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#### **Promoting Critical and Analytical Thinking in an Age of Populism: Sequencing Critical Analysis Papers in the Political Science and Legal Studies Capstone Course Fletcher McClellan (Politics, Philosophy, and Legal Studies)**

One of the purposes of PS 498 Senior Seminar in Political Science and Legal Studies is development of critical and analytical thinking. To that end, the course asks political science and legal studies majors to reflect upon, understand, and apply major approaches in their respective disciplines to historical and current events. A series of three critical analysis papers, two-to-four pages each, is assigned to move students through different stages of critical thinking (Elder and Paul 2010). The first assignment, based on Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2d ed. (1999), asks students how behavioral, institutional, and rational choice approaches were applied by the authors to a historical event, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Two more approaches – constructivism and political psychology – are introduced in the second assignment, in which students watch the film satire *The Death of Stalin* (2017) and read Philip Roth's counterfactual history, *The Plot Against America* (2004). Employing these approaches and texts, as well as reflecting on current events, students explore the question of whether the United States is becoming or might become an authoritarian state. The final paper has students explain current events, using at least three of the approaches discussed in the course (Marxism and feminism are also examined). In November 2018 the results of the 2018 midterm elections were the events that were analyzed. To ascertain the extent to which students mastered the critical and analytical thinking skills promoted by the course, two faculty members apply a rubric to the third paper and compare the findings of the current cohort of political science and legal studies seniors to those of previous cohorts. This presentation will discuss the underlying theory and pedagogy for this component of the course, share assessment results from several Senior Seminars, and show how the findings were used to improve instruction and student learning.

Learning Outcome(s): Attendees should be able to: (1) describe developmental stages of critical and analytical thinking; (2) understand how writing assignments can be structured to promote development of critical and analytical thinking; (3) describe a rubric for assessing critical and analytical thinking; and (4) discuss how assessment results can be used to improve teaching and learning of thinking skills.