FEP 251 Cl: McNair Scholars Research Preparation Seminar: Developing a Research Question and Proposal

Instructor: Dr. Nicole Truesdell  
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Time: Fridays 7-7:50am plus one-on-one meetings  
Location: South College

Course Description:
What is research? How does one develop a research project? What is the best methodology to conduct a research project? These are some of the questions this course seeks to answer. Over a period of 7 weeks this class will prepare McNair Scholars for the McNair Summer Research Institute, where Scholars will work with their Faculty Mentor in the development of a research project and production of a final scholarly project. The aim of this course is twofold: 1) students will grasp the overall concept of research and the steps involved in conducting an academic research project and 2) students will develop a clear, succinct, and viable research proposal by the end of the course.

Course goals/objectives/outcomes:
1) Learn the professional value of academic research and graduate study.  
2) Understand the steps of conducting an academic research project.  
3) Develop a succinct research question(s)/hypotheses with a brief proposal (5-6 pages max).  
4) Develop a familiarity with the research traditions, methods, and current trends in various disciplines with attention being paid to the student’s desired field of study.  
5) Understand how to use a liberal arts approach to research.

Readings:
Readings will be assigned throughout the course as needed. All readings will be in article form and will be emailed by the Instructor to you.

Professional Courtesy and Email:
Sending Emails: One goal of the McNair Scholars Program is to teach professional development to our Scholars so that they may go on and be successful after they leave Beloit College. As such understanding and practicing professional courtesy is one key aspect of this development. Going forward I will only answer emails that have a Greeting and Ending. Also, I prefer to be addressed in email as Dr. Truesdell until I say it is fine to address me as Nicole. I know Beloit College prides itself on calling professors by their first name, but not all of us adhere to this policy and once you leave Beloit to go onto other institutions you will quickly learn many other professors will ask to be addressed as “Dr” until they specify otherwise.

Responding to emails: I expect Scholars to respond to emails sent out by the McNair program (from Kristin Frey or myself) to be answered within 24 hours. This program success is dependent upon Scholars being in good contact with us. Therefore, we need to ensure we hear from you all in a timely fashion in order to make our program run smoothly.
Time: I am strict about time. Class starts at 7pm, therefore I start at 7pm. If you are late without notifying me ahead of time that will reflect upon your grade.

Course Policies:
Disability Accommodations: If you have a disability and need accommodations, contact the Learning Enrichment and Disability Services Office located on 2nd floor Pearsons (north side) or call x: 2572 or email learning@beloit.edu. For accommodations in my class you must bring me an Accommodation Verification Letter from the Director of that office which will indicate appropriate accommodations. Contact that office promptly; accommodations are not retroactive.

Grading:
Grading for my courses are straightforward. I expect things to be turned in on time and completely finished. If you have a question about an assignment then please contact me ahead of the due date. Do not wait until the last minute to seek clarification on an assignment. If all assignments are turned in one time and are of a high caliber, and all class meetings and one-on-one meetings are attended (on time) then one can expect a 4.0. Missing a class or individual meetings and/or not turning in assignments on time will lower your grade with each miss.

Course Schedule:
March 21st – Conceptualizing Your Project, Introductions, And Review Of Course
Assignment: In one page (single spaced) answer the following questions. What do you want to look at? Think about the topic(s) that you wish to research this summer and start to literally “map” out the project you want to do. What do you think will be the main issue/question(s)/hypothesis you will examine? What do you already know about this topic/issue? What will you need to learn/do in order to examine this topic/hypothesis?
Due: March 25th 8am via email to Instructor

Week of March 24th – Individual Meetings. Scholars need to set up an hour-long scheduled time to meet with me during this week to go over the assignment. NOTE: Meetings need to be AFTER 8am on March 25th as I need to read and comment on what you turned in.
Assignment: Create an annotated bibliography with 6 sources that you will use in your research. Focus on key sources that will help you develop your overall project idea and question(s). The annotated bibliography should have the citation and a paragraph explaining the main points/arguments of the reference. This should be single-spaced.
Due: April 3rd 8am via email to Instructor

April 4th – Putting literature into conversation with one another.
Assignment: Redo the annotated bibliography into a 1-2 page single spaced analysis of the key points/topics/issues addressed in the readings. Which authors agree? Disagree? Are there any trends you see? What does this mean in relation to your topic?
Due: April 8th 8am via email to Instructor.

Week of April 7th – Individual Meetings: Creating Your Research Question(s)/Hypothesis
NOTE: Meetings need to be AFTER 8am on April 8th.
Assignment: Look back at your first week assignment and start to reformulate what you intend to ask/investigate. Use your background analysis to help guide your question/hypothesis. List your question(s)/hypothesis and indicate what type of information you will need to gather/know in order to address that question.

Due: April 17th 8am via email to Instructor

April 18th – Developing A Methodology.
Assignment: How will you go about answering your question(s)/hypothesis? In 1-2 pages outline the method(s) you plan to do in order to address your overall research questions. Are you using qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods? Explain why those methods are the best ones to use for your research.

Due: April 22nd 8 am via email to Instructor

Week of April 21st – Putting it all together. Creating a research proposal. NOTE: Meetings must be after April 22nd at 8am.
Assignment: Create a 5-6 page single-spaced research proposal that combines the work you have done over the last few weeks. Remember you are writing to an intelligent audience who may or may not be in your field of study, therefore you need to make sure your writing is free of jargon and is clear and to the point. The proposal should have the following information:

Title – short and to the point

Introduction – This section lets the reader know what your problem/question is, what you plan to do, why the reader should care, and how this project will help you achieve your academic goals (like gaining needed academic research experience or developing a research project that will be continued on…). Remember this section is not long – no more than a paragraph as it sets up the rest of the proposal, where you will give more detailed information.

Background – This section explains the context of your project and provides basic information to the reader that helps that person understand what you want to do. Choose the information that is most relevant in explaining your goals.

Literature Review – This section connects with your background, and depending on how you write your proposal the background and literature review can become one whole section. Here you want to place your project within the larger context of the literature surrounding the topic, addressing what has already been ask and the situating your project within this body of literature. What questions/topics/issues have already been address or asked and what is your understanding of these arguments or findings? What does your research do that is original/different/contributing to this overall debate or issue? Even if your work is original and new you can always connect it to another concept or theoretical framework that allows the reader to better understand where your topic sits in your field and how it can help move the field forward.

NOTE: Depending on the discipline and research project the “Background” and “Literature Review” sections may be one in the same.
Research Questions/Hypothesis – What is/are the specific question(s) your research seeks to answer? These questions should be focused, answerable, and be an indicator of how you plan to reach your overall objective. Hypotheses should be clearly explained.

Methodology – How are you going to answer your question(s)? This section explains in detail the steps you will take to conduct the research needed, which will allow you to answer your questions/test your hypothesis. What exactly will you do and how long will it take? If you need to be in the lab, what procedure will you be doing and how long will each step take? If you need to conduct interviews with whom will you be talking to? Why that population? How will you recruit individuals to talk with and how long will that take? Finally, how will you analyze your data? Will you use a statistical program? If so, which one and why? Will you do qualitative analysis that involves coding? Whichever method you use the reader should know what it is and why you are using it.

Previous Experience (optional) – Some proposals will want to know what qualifies you to do this project. This is the section where you present yourself as a viable and competent researcher who can effectively and efficiently complete the project you are proposing. This includes listing your skills, education, and other experiences that contribute to your overall ability to conduct your project.

Conclusion – What do you hope to learn/gain/understand from this project and in what ways can this research contribute to future work? The conclusion should let the reader know the future outlooks of the project and what you hope to gain from the research.

Due: May 1st in hand to Instructor by 3pm. This proposal needs to be SIGNED by your mentor so that I know your mentor and you have an agreed upon vision of what your summer research will focus on.

May 2nd – Presentations of research proposals by Scholars and an overview of the summer program. Students will give a brief 5-minute overview of their proposed summer project. The time limit is strict and is intended to have the Scholars practice pitching their research when networking with other academics.

Assignment: Create an annotated bibliography that you will use for your summer research. Sources must come from your mentor and be an agreed upon amount of work. This bibliography should include the 6 original sources you have used for the class as long as you have completed the necessary revisions given to you by me. The purpose of this assignment is for you to have already completed a good part of the reading for your literature review so you can go straight into analysis once you are back on campus for the Summer Institute. You should work with your Mentor in the selection of the bibliography.

Due: May 30th via email to the Director AND your Mentor by 3pm. Receiving your first stipend on June 14th is contingent upon us receiving this first piece of completed work.