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

Instructor: Dr. Atiera Coleman
Email: colemana@beloit.edu
Phone: 608-363-2617 (office), 608-844-5443 (cell)
Time: Thursdays from 7:30-8:50am plus one-on-one meetings
Location: Science Center 130

Course Description:
Over a period of 8 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. The Director of the McNair Scholars program will use this proposal to assess whether or not a Scholar is ready for the summer Institute.

Course goals/objectives/outcomes:
1) Learn the professional value of academic research and graduate study.
2) Understand the steps needed to plan out an academic research project.
3) Develop a succinct research question(s)/hypotheses.
4) Create a brief proposal (5-6 pages max) that will be used to assess the Scholars ability to participate (and be funded) for summer research.
5) 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.

Readings:
Readings will be assigned throughout the course as needed. All readings will be in article form and will be provided to you via google drive.

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. Keep in mind: Beloit College prides itself on calling professors by their first name, but everyone does not 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” or “Professor” 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 24-48 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 7:30am, therefore I start at 7:30am. If you are late without notifying me ahead of time you will lose points for attendance.

Scheduling Individual Appointments: All students need to set up appointments with me via my Google calendar. You can find the link to my calendar under my signature on previous emails I have sent.

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:
This is a fast paced course that necessitates you showing up and turning assignments in on time, as such I will not accept late assignments in this course. You are graded for this course and grading is dependent upon your ability to complete all assignments on time and successful submission of your proposal by the end of the course. This course is based on a point system with a breakdown of points is listed below:

Attendance (includes coming on time to class and appointments): 14 points
Assignments 1-5: 10 points each (50 points total)
Final proposal: 36 points
Total - 100 points

Grading scale:
100-95 pts: 4.0 (A)
94-90 pts: 3.7 (A-)
89-85 pts: 3.3 (B+)
84-80 pts: 3.0 (B)
79-75 pts: 2.7 (B-)
74-70pts: 2.3 (C+)
69-65pts: 2.0 (C)
64-60 pts: 1.7 (C-)
Below 60 pts: 1.0 (D)

Mentor Input:
Your mentor is an important part of your summer research, therefore your mentor needs to be informed about AND have input in what you plan to do and how you plan to do it. Your mentor also must approve of your topic, as s/he is the one who knows what is and is not feasible to accomplish over 6-8 weeks. As such, throughout the course your mentor must sign off on specific assignments before handing them in. This way I know you and your mentor are in contact and are in mutual agreement over the direction your research will go.
Assignment Format:
All assignments must have your name, the date, and the assignment name/number at the top of the page. Font size must be either 11 or 12 and use a standard Font type (Times New Roman, Garamond, Georgia, etc.). Please do not use any font’s that you would not deem professional or academic.

Course Schedule:
March 23rd – Introductions, Review of Course, And Conceptualizing Your Project
Assignment: Read “The Selection of a Research Design” article. This article can be found in the course google doc folder.
Assignment: Think about the topic that you wish to research this summer and start to literally “map” out the project you want to do. In 1-2 pages (single spaced) answer the following questions. What do you want to look at? 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? What is your intended outcome/what do you want to produce? Is the project you are thinking of doing feasible to do in a 6 to 8-week timeframe? Note: STEM students’ summer is 8 weeks long. Everyone else will have 6 weeks.
Due: March 28th by 8am to Instructor via Google Docs

Week of March 30th – Annotated Bibliography (Individual Meetings). Scholars need to set up a 40-minute scheduled time to meet with me during this week to go over the assignment. NOTE: Meetings need to be AFTER March 28th as I need to read and comment on what you turned in.
Assignment: Create an annotated bibliography with 5 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 of the article you are reading in the disciplinary style most appropriate to you and a paragraph after each citation explaining the main points/arguments of that reference. Each citation should be single-spaced.
Note: You need to speak with your mentor to assess which articles/references are most appropriate for you to be reading at this point. STEM students MUST do this, as your mentors all will have specific readings they need you to cover for your projects. I will be in contact with your mentors to ensure the readings you are doing are in line with what they want you to cover at this point.
Due: April 5th 8am via Google Docs
Due: April 5th 8am – Pre-research Survey

April 6th – Putting literature into conversation with one another.
Assignment: Redo your annotated bibliography into a 1-2 page single spaced analysis of the key points/topics/issues addressed in the readings. Where is there agreement or disagreement between the authors? Are there any trends you see? What does this mean in relation to your topic? What are you missing at this point that you need to know more about? This assignment will turn into your literature review/background section of your proposal.
Due: April 11th 8am via Google Docs
Week of April 13th – Creating Your Research Question(s)/Hypothesis (Individual Meeting).

**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. In 1 single-spaced page list your question(s)/hypothesis/aim AND indicate what type of information you will need to gather/know in order to address that question.

*Note:* If you are one of our STEM students you will get your aim/hypothesis from your mentor. You MUST use the aim/hypothesis given to you by them and then indicate what you need to know in order to address that aim/hypothesis.

**Due:** April 19th - 8am via Google Docs
**Due:** April 19th - 8am – Pre-research Self-Assessment

April 20th – Developing A Methodology and Budget.

**Assignment:** In 1-2 pages outline the method(s) you plan to do in order to address your overall research questions. How will you go about answering your question(s)/hypothesis? Are you using qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods? Explain why those methods are the best ones to use for your research. What type of theoretical framework(s) do you think you will use? When you are doing this assignment keep in mind your time frame – you are on a 6-8 week timeframe (STEM students are 8 weeks). Your question and methods should reflect that timeframe.

*Note:* If you are one of our STEM students your assignment is a little different. You will ask your mentor for readings (3-4) that explain the methods and procedures that you will be using during the summer. You will then summarize those articles into 1-2 page(s) and use them to explain what you will be doing. Then indicate what you need to know skills wise in the lab to accomplish this.

*Note:* If you will be in the lab or in the field and need supplies I need you (in conjunction with your mentor) to create a short budget that outlines what you need and the cost.

**Due:** April 25th - 8am via Google Docs

Week of April 27th – Putting it all together. Creating a research proposal. **NOTE:** Meetings must be after April 25th.

**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 this proposal to the McNair program as a way to indicate you have a plan for the summer and that we should fund your research, therefore you need to make sure your writing is free of jargon and is clear and to the point. You need to incorporate edits and suggestions made to you throughout the course in this final proposal. Again, you are trying to convince me to fund your research and as such the proposal needs to be well written and coherent. 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/Literature Review – 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. You want to place your project within the larger context of the literature surrounding the topic, addressing what has already been ask and then situating your project within this body of literature. What questions/topics/issues have already been addressed 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.

Research Questions/Hypothesis/Aims – What is/are the specific question(s) your research seeks to answer? OR What aim(s) do you seek to find? These questions should be focused, answerable, and be an indicator of how you plan to reach your overall objective. Hypotheses/Aims 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 what do you already know how to do now and what will you learning to do this summer? 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? Will you be doing a literature review? If so, what framework do you anticipate you will use to analyze that information? Whichever method you use the reader should know what it is and why you are using it. Remember – you MUST indicate that this can be done within the timeframe of the summer.

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. Will this part of your senior thesis/capstone? Is this just a one-summer project to get you acquainted with research? Do you plan to go abroad and want to use this research as a starting point for a larger project? Let the reader know where you see this project going.

Due: May 4th in class to Instructor WITH mentor signature.

Due, Special Project form filled out completely with ALL signatures EXCEPT the registrars.

May 4th – 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. Course wrap-up & Turn in proposals
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 5 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 and/or lab once you are back on campus for the Summer Institute. You must 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 is contingent upon us receiving this first piece of completed work.