

**Evaluation Report for Joseph I. Moreland Grant to Promote Information Literacy
in a Political Science Capstone Seminar on Democratic Erosion (W2018)**

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1. Introduction

Between November 2017 and March, 2018, the Joseph I. Moreland grant enabled me to achieve three major objectives. First, it prompted me to research best practices in information literacy education in political science while developing my proposal, and continuing through the start of my course in January, 2018. Second, the grant supported me during the additional hours spent drawing on the aforementioned research to develop and embed my own enhanced information literacy components into the new course I was preparing to teach on democratic erosion. This course was a Capstone Research Seminar (capped at 22 students), which is taught by different faculty on different themes, but is required for all senior political science majors and must culminate in an original research paper (roughly 30 pages long). Active and ongoing collaboration with my incredibly supportive subject librarian, Christopher Brown, was essential to both of these objectives. Lastly, the grant has prompted and supported me as I designed and implemented a rigorous, multimethod evaluation of the various components of the course. This evaluation strategy – which I detail below – centered on a combination of pre- and post-course survey research, paired with students' self-reflections.¹

In this report, I offer brief updates and concerning the implementation of the proposed project (Section 2) and use the rest of the report to present results of the multipronged evaluation. Specifically, I discuss the quality of students' final papers; analyze quantitative measures included in the pre- and post-course survey; and then explore students' qualitative responses to open-ended questions, especially their reflections of their own pre-course reflection videos. In the final section of the report, I consider one additional type of data: student comments on DU's official, anonymous course evaluations. These, I suggest, are particularly informative for what they do not contain. Namely, when prompted to describe weaknesses of the course, a majority of the twenty students who completed evaluations either stated that the course had no weaknesses or identified the department's course sequence or course size as a potential weakness. Very few comments point to any weaknesses in the information literacy curriculum or its delivery. Accordingly, when prompted to identify strengths of the course, students offered detailed, extremely positive feedback. I analyze this feedback through a brief thematic analysis in Section 3.4 (a copy of official course evaluations is attached in the appendix.) Overall, triangulating a variety of types of evidence leads me to conclude that the succeeded in meeting all of its goals. Moreover, it allowed me to develop new professional relationships, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching experience that I look forward to applying in future endeavors.

2. Integrating enhanced information literacy in the Political Science Capstone Seminar

As noted above, the course succeeded in meeting all major goals and objectives with respect to the integration of enhanced information literacy training, as well as implementing collaborative instruction and engagement with other experts, such as consultants from the Writing Center, who led a peer feedback session in class. As reported in Table 1, seven out of the eleven weeks of the course involved some kind of collaborative engagement that relates directly or indirectly to students' information literacy comprehension. Our subject librarian attended three classes, two of which he co-taught, and met with each student at least once outside of class (most met with him more than once). He and Dr. Paguyo also contributed to the project by reviewing the survey instrument in addition to the conclusions

¹ I am grateful to Dr. Christina Paguyo for helpful feedback on my evaluation strategy during the fall of 2017. In particular, I am grateful for her suggestion to ask students to post initial self-reflections on video, and to have them contemplate those videos at the conclusion of the course.

presented in this report. Therefore, the course met the three main objectives associated with the grant, including provision of:

- Scaffolded assignments in which students selected, critically evaluated, and applied relevant library sources as evidence in their final Capstone Thesis.
- Three in-class visits with reference librarian Chris Brown, in addition to individual student meetings throughout the latter part of the course. (Photo from last day of class on p.4.)
 - Two consultants from the Writing Center also led the class in a peer feedback session that broadened students' focus from questions about information literacy and presentation of information in their own papers to those of their peers.
- Online modules and information literacy tutorials, including guides for writing annotated bibliographies,² broader research skills tutorials,³ and academic writing guides, including extant materials⁴ as well as a series of "pages" and guides that I developed in dialogue with materials created by two senior colleagues in political science and the Writing Center. Additionally, I encourage students to submit their theses to undergraduate research journals, using online guides to help them select appropriate journals.⁵

Table 1 details information literacy learning objectives addressed each week. It also highlights instances of collaborative instruction or engagement, including engagement with Mr. Christopher Brown. The goals of the course were inspired in part by the Association of College and Research Librarians' (ACRL) 2000 conceptualization of an information literate individual as someone who is able to "determine the extent of information needed; access the needed information effectively and efficiently; evaluate information and its sources critically; incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base; use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information." Further, collaboration with these colleagues was enriching and educational for me (a junior faculty member). I look forward to recommending greater collaboration with them to my fellow junior colleagues in the future.

Figure 1. Capstone Seminar participants and instructors



Notes: Photo taken on last day of class. Subject librarian, Christopher Brown, is fourth from the left in the back row; Professor Sperber is third from the left in the front row.

² University of Toronto, New College Writing Centre (n.d.). [Writing an Annotated Bibliography](#). Written by Deborah Knott and affiliated with the University's Health Sciences Writing Centre. Available at: <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/annotated-bibliography/>

³ Research Skills Tutorial by Sarah Morehouse, Librarian at Empire State College (Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License). Available at: <http://subjectguides.esc.edu/researchskillstutorial>

⁴ University of Southern California Libraries Research Guides (n.d.) "Organizing your social science research paper." Available at <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/results>

⁵ American Political Science Association (2018). Graduate and Undergraduate Research Journals. Available at: <http://www.apsanet.org/RESOURCES/For-Students/Student-Journals>

Table 1. Information literacy material covered (by week)

Week	Learning objectives & related activities	Collaborative component?
W1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-course survey completed in class, including info literacy evaluation components Introduction to course, students reflect on and discuss: What is information literacy? How confident are you in [various aspects of info literacy]? What strategies do you use to locate and evaluate sources? Pre-course video reflection on these topics due by second class 	Engage cross-university blog related to the course; explore how students' research papers will be posted at end of class, generating new knowledge in academic and policy debate.
W2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to evaluate the empirical rigor, validity, and potential bias of academic sources. 	
W3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students turn in and review first annotations on assigned course content for the week. Focus on identifying and describing editorial perspectives across academic journals and periodicals. 	
W4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to search for and use academic sources (e.g., journal articles, primary source docs, and datasets) Bibliographic trace 	Subject librarian (Chris Brown) co-taught a class.
W5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using academic databases with an emphasis on quantitative data and tools for data visualization 	Brown co-taught a class. Students met with Brown individually.
W6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structuring an argument and learning about responsible and effective ways to integrate information (qualitative and especially quantitative sources) into academic research. Small and large group work. 	Students continue meeting one-on-one with Brown outside of class.
W7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to cite and describe data and primary sources effectively, focus on citing presentations or media 	
W8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing strategies for effective annotated bibliographies and focus on academic writing 	
W9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is knowledge produced and valued? 	Students receive feedback, visit Brown with targeted questions.
W10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing and delivering effective peer feedback. 	Writing Center leads in-class workshop.
W11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A panel of students (volunteers) present their final papers, followed by Q&A. Chris Brown attends Post-course reflection on initial video submission and survey evaluation 	Brown attends last class, collaboratively offers feedback/follow-up on final projects.
Pre-course	Sperber met with subject librarian (Brown) and DU evaluation specialist (Paguyo) together, discussed goals, objectives and strategies for the course and its evaluation. Paguyo suggested some questions included in the survey.	
Post-course	Sperber drafts report using evaluations; Brown and Paguyo review draft and suggest revisions or additions.	

3. Evaluation of student learning

There are many ways to evaluate the success of a course. In this report, I focus on the achievement of goals related to information literacy, beginning with the broadest metric: students' final research products. I then present evidence from the quantitative indicators included in the pre- and post-course tests, and discuss some of the qualitative material solicited in our evaluations. Here I focus on students' submission of a video reflecting on information literacy and research experience at the start of the course, as well as their written reflections on the video during their post-course evaluation. I conclude with a brief discussion of students' anonymous course evaluations collected by the University. With a completion rate of 95%, the student evaluations reflect a widespread, extremely positive perception of the course. They are also a useful evaluation tool in this report because they are anonymous. Overall, across metrics, evidence suggests that students exhibited and reported significant and meaningful learning and research experiences in the course.

3.1 Research papers and annotated bibliographies

Each paper included 18-24 pages of double spaced text, an annotated bibliography, and at least one original table and figure (graph) created with data that students located independently or through our class-based "data lab." At least three students have submitted their papers to undergraduate research journals (which I encouraged in the course), and several more are in communication with me as they prepare to do so. Additionally, students' papers will be posted on an interuniversity blog (run by Brown University) on democratic erosion. Although I am inevitably biased, the final research products (including papers and presentations that Chris Brown attended) reflected high levels of student engagement and rigor with respect to the analysis, evaluation, and presentation of information.

Beyond these research products, there are several ways to evaluate the success of the course and its information literacy objectives. I consulted with Dr. Christina Paguyo before the course began about effective evaluation methods and adopted a multipronged approach. This included designing and administering pre- and post-course surveys (completed in class on day 1 and over finals week), as well as prompts for an 8-10 minute individual video reflection that students posted online before the second class of the quarter (discussed further below).

3.2 Survey results

All students in the course (N=21) were required to complete the pre- and post-course survey.⁶ With Dr. Paguyo's input, I incorporated several questions adapted from the National Science Foundation Research Project: Cultivating Inclusive Identities of Engineers and Computer Scientists: Expanding Efforts to Infuse Inclusive Excellence in Undergraduate Curricula (K. Rambo-Hernandez, C. Paguyo, R. Atadero). I also drew on my background in survey research to write questions that targeted course learning objectives more directly, which I present in Figures 2 and 3.

Specifically, Figure 2 (below) reports the change in students' responses to the following series of questions on the survey. For each question, students were presented with a scale ranging from zero, identified as "strongly disagree," to six, identified as "strongly agree" (for questions with an asterisk,

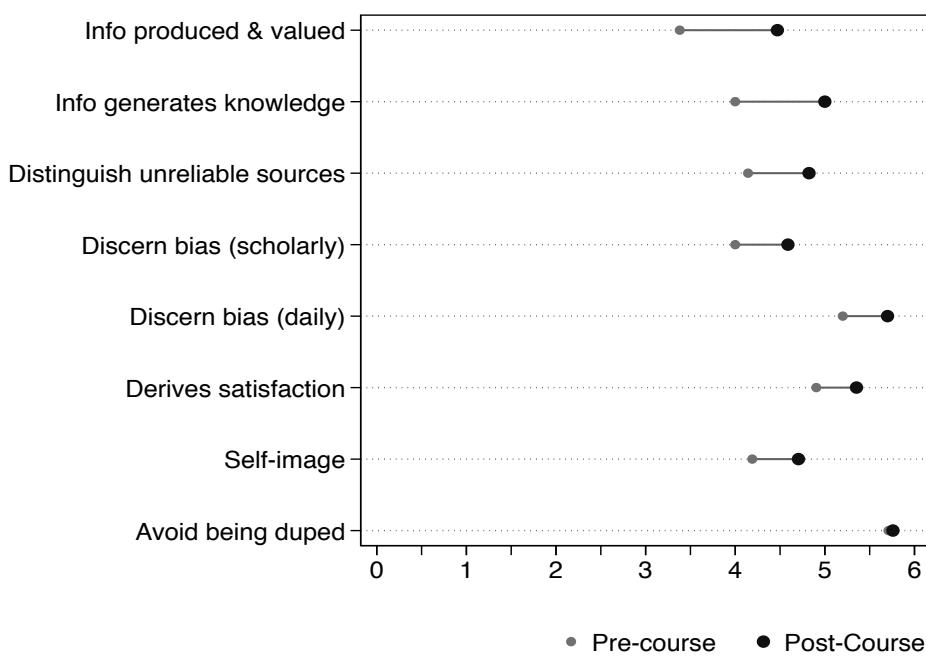
⁶ All 21 completed the pre-course survey, and 20 of the 21 students completed the post-course survey. I am in touch with the student who did not complete his post-course survey due to a medical emergency. Since he was a very strong and highly motivated student in the course, it is highly unlikely that his responses would alter the results in any significant way.

the range was from “no confidence” to “complete confidence”). The precise question wording for variables included in Figure 1, in order of presentation, includes:

- *I understand how information is produced and valued.*
- *I understand how information is used to create new knowledge.*
- *I feel confident in my ability to distinguish scholarly or other reliable sources of information from unreliable sources.**
- *When completing readings for coursework, I am confident in my ability to tell whether an author is biased, and in what way.**
- *In my day-to-day life outside of class, I am confident in my ability to tell whether a source (e.g., an author, blog, or magazine) is biased, and in what way.**
- *I derive great personal satisfaction from working on important political science projects.*
- *Being a political science major is an important part of my self-image.*
- *It is important to see myself as someone who won't be duped by "fake" news or other unreliable sources.*

In Figure 2, the small gray circle indicates the mean student response on the pre-course survey. The larger black circle represents the mean student response to the same question 10 weeks later on the post-course survey. The line connecting them represents the positive change observed across surveys. Overall, we observe significant growth in students’ self-reported information literacy (explored in detail below). Moreover, the three questions on which we observe the least change are explained by a ceiling effect: students’ responses were already extremely high on the pretest, so there was not much room for growth. The one possible exception concerns students’ response to the statement, “being a political science major is an important part of my self-image.” The class average on this variable hovered around “agree” throughout the course. This indicator is arguably the least directly related to information literacy, however.

Figure 2. Changes observed in pre- and post-course course evaluations



In Figure 3 (p.8), I focus on students' responses to the first two variables presented above (I understand how information is used to generate knowledge and I understand how information is produced and valued). These variables experienced the greatest gains during the course.⁷ Figure 2 demonstrates that although there was a wide distribution on the first statement in the pretest, most students only slightly agreed that they understood how information is used to produce knowledge. By the end of the course, the distribution of responses was much tighter and concentrated around "agree" and "strongly agree," which gained the most respondents. With respect to the second statement, the class distribution was even wider at the start of the course, with students almost evenly distributed across all response categories (again, these variables range from strongly disagree (0) to neutral (3) to strongly agree (6)). By the end of the course, all of the students who initially reported that they did not understand how information is produced and valued (e.g., some form of disagreement) had shifted to neutral or positive responses. The class average concentrated around "agree," which gained the most endorsements over the course of the quarter. These are major improvements in students' perceived understanding of key concepts in information literacy.

Another way to assess what students gained from the class is to ask them to identify areas where they have made the most progress. To this end, the post-course survey asked, "What aspects of the research process did you learn the most about or improve most in as a result of our course?" Students were instructed to select as many responses as they saw fit. Table 2 reports the percentage of the class who identified that skill an area of major improvement as a result of the course. Statements are listed in order of popularity, not the order in which they were presented. Importantly, the three skills that students identified as sources of progress were associated with information literacy (i.e., evaluating the reliability of a source, maximizing comprehension of scholarly or other readings, and writing annotated bibliographies). Evaluating sources, maximizing reading comprehension and writing annotations all require critical consideration of information and the modes and sources in which it is presented.

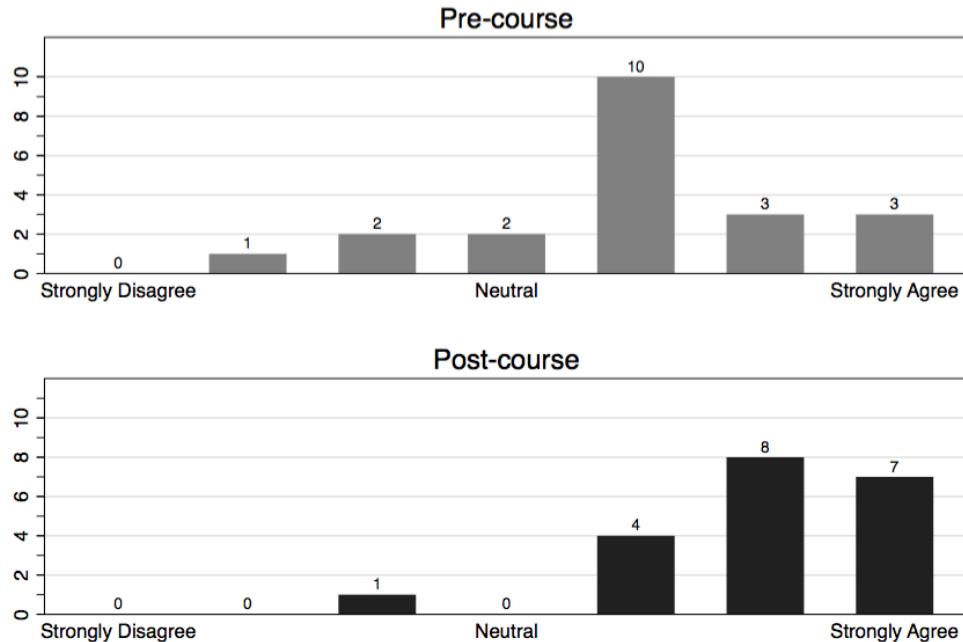
Table 2. What students improved most as a result of the course (self-reported)

Percent selected	Statement
70%	How to evaluate the reliability of a source
70%	Strategies to maximize my comprehension of scholarly or other readings
70%	How to write an annotated bibliography
65%	How to present data in a table effectively
60%	How to keep track of references and produce a correctly formatted bibliography
60%	How to structure a persuasive argument
50%	How to access quantitative databases online
45%	How to access quantitative databases online
35%	How to analyze primary source documents
30%	How to search for academic articles online
25%	How to present an idea or theory using a diagram
20%	How to analyze quantitative data using Stata (not required)
20%	How to give my peers constructive criticism on their writing
10%	How to give my peers constructive criticism on their research process

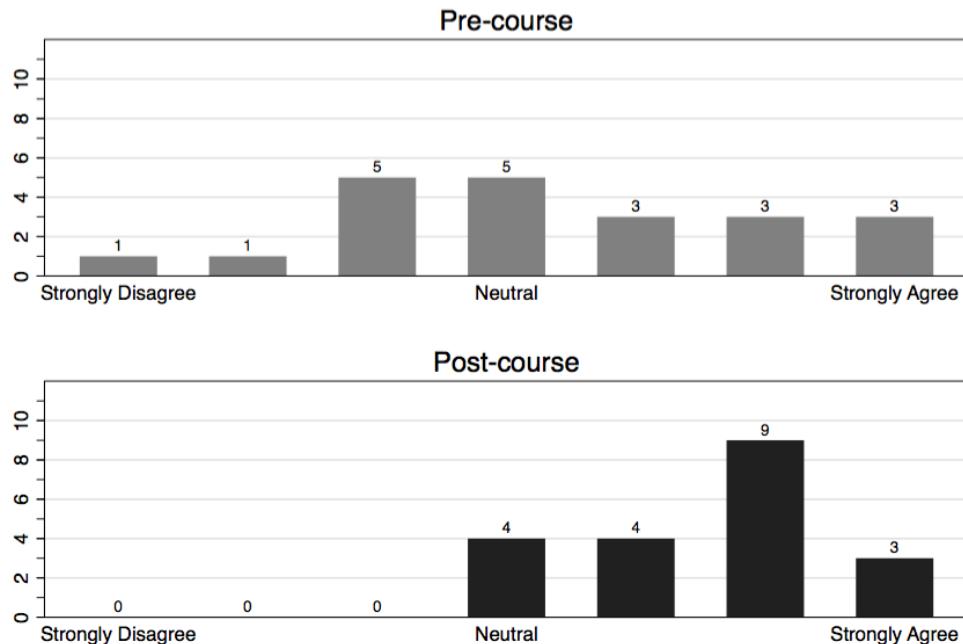
⁷ One might be concerned that these gains are attributable to social desirability bias (i.e., students reporting what they think I want to hear). This is not a valid concern, however, since students did not respond to *all* information literacy prompts in this manner, despite the fact that they all have normatively desirable responses (one ought to be able to discern bias, etc.).

Figure 3. Pre- and Post-Course Comparisons of Information Literacy Objectives

(A) Understands how information is used to generate knowledge



(B) Understands how information is produced and valued



Notes: Pre- and post-course responses to the statements: "I understand how information is used to create new knowledge" (panel A) and "I understand how information is produced and valued" (panel B). For each statement, the survey presented a scale ranging from 0, labeled "strongly disagree" to 6, labeled "strongly agree."

3.3 Video reflection and qualitative feedback

The prompts for the video reflections are included in Appendix A. Students watched their video reflections again at the end of the course and reflected on them in writing in post-course reflections. Additionally, I used the pre-course surveys and video reflections to learn more about students' perceived information literacy strengths and challenges and used this information to tailor and guide my information literacy teaching throughout the quarter.

In the post-course evaluation students received the following instructions: "Watch the video that you submitted at the start of this course. What stands out to you most as you watch it? Try to be specific. Does watching your earlier video give you new insights into or feelings about your identity as a learner, researcher, or citizen, more broadly?" Overwhelmingly, students reported satisfaction with their progress, with a majority singling out skills and competencies related to information literacy. Many further emphasized the important role that the subject librarian played in their development as a learner and researcher. Two representative examples of this type of response include:

I was confident in my ability to search google scholar before this course started. However, with Chris Brown's guidance, I have learned so much more. This shows me that there is always room to grow as a researcher. Also, I identified that I have struggled with identifying the reliability of sources. Through the annotated bibliography, I practiced evaluating sources quickly and efficiently. I had never written an annotated bibliography before. Additionally, I said that I struggle with balancing research and summary with analysis and my original thoughts. I definitely feel more confident in my ability to bring my voice in. Even just reading a couple of chapters of "They Say, I Say" made me more confident. It was really cool to listen to myself talking about how I want to create an original conclusion to contribute to the literature. Through the final paper, I think I did that. Overall, this video highlighted the growth my growth over this past 10 weeks. I have refined my understanding of democratic erosion. With this knowledge, I can be a better democratic citizen because I can eloquently explain what is happening in our country.

And a similar reflection from another student:

I think I'm a little better at researching now. Chris Brown helped a lot with his tips, although I am definitely not at his level! As far as democratic erosion goes, I (obviously) know more about it now, although since it's still an emerging field in political science I think there is still much ground to break. I do question calling it democratic erosion in places like Poland and Hungary, as it seems that they willingly voted themselves into a more illiberal democracy... which, in a backwards way, is what democracy is all about. Otherwise, I feel like a more informed citizen and that I am better able to analyze literature and events to pick out the important and relevant pieces.

Other students focused on the correlation between the skills that they said they wanted to develop in their pre-course video, and the skills they actually developed in the course. For instance, one student wrote:

After watching the video I submitted at the beginning of the quarter, the thing that stands out most to me is that I improved on all of the things that I said I wanted to improve on. For example, I mention wanting to make sure that I could effectively evaluate sources and determine biases.

We practiced that skill over and over again for the annotated bibliographies and I feel like I could determine the editorial perspective of any source if I needed to. Additionally, it is pretty clear to me that I had no idea what I was talking about when it came to democratic erosion and now I feel like I can have a conversation about it with someone if needed. More broadly, I think that looking back on the video showed me that a great deal of progress can be made in a relatively short amount of time if the assignments, guidance, and mindset are all correct.

Another student reflected on the original goals they set for themselves as a learner in the course but emphasized how radically her perspective had changed as follows. Importantly, this student goes beyond expressing satisfaction that they were able to achieve goals they set for themselves, and considers how their paradigm shifted, both in terms of what they thought they knew about information literacy and the discipline-specific content of the course:

Wow, I must admit re-watching this video made me smile! What stands out most to me are two things. First, when asked about my skill set my answer was almost a bit ironic. I answered that one of my best skills is the ability to quickly and accurately gather information on a subject from the internet. However, with the completion of my thesis I can certainly tell you that whatever "skill" I had coming into this class, I left with far more experience. The vigorous [sic] research this class required solidified my research abilities, while also teaching me new methods that I can apply to future school work and my career.

Secondly, what also stood out to me was my answer to the last question, "What do you want to learn". In the video I expressed that I knew a little bit about democratic backsliding, and I asked why voters would consciously vote against their best interest. The class, on the other hand, corrected my misunderstanding, and introduced that illiberal moves by sitting governments are generally sourced from modes of institutional change and misuse of legal procedure by elected officials. What I loved about this class is that it took my misconception, introduced new alternative concepts, and then led me to conclude how other factors were truly at play. In conclusion, I think watching the video was a bit humbling, as it showed me how much I thought I knew before diving into the class. With this in mind, rather than scolding me for my bravado, this class took my enthusiasm and challenged me with alternative concepts, ultimately leading me down a new thought process.

Another important theme in students' responses to their pre-course video reflection concerned their broader development as a conveyor of information, including their self-confidence with respect to information-gathering and information-sharing. For instance, one (female) student noted:

The thing that most stands out to me is how much I have changed in terms of my knowledge of information. I think that I still have strength in locating relevant information for my argument and understanding that information, however I think that this Capstone [course] helped me a lot in strengthening my ability to share information and use the information that I have. More than anything though, the biggest insight that this video gave me was how much more confident I should be in my ability to analyze and speak on the issues I am researching. The difference from the first video to my presentation of the paper is enormous. In this video it is obvious that I don't know much about democratic erosion or information literacy, and this class helped me understand that when you are researching a subject that it is important to be confident in your abilities and intellect.

Lastly, in reviewing students' self-reflections, it is notable that a significant percentage of them underscored the significance of the annotated bibliography assignment in their development throughout the quarter. We began with students turning in an annotation for all of the assigned class readings during the first few weeks of class. They also submitted annotations for a dataset that we explored during our "data exploration" week. They received detailed feedback on these annotations, and we reviewed some together in class, discussing a given annotation's strengths and weaknesses, for instance. By the middle of the quarter, students began searching for sources specific to their selected paper topic and cases. This included primary and secondary sources, as well as quantitative datasets. Chris Brown played a major role facilitating this stage of their research, and the process of annotating the sources they found proved very useful to them when they were ready to begin writing.

3.4 Formal course evaluations

Course evaluations offer one more type of evidence that I use to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the course from students' perspectives. Although these anonymous) evaluations ask students to focus at least partly on the instructor (as opposed to the course as a whole), students relayed valuable information in this arguably higher stakes format.

Perhaps the most valuable information to glean from the formal course evaluations is in what's *not* there. For instance, the final part of the evaluation prompts students to "comment on what you see as the weaknesses of the course and instructor, with particular attention to the issues addressed in the previous questions." With evaluations from 20 of the 21 students in the course (near a 100% response rate), there were numerous students who stated that they perceived no weaknesses in the course. Others responded by emphasizing weaknesses that are unrelated to the curriculum and instructor, such as the size of the class (most wished it could have been smaller), and the fact that the department does not align the required methods course with the Capstone thesis seminar. Representative responses include:

Nothing at all.

The ONLY weakness I can identify with this course was the introduction of too much literature.

Some of the aspects of the paper I did not feel were completely necessary, specifically the use of Stata for our research papers But overall, I have very few complaints about this class.

I wish the class would have been smaller. It would have made it easier to meet with Sperber and to contribute to class discussion.

I think this course would have been more effective if it had been capped at a lower number of students. I think that it is a lot for a professor to have to provide detailed feedback on twenty-two different twenty page papers, especially since the assignment was scaffolded so we were providing multiple different drafts/uploads.

Others noted that they wished we had spent even more of the class on research, noting that the first few weeks of more theoretical readings should be condensed. For instance, one student noted:

The first few week's readings are not super relevant and it would have been more helpful to dive into research straight away. I felt the process of finishing my paper was a bit rushed.

Only one student indicated that some of the focus on information literacy was too “basic.” Overall, when prompted to criticize the course and its instruction, the vast majority of students had nothing negative to say about any of the information literacy components of the course, or their delivery.

Perceived strengths of the course

In the section of the report where students are asked to comment on the strengths of the course and the instructor, the major theme that emerged was the importance of one-on-one feedback, either written or in person. Responsiveness to individual students’ needs and challenges appears to have been key to the success of the course. (This emphasis is likely the flipside of students identifying class size as a possible weakness.) For instance, numerous students endorsed the sentiments that are clearly articulated in these three responses:

Prof. Sperber took extra time to help me along and would have not made it through the class without her help and support!

My research skills improved, she gave good feedback, class discussions were engaging and interesting.

Prof. Sperber was very helpful with one on one feedback. I feel like she helped me produce a solid paper for this capstone.

As per the last comment, it is notable that many students referenced their “final product” (research paper) to indicate that they were proud of what they were able to accomplish through their research. Other comments along these lines included:

I thought this course was really strong in capitalizing on the synthesis of our political science degree, requiring us to use the different methods of research and analysis to construct a thesis quality work.

...I learned a lot in this course and I am proud of the work I did in it. I liked the way that we worked on our final paper in steps for the last month of class.

Related to students articulating pride in the work they were able to accomplish in the course is the idea of empowerment, and students beginning to see themselves as researchers. For instance, one student noted:

Professor Sperber is an excellent professor. In addition to providing valuable feedback, being an excellent lecturer, and creating a variety of different activities for the class to participate in (e.g., lectures, group work, peer-review, etc.), Professor Sperber stands out for her ability to empower her students. Some professors treat undergrads as if they don't really have anything to contribute to the discussion at hand, but Professor Sperber made students feel as if their comments and analyses were worthwhile and that we should think of ourselves as scholars and hold ourselves to those standards. Additionally, Professor Sperber was always really available to meet with/help students.

4. Conclusion

This evaluation began by affirming that the course met goals established in my grant proposal, such as integration of information literacy instruction, activities, and online modules, along with collaboration with my subject librarian throughout the course. I began the evaluation component of the report by noting the quality of students' final papers in the Capstone Seminar, several of which are now being submitted for publication in undergraduate journals. I then presented a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence that indicates that students made significant gains in information literacy and broader research and writing skills. By examining students' responses to their own pre-course video reflections, for instance, I offered evidence of students' own reflections on their development of both broad skills (e.g., presenting research with confidence) and more specific skills (e.g., locating, evaluating and annotating academic sources).

In the report's final section, I used data from official course evaluations to support inferences drawn from my own pre- and post-course evaluation methods. These anonymous formal evaluations suggested that the course integrated an impactful information literacy component in an empowering way. Overall, of the 20 completed course evaluations (out of 21), students rated the course in the highest two possible categories ("strongly agree" and "agree") 100% of the time. This is a first for me, and I believe the positive evaluations derive not only from the added time I was able to invest – thanks in large part to the Moreland grant – but also to meaningful collaboration with Chris Brown, whom students singled out as a critical source of teaching and support. When I teach this course again, I will change some aspects of the evaluation strategy and the content readings (e.g., some open-ended questions on the pre- and post-course surveys did not yield comparable responses). However, there is little I will change about the incorporation of information literacy and consciousness in the course. Ultimately, I am grateful for the inspiration and opportunity provided by the Moreland fund, which enabled me to teach this course in this particular way. From it, I learned a lot.

Appendix A. Pre-Course Reflection Guidelines

Excerpted from student assignment:

Reflection video: Your video should be *roughly* 6-8 minutes long and address the questions below. The first set of questions concerns information literacy, and the second focuses on democratic erosion – the topical focus of our course. There are no right answers! If you are thoughtful and take time to communicate your ideas clearly and effectively, and if you post the video on time, you will receive full credit. Please do not read each question aloud in the video; rather, begin with something like, “My strengths in information literacy are...”

Information literacy

Definition of information literacy: “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”

1. What are your strengths when it comes to recognizing when information is needed, and effectively finding, processing, and using that information?
 - Hint: You might reflect here on a class or project that you’ve completed where you learned information literacy skills, such as how to search for or digest academic research articles, statistical data, primary source documents (such as legislation or politicians’ speeches, and the like), relevant blog posts or other online media. What was that learning process like? What did you get better at?
 - Alternatively, you could consider how confident you are in your ability to distinguish reliable research sources from opinion or biased sources? What strategies do you use?
2. What are the main challenges that you face with respect to locating, processing, or “using” (i.e., writing about) these types of information? Correspondingly, what information literacy skills do you aim to improve in this research course? Another way to think about this is to answer the question, “What do I need to learn more about or practice before writing an excellent research paper?”

Democratic Erosion

3. As you enter this class, what prior knowledge do you have about democratic erosion, if any? Where does this knowledge come from (if you have it)?
 - For example, perhaps you studied aspects of US democracy in depth in another course and feel informed about risks of democratic erosion from this learning. Or maybe you’re addicted to politics news podcasts that discuss related topics, or simply read the news every day. Maybe you’ve volunteered on political campaigns or worked with organizations that gave you insight into aspects of democratic erosion.
 - Whatever it is, be sure to distinguish and specify what you did and what you learned from doing it.
4. What do you want to learn more about in this class, with respect to democracy and challenges to democratic governance in the world today?
 - Are there specific issues, countries, or states *within* the U.S. that you would be interested in learning more about?

Appendix B. Formal course evaluation

Winter Quarter 2018, PLSC PLSC 3290 Capstone Seminar in Politics Section 1

Instructor: Sperber, Elizabeth (Primary)

There were: 21 possible respondents.

	Question Text	N	Top Two	Avg	Str Disagree	Disagree	Disagree More	Agree More	Agree	Str Agree
1	The course was intellectually stimulating and challenging.	20	100%	5.9	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
2	Student responsibilities and requirements for the course were clear.	20	100%	5.85	0%	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
3	I learned a great deal in this course.	20	100%	5.95	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
4	Overall, this is an excellent course.	20	100%	5.95	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
5	The instructor skillfully shared his or her knowledge about the subject matter. (Sperber)	20	95%	5.8	0%	0%	0%	5%	10%	85%
6	Instructor feedback on course assignments was valuable and timely. (Sperber)	20	95%	5.75	0%	0%	0%	5%	15%	80%
7	Overall, this is an effective instructor. (Sperber)	19	100%	5.89	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%	89%

Instructor	Text Responses
	Question: Please comment on what you see as the strengths of the course and instructor, with particular attention to the issues addressed in the previous questions.
Sperber	Her biggest strengths are knowledge on the subject (which is extensive) as well as the amount of time she is willing to sacrifice for her students.
Sperber	Professor Sperber did an amazing job introducing a really difficult concept, and then breaking it down in a way that made it easy to understand.
Sperber	Professor Sperber was an incredibly engaged and diligent professor who was dedicated to making sure students were learning and truly growing in our understanding of a political phenomenon. She employed a multitude of different methods and analyses that we as political science majors learned about in our four years at DU, and would provide feedback on our research papers at every step of the process to ensure that we were creating a formal capstone thesis that was incredibly well-assembled and academic. While the workload was incredibly intense at times, I feel like this course was an incredible way to synthesize the knowledge I've gained in my political science degree over the past four years at DU, and Professor Sperber was a wonderful professor in leading that.
Sperber	Prof. Sperber was very helpful with one on one feedback. I feel like she helped me produce a solid paper for this capstone.
Sperber	Considering the time constraints and amount of students in the class, Professor Sperber did well in helping students via meetings outside of class and discussing the literature and other materials in class.
Sperber	Professor Sperber is an excellent professor. In addition to providing valuable feedback, being an excellent lecturer, and creating a variety of different activities for the class to participate in (e.g., lectures, group work, peer-review, etc.), Professor Sperber stands out for her ability to empower her students. Some professors treat undergrads as if they don't really have anything to contribute to the discussion at hand, but Professor Sperber made students feel as if their comments and analyses were worthwhile and that we should think of ourselves as scholars and hold ourselves to those standards. Additionally, Professor Sperber was always really available to meet with/help students.
Sperber	The course dealt with relatively new concepts in the discipline, it was unique to take a class in which there was so much new literature. I think having a course that addresses ongoing events, like democratic erosion, contributes to interest and learning in the class. Instructor clearly had knowledge on the subject matter, and was constantly introducing new information to the class as it came up. Instructor also clearly cares about student learning and success, and was extraordinarily helpful when I was struggling at points in the class.
Sperber	I thought this course was really strong in capitalizing on the synthesis of our political science degree, requiring us to use the different methods of research and analysis to construct a thesis quality work.
Sperber	Instructor went out of her way to set up the students for success. For example, all deadlines were derived from student input.
Sperber	Strengths: flexibility, offering resources where the professor did not have in depth knowledge (i.e. Law Prof. Presentations, Seth Masket, Research Assistant).
Sperber	Professor Sperber was very helpful in focusing my ideas into an actual research question. She was very active in responding to my questions via email in a timely manner. The readings in the course were assigned in a way where you had no choice but to read them thoroughly, which was extremely helpful for the paper writing stage.
Sperber	While the information presented in the class was not of interest to me, especially with no prior background on the topics engaged in, I found that the professor did a nice job of finding articles and new-age research that was particularly relevant and kind to new learners of democratic erosion.
Sperber	Professor Sperber is an excellent professor! Her willingness to adapt to the needs of the class, and the overall course, really made reaching academic goals even easier. I have appreciated this throughout the course.
Sperber	The strengths of this course include researching new topics that are extremely relevant to our current and future lives. In addition it pushed me to be a better writer. Professor Sperber, is an incredible teacher who really cares about the topics and her students.
Sperber	This class was extremely challenging. However, Professor Sperber did an excellent job of adjusting the course material as she saw would match student progress. She also did a good job of making me feel comfortable and confident even when the coursework was challenging and I was nervous about speaking up in class. She also took specific time to give me feedback and talk to me in depth about my concerns and my final product.
Sperber	My research skills improved, she gave good feedback, class discussions were engaging and interesting.
Sperber	One of the best teachers I've had while at DU. She is very interesting and makes the students more interested in the class. Class act beaut.

Sperber	Professor Sperber is an amazing professor and a great role model for young women. She provided so much feedback on each of our two drafts and outline. I could see how much time and energy she was putting into making our writing better. I learned a lot in this course and I am proud of the work I did in it. I liked the way that we worked on our final paper in steps for the last month of class. Also, I appreciated that Prof Sperber was willing to change her syllabus when she knew that we were feeling overwhelmed with the final paper. She rearranged the schedule so that we could maximize our time in class working on our final papers. I loved this class and Prof Sperber!
Sperber	Professor Sperber was very responsive and helpful throughout the course. I was impressed with her dedication and intellect.
Sperber	Prof. Sperber took extra time to help me along and would have not made it through the class without her help and support!
	Question: Please comment on what you see as the weaknesses of the course and instructor, with particular attention to the issues addressed in the previous questions.
Sperber	One weakness is the planning of this course. Of course, this was the inaugural version of this capstone, but she should plan more strategically next time. Possibly toning down the readings in the second half of the class to allow for more focus on the papers.
Sperber	The ONLY weakness I can identify with this course was the introduction of too much literature.
Sperber	Some of the aspects of the paper I did not feel were completely necessary, specifically the use of Stata for our research papers (especially for those of us who do not wish to go about and receive a graduate degree in political science/do research our entire lives. Perhaps more instruction on how to utilize Stata and other statistical software would be nice to be built into the class into the future to ensure that everyone knows how to operate it well, especially with transforming datasets and creating figures. But overall, I have very few complaints about this class.
Sperber	The first few week's readings are not super relevant and it would have been more helpful to dive into research straight away. I felt the process of finishing my paper was a bit rushed.
Sperber	DU ADMIN AND CHAIR: I strongly feel this course, in general, could be much better structured in order to provide the best education to political science students at DU. Professor Sperber did the best she could with the quarter system and course requirements, but the structuring of the class did me a great disservice as a student. Students would best be served by spreading the capstone course over two quarters - the first would be Political Inquiry style, where students learn about the literature, how to write a research paper, how to collect and analyze data, etc. Then they would move on to the second quarter, which would be writing the actual paper. As I had never written a paper of this magnitude before and apparently hadn't learned much in my Political Inquiry class, I felt a little at loose ends many times and would have done better on my paper and in the course if it had been split over two quarters. Additionally, I often felt that 22 students was perhaps too many for this type of class.
Sperber	I think this course would have been more effective if it had been capped at a lower number of students. I think that it is a lot for a professor to have to provide detailed feedback on twenty-two different twenty page papers, especially since the assignment was scaffolded so we were providing multiple different drafts/updates.
Sperber	Some of the grading expectations were sometimes unclear but confusion was generally worked out in class, so it wasn't a major issue.
Sperber	I think the course itself caused more issues for the professor. The scholarship we were required to read for the cross-institutional symposium was dragged out, and I really thought that could have been condensed, leaving more time to do original research and pick our case studies. I think the biggest weakness of this course is that it assumed we couldn't do the research in 10 weeks that students normally do in a semester, and I think that is a ridiculous assumption. If the theoretical exploration of the class had been limited, and student engagement on their projects been prioritized, I think the class would have been a lot better. The structure that our professor was forced to use ended up dampening our experience.
Sperber	I think there were two main weaknesses. First, the size prohibited the professor from spending as much time with individual
Sperber	This course definitely bites off more than it can chew. It was extremely rushed, mirroring a thesis (commonly done over two quarters), and squished it into one. On top of that, there were additional readings and quizzes that made the class overloaded almost 100% of the time.
Sperber	I felt I didn't receive the same amount of feedback as others. Some people received two drafts back with comments while I got one back. I think this speaks more to the size of the class rather than Professor Sperber. There were 20 large papers to look at and I understand some students may have been prioritized over others. For the future I suggest lowering the max number of students for the class.
Sperber	The professor seems to not have any overt weaknesses that hinder her teaching of the course. She is adaptive, eager to present knowledge to students, and overall a joy to have as a professor.
Sperber	Many topics reviewed in class, such as the formal emphasis on annotated bibliography citations, and how to conduct research via DU's library sources felt elementary in nature. As graduating seniors simultaneously working on senior theses, many aspects of the course felt time consuming and tedious drills of information that has already been learned or reviewed, such as in WRIT 1133-a requirement for all DU students.
Sperber	I do not believe there are no weaknesses of this course or teacher.
Sperber	I think one of the weaknesses of this class was the amount of time. This is more of a comment for the Political Science Department as a whole, but I think that this class would work much better if Political Inquiry was tied to it as a sequence. There was not enough time to have in-depth data analysis and write about the findings. I think it would be very beneficial to the program to have Political Inquiry aid you in researching the topic, and then have the capstone class be the qualitative report. My class in political inquiry did NOT prepare me AT ALL for this Capstone class, and made it extremely difficult.
Sperber	More organization with paper and prompt
Sperber	Nothing at all.
Sperber	I wish the class would have been smaller. It would have made it easier to meet with Sperber and to contribute to class discussion.