



## Spanish Independent Study & Minor Capstone Projects

C TERM - JANUARY 11-MARCH 2, 2012

### Instructor Information:

Prof. Aarti S. Madan

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Class Time: SL 03, Thursdays 11:30-12:30

Office Hours: SL 03, M/F 3:00-4:00 or by appointment

### Course Goals and Objectives:

#### Role of advisor:

- Provide project “guidance” rather than project “instruction;”
- Encourage critical thinking;
- Push students to realize their greatest potential;
- Create a learning environment based upon openness, trust, and respect;
- Establish milestones to encourage timely work;
- Provide advice and/or resources for group effectiveness.
- Comment on (rather than edit) Spanish grammar

#### Advisor expectations of students:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the relevant literature and other background sources; evaluate this material critically and apply it appropriately to the project work;
- Have clearly stated, achievable goals and objectives;
- Achieve the goals;
- Design a sound approach; understand and apply appropriate methodologies;
- Arrive at conclusions and recommendations that are supported by evidence;
- Effectively present the methods, evidence, and conclusions, orally and in writing;
- Take initiative: students should make the project their own, and pursue its completion independently; (Advisors advise and consult; they should not have to dictate.)
- Work smoothly with each other and with advisors, meeting deadlines and conducting work in a timely fashion;
- Lead meetings with advisors. It is your responsibility to make sure they are productive;
- Fulfill responsibilities to advisors and other students;
- Effectively document and report information about the project, in written and oral form: drafts and presentations are the primary means by which you convey your work to your advisor; I expect that these materials will represent your best efforts;
- Be flexible, and take adversity in stride;
- Grow and learn;

Have some fun doing the project!

## I. General Description of an Independent Study/Project and Final Essay

Through an Independent Study Project you demonstrate, foremost, independence in designing and executing an advanced research project. The basic idea: that you, with my guidance, establish competency in a specific aspect of Latin American or Spanish history, literature or culture. Alongside weekly meetings with me you will conduct and synthesize research to produce a final scholarly essay.

### PAGE LENGTH

Regular course IS/P:	10-15 pages, including notes and bibliography
HUA Inquiry Practicum:	15-20 pages, including notes and bibliography
Minor Capstone Experience	20-25 pages, including notes and bibliography

### GUIDELINES

Essays must be:

- Composed in Spanish
- Doable in seven weeks (research included)
- Driven by a clearly defined thesis
- Supported by an adequate body of research
- Formatted according to *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*
- Typed, double-space, standard 1-inch margins
- Composed in a font size no bigger than 12 pts.
- Devoid of many fonts, italics, bold, etc. The use of graphs or illustrations, if appropriate, will be welcomed, as long as illustrations are pertinent and not used as "filler."

In this project you will engage in a conversation with the scholarly material relevant to your topic. In designing this intelligent and meaningful conversation, you must first establish an *independent* position and thereby avoid mere reproduction of what other scholars have said; you may—and are, in fact, encouraged to—ground your arguments on what others have said.

That means a great deal of the project will be dedicated to reading.

Although I understand that you, at this level, are not an expert in the field, I will expect a certain level of originality. You should produce at least a modest contribution to the subject being studied.

You can develop the aforementioned independence in many different ways, but you must always be aware of your audience: I would like to know more at the end of your paper than I did at the start.

## II. Brainstorming

Once you have decided upon a topic of your liking, you have to think immediately about *3 specific questions* that you might have about that topic. Your most pressing goal: to narrow down your larger topic, which may be too general. From these questions you will choose one. This question will be the main focus of your work.

### III. Thesis

Once you have focused on a specific aspect of the subject, you will then proceed to establish an initial thesis. The thesis can be defined as your tentative response to a central question. Your essay must ask a relevant historical, cultural, or literary question. You must find an interesting idea, present it clearly, argue that idea carefully, and use evidence to support your claims. Finally, you will show why your idea is significant for the particular subject of study.

The sooner you have a research topic in mind, the sooner you can begin to experiment with the formulation of your thesis. The success of your project depends on the careful choosing of your topic and on the diligence and resourcefulness you show in finding the resources. Your topic should be focused enough to allow you to treat it fully within the time limitation of seven weeks.

In my experience, the more interest you have in a topic, the easier it will be to research and write it.

Ensure that there are enough resources available within the Worcester Consortium. If your topic is too difficult, or if the materials have to be requested from other universities, be sure to request the material needed from other libraries or institutions well ahead of time. While the Gordon Library is growing its collection of journals or books related to Hispanic cultures, literatures or histories, you may need to consult other local libraries to find articles or other material relevant to your research topic (the libraries of Holy Cross and Clark University are good options). *ILLiad will become your friend.*

### IV. Organization and Presentation

The essay as a whole might be considered a structured response to the question you initially pose. Once you have your topic and thesis, break your research topic into four or five subtopics. These can be organized around a set of four or five minor questions that will help you to organize the answer to your central question.

Organization and presentation are key components to having a successful essay. You must present your argument clearly and logically, maintaining paragraph unity and coherence. Verbal and argumentative transitions from one paragraph to the other or from one section to the other are crucial. As for language components, check your grammar, spelling, and punctuation carefully, and always double-check all of your quotations for accuracy.

*Draft* means your best current effort, well written, spell-checked, and carefully typed. A draft should never be a document that would embarrass any of us. Do not be satisfied with the first draft of any section. A good essay will take a lot of careful revision and rewriting. *The Writing Center is a great resource.*

The drafts must include all the material that will be in the final draft, including footnotes and bibliography according to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Be sure to regularly back up your paper on a USB, on email, on Dropbox, on your hard-drive.

## V. Evaluation

Project grading is difficult, particularly since students and advisors develop a working relationship during the project. Project grading is also very different from course grading. In a class, correctly completing all assignments and evaluations (designed by the professor) earns a student an A grade. However, an A project grade requires that students go beyond this level and demonstrate originality, initiative, and creative analytical skills. Students generally feel that a great deal of hard work and a nicely presented report deserve an A. Most professors (including me) do not, unless there is real analysis, originality and analytical depth in the total project effort.

Listed below are some specific guidelines on how WPI professors determine project grades. Many of the grading characteristics described below are subjective and open to some degree of interpretation. Student attitude throughout the project can also affect how we, as advisors, make these subjective judgments. Students often ask at the end of a project how they can improve their grade. No project grade can be changed by last minute work; rather, only sustained quality effort over time will result in a good grade.

**A:** This grade represents a consistently excellent effort that **exceeds** explicit project goals. Characteristics of A work include meeting all project goals, and exceeding them in several areas such as development of objectives, initiative, originality, depth of analysis, and creativity. This grade is reserved for performance that is exceptional and thus is not achieved easily.

**B:** This grade represents a consistently good effort that **attains** the project goals. Characteristics of B work include doing all that was asked in a substantially correct form; setting clear project goals, writing a clear, professionally presented essay that has not required many drafts; completing all work in a timely and satisfactory manner; demonstrating sound analysis that includes logical interpretation of results; coming to meetings well prepared; and working hard, consistently, and diligently. A grade of B means that you worked well and did a good, strong job. Students should be proud of this grade.

**C:** This grade represents an acceptable effort that **partially attains** the project goals. Characteristics of C work include meeting some but not all of the project goals; and writing a readable but average report requiring many drafts and lots of faculty corrections. Missing deadlines, missing meetings without prior notification, and ignoring faculty comments on report drafts are traits common to some C projects. Students who receive this grade have fallen short of expectations in a number of ways.

**NR:** This grade denotes effort insufficient for registered credit. Characteristics of NR work include doing very little throughout the project; missing several meetings without prior notification; coming unprepared to meetings; repeatedly missing deadlines; turning in substandard work; not completing assigned tasks and showing little or no initiative and originality.

## VI. Academic Integrity

According to the Faculty Guide to Academic Integrity at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, “Any act that interferes with the process of evaluation by misrepresentation of the relation between the work being evaluated (or the resulting evaluation) and the student’s actual state of knowledge is an act of academic dishonesty.” In simpler words, I trust that you alone have produced your answers, ideas, and writing and therefore evaluate your work as such; if you misrepresent your knowledge, that’s academic dishonesty. For specific examples and details, see [“What Constitutes Academic Dishonesty](#)

[at WPI](#)” on MyWPI.

If you do look to and use sources outside of your breadth of knowledge, you must indicate that you’ve borrowed ideas or words belonging to someone else. If you misrepresent that work as your own, you’ve committed an act of *plagiarism*. I am required to report you the Humanities and Arts department head if I suspect you of academic dishonesty; while we can resolve a first offense internally (by, for example, refusing you credit on the assignment or for the whole project), we must report it to the Dean’s office, thereby giving you a record. Further offenses will potentially be judged by the Campus Hearing Board.

Please feel free to ask me for an extension instead of risking the consequences of plagiarizing. I’m likely to be considerate in such situations.

## VII. Schedule and Meetings

Listed here are the assignments for each of the seven weeks of the ISP. Delivery of material to Professors Madan should be done via email ([amadan@wpi.edu](mailto:amadan@wpi.edu)). Unless otherwise noted, the deadline is 7:00 pm by Tuesday of that week. Transmission of any revised draft must include the advisors’ comments from the previous week.

The topics listed below are suggested foci for the weekly ISP meetings. Weekly *meeting agendas* are due by email by 5 PM the day before your ISP meeting, which is to say, Wednesday. The minutes of each ISP meeting must be sent to all participants within 24 hours of the meeting. Students will develop the agenda for each ISP meeting, and at each meeting one person will serve as the meeting chair and one person will serve as the secretary and be responsible for writing up the minutes. These two roles should be rotated among all team members so that each student serves in each role at least once during the term.

At each meeting you should be prepared to talk about your progress and the ideas that you have been developing. NB: No paper will be accepted or approved if this requirement has not been met. No paper will be accepted or graded if it was not discussed and reviewed thoroughly during the quarter in question.

These regular meetings will allow me to assess your progress. Also, this will help you to organize your research by subtopics in order to have an effective discussion every time that you meet.

### Meeting 1 (19 January)

- Identification and discussion of topic, 2-3 primary sources

### Meeting 2 (26 January)

- Formulate 3 specific historical, literary or cultural questions you have about your topic; send these to me by **1:00 pm on Saturday 1/21**. I will suggest via email which one you should develop. This question will be the main focus of your work.
- Draft an initial *thesis*, which can be defined as your tentative response to your central question. It will become part of your essay’s *Introduction*. As you conduct primary and secondary research your thesis will of course develop and become stronger.

- Divide the topic in
- to minor subtopics.

### Meeting 3 (2 February)

- Develop a tentative list of research issues for *Background* and annotated bibliography providing information on these issues.
- Detailed outline of essay with sections and subsections—this will change as you research
- Draft of *Background* section; you decide what page length is most appropriate for the length of your essay
- Draft of *Introduction with thesis*

The *Introduction* is the section of your essay. The five rhetorical moves include a statement of your question and its importance, what research has already been done on the topic and what remains to be done, as well as a summary of the goal of the project and the methods for achieving it. Your thesis should be stated in such a way that you can assess whether or not your evidence proves it.

The *Background* summarizes what is known about your topic and the issues related to it, citing relevant experts in every instance. Expert opinion must be critically evaluated and differences of opinion between experts must be discussed. The *Background* section is your knowledge database for the execution of this project. It will continue to grow during the course of the project, but you should master most of it now in order to make informed decisions about the direction your work will take.

The *Outline* is a tool for designing a document. It can begin with a list of primary ideas, perhaps in the form of titles of sections and subsections as if you were sketching the main elements of a mechanical design or the primary procedures in a computer program. Those ideas are then refined until you can write the topic sentence of each paragraph in each subsection. With those topic sentences, you can test the coherence of your document just as you can test the functionality of any other design from a detailed plan. Writing and revising without a plan or outline is just as inefficient as “build and bust” design.

### Meeting 4 (9 February)

- Detailed outline for your *Analysis*, which will be divided up as you see fit
- Partial draft (about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$ ) of your analysis
- Review of Introduction and Background sections

Your *Analysis* offers evidence and specific examples to prove your thesis. With a great deal of specificity you will draw examples (or counterexamples) from the background literature or from the specific text you’re dealing with. You should quote passages from the text to prove your point; remember that you must explain their significance, explain how they relate to your thesis. When you incorporate evidence into your essay, you must be sure to explain it adequately. In subtle ways you must bring it back to your thesis statement. You must continually explain *how* and *why* the example means what you say it means. If you write something that has little to do

with your thesis, you have two options: expand and modify your thesis to accommodate that information, or do not include it and find other evidence that does support your thesis.

For example, if your question is “What is the role of geography in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo*,” your analysis might be split up into 5 sections: (I) Sarmiento’s reliance and response to the works of the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt; (II) Sarmiento’s obsession with Argentina’s rivers in all of his writings; (III) disciplinary geography as a way to attract potential immigrants to Argentina; (IV) literature as a vehicle to disseminate knowledge about Argentine geography across Argentina and the world; (V) literary geography as a method to teach Argentines about their territory

### **Meeting 5 (*writing week: no meeting*)**

- Complete draft of analysis

### **Meeting 6 (23 February)**

- Draft of conclusion
- Rewrite introduction
- Review of revised analysis

A *Conclusion* ties everything together and is, in many ways, a mirror of your introduction. In fact, it might need to become your introduction since you now, after having written the paper, ought to rewrite your introduction. Just as your introduction lead the reader into the thesis, the conclusion leads out from it. Often, the arguments and examples presented in your analysis are summarized and the thesis is restated as proved. You should seek an element of finality to your essay, much like the closing statement lawyers make at the end of a trial—a summary of all the evidence presented and a restatement that all the evidence points to the logical conclusion that what they said at the beginning (their *thesis* that the defendant was either guilty or innocent) is true. Try leaving the reader with something additional to think about (but still something that is related to thesis of the paper).

For example, I could conclude—and have concluded in a published article—that the role of geography in *Facundo* is two-fold: first, Sarmiento composes a *didactic geography* directed toward the citizens of Argentina; in what becomes a rallying cry, he explains that knowing the Argentine land—its rivers in particular—is tantamount to knowing the nation. Yet, at the same time, he constructs his narrative as a *marketable geography* designed to convince foreign readers to populate the lush Argentine terrain.

### **Meeting 7 (1 March)**

- Roundtable: conference-like presentations of 10-12 minutes in which you explain your project. You can have visuals if necessary in the form of a handout or a PowerPoint that includes quotations, images, or whatever best suits your particular project. Room: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Submit final essay