure and Legislative Process		Committee Organization (5pp) Committee Types and Roles (3pp) Authorization & Appropriation (2pp)	(same)
5/15		Conducting Research: Quantitative and Qualitative		KKV (1996) Ch. 1 (19pp) Barkin (2006) (18pp)
5/20- 5/22	Areas in Congressional Studies	Surveying the Field/ Developing a Research Question	DeGregorio (1988) (16pp)	(same) Fenno (1986) (12pp)
5/27	An Introduction to the Congressional Office		Staff Guide	(same)
5/29		Ethics of Elite Interviewing *Request for IRB Approval	Woliver (2002) (2pp)	(same)
6/3		The Mechanics of Elite Interview	Leech (2002a) (1pp) Peabody et al (1990) (4pp)	(same)
6/5	How to Talk (and Listen) to Members of Congress	Conducting Elite Interviews and Gathering Data	Leech (2002b) (4pp) Aberbach and Rockman (2002) (4pp)	(same)
6/10		The Shape of Interview Notes	Fenno Interview Notes	(same)
6/12	The Diversity of Congressional Personnel	Selecting the Subjects and Scheduling the Interview	Goldstein (2002) (4pp) Rivera et al (2002) (4pp) Berry (2002) (4pp) Party Leadership (2pp) Organizational Structure	(same) KKV (1996), Ch. 4 (34pp)
6/17	Asking Good Questions	Questionnaire and Interview Schedule	Kingdon (1983) (3pp) Fenno Interview Notes (selections)	(same)
6/19	Pre-Trip Meeting	Pre-Trip Meeting		
6/24	In D.C.	AT THE FIELD SITE		
7/1	Recording and Making Sense of Your Experience	Data Transcription & Interpretation	Fenno Interview Notes (selections) Fenno (1978) Appendix	(same)
7/8	The Outline: Previous Scholarship	The Research Paper: Literature, Data and Methods	Evans (2008)	(same)
7/15	Bringing the Pieces Together	Analysis and Findings	Examples provided in class.	Hall (1996) (17pp); Swers (2002) (19pp)
	Group Meetings	Group Meetings	No Readings	No Readings
8/5	Final Paper and Presentation	Final Paper and Presentation		

Appendix F: Course Readings

Books

Fenno, Richard. 1978. *Home Style*. Longman.

Articles

Aberbach, Joel D. and Bert A. Rockman. 2002. "Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4: 673-676.

Berry, Jeffrey M. "Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4: 679-682.

DeGregorio, Christine. 1988. "Professionals in the U.S. Congress: An Analysis of Working Styles." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 13(4): 459-476.

Goldstein, Kenneth. 2002. "Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4: 669-672

Leech, Beth L. 2002(a). "Interview Methods in Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4: 663-664.

Leech, Beth L. 2002(b). "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4: 665-668.

Peabody, Robert L., Susan Webb Hammond, Jean Torcom, Lynne P. Brown, and Robin Kolodny. 1990. "Interviewing Political Elites." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 451-455.

Rivera, Sharon Werning, Polina M. Kozyreva, and Edward G. Sarovskii. 2002. "Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons from Russia." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 683-688.

Woliver, Laura R. 2002. "Ethical Dilemmas in Personal Interviewing." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 4: 677-678.

Additional Material Available Through Elearning

Evans, Jocelyn. 2005. "Office Administration." *some excerpts...*

Fenno, Richard. Elite Interview Transcripts. Library of Congress.

Heitshusen, Valerie. (2007). "Committee Types and Roles." *CRS Report for Congress* Order Code 98-241.

Heniff, Bill, Jr. (2006). "Overview of the Authorization-Appropriations Process." *CRS Report for Congress* Order Code RS20371.

Kingdon, John W. 1981. *Congressmen's Voting Decisions* New York, NY: Harper and Row. (Appendix)

Schneider, Judy. (2005). "House Committee Organization and Process: A Brief Overview." *CRS Report for Congress* Order Code RS20465.

Schneider, Judy. (2003). "House Leadership Structure: Overview of Party Organization." *CRS Report for Congress* Order Code RS20930.

Additional Readings for Graduate Students

Barkin, Samuel. 2006. "What Defines Research as Qualitative?" Paper presented at the American Political Science Association.

Fenno, Richard. 1986. "Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 80(1): 3-15.

Hall, Richard. 1996. *Participation in Congress*. (Appendix)

King, Gary, Keohane, Robert O., and Verba, Sidney. 1994 *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Swers, Michelle. 2002. *The Difference Women Make*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Chapter 1)