

TASK FORCE HANDBOOK



**THE HENRY M. JACKSON
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Task Force (SIS 495 – 5 credits) is a small group seminar required of all International studies majors in their senior year. Five or more seminars are offered in the Winter Quarter, and each focuses on a current policy issue. In recent years Task Forces have dealt with such topics as the North American free trade agreement, NATO after the revolutions of 1989, U.S. policy toward Central America, and economic sanctions in U.S. foreign policy. This handbook serves as a general guide for Task Force students, instructors, and evaluators.

INTRODUCTION

The International Studies program at the Jackson School introduces undergraduate students to world affairs through multi-disciplinary coursework. Its curriculum draws on economics, geography, history, political science, sociology, languages and literature, religious studies, and many other disciplines. In addition, the program recognizes that the study of international affairs is rooted in policy issues and processes. It is this notion which underlies the concept of Task Force.

Task Force has been a part of the International Studies major since the program's inception in 1982. It operates much like a Presidential Commission or other investigating group whose object is to arrive at a set of policy recommendations. The 15-member Task Force researches the policy issue using a variety of resources, debates, the merits of policy proposals, and hammers out a set of recommendations. Students then present their findings in a written report which is subjected to an oral evaluation by an experienced policy maker.

Recognizing that many Jackson School students may be preparing for careers in government or corporate environments, Task Force offers students the opportunity to deal with a policy question within a "real world" setting. While most courses encourage students to approach issues at an abstract and theoretical level, Task Force requires members to formulate and recommend policy with political and socio-economic constraints in mind. If the Task Force report is "destined" for the President's desk, for example, it should take into consideration the condition of the national economy, as well as the President's personal biases, in order to convince him or her of the wisdom of taking a new approach or of "staying the course."

Task Force also gives students a “real world” experience by requiring them to work together under a tight deadline and in the face of incomplete information. Students attempt to reach responsible conclusions while reconciling their personal beliefs and preferences with the broader concerns of the group. The lessons of Task Force are relevant to any public context students encounter later in life and add a new dimension to their liberal arts education.

Finally, each task Force provides members with thorough evaluation of their work. IN many courses, evaluation of a student’s work comes at the end of the assignment. The cooperative nature of Task Force requires members to be keenly aware of each other’s progress throughout the term. The instructor and fellow Task Force members may critique individual papers and oral presentations. Some task Forces select members to edit the final drafts of the report. At the end of the term an outside evaluator orally examines each Task Force and the instructor assigns grades. Most students have never experienced this intensity of critique and evaluation.

STRUCTURE OF THE TASK FORCE AND ROLES OF VARIOUS MEMBERS

Division of labor is particularly important for Task Force’s efficiency. The instructor, student coordinator, subgroups, and individual members comprise the components of a Task Force.

Task Force Instructor

The Task Force instructor provides the group with substantive advice and guidance. By assigning pre-quarter readings, giving introductory lectures, and arranging visits by outside experts, the instructor gives the Task Force a groundwork from which to begin its exploration of the relevant issues. As the Task Force progresses, the instructor may spend considerable time with individuals and subgroups outside of class.

The role of the faculty member differs from that of a professor in a traditional academic course. The instructor does not fully describe or explain the issues but provides students with some of the conceptual tools or history necessary to arrive at their own understandings and offers students guidance to sources of information. The complexity of a policy question forces any analysis to take a multi-disciplinary approach, and an instructor is not likely to have expertise in all areas investigated by a Task Force. What the instructor does have, however, is an appreciation of this complexity, and understanding of the need for careful organization, and a willingness to help students see the issues involved in finding a workable solution to the problem.

Student Coordinator

The coordinator is selected prior to the start of the term or during the first week of class. The role of the Task Force coordinator varies with the dynamics of the particular Task Force group. The basic functions of the position may include carrying out administrative and organizational details, initiating group or subgroup discussions, editing Task Force members' drafts, or serving as a "troubleshooter" throughout the course of the project. The coordinator's most tangible contribution is to assemble and write the conclusions of the group. It is important to note that while the coordinator provides leadership for the group, his or her opinions may have no greater influence than another member's on the final conclusions of the report. The coordinator's duty is to reflect accurately the findings of the entire group when drafting the concluding chapter or executive summary.

Subgroups

Working subgroups of 2-5 people are formed early in the term around various aspects of the policy problem. Division may occur along economic, political, theoretical, regional, or other lines. Much of the discussion and coordination among members of a Task Force takes place at the subgroup level.

Individual Task Force Members

The cooperative nature of a Task Force requires each member to adhere closely to the needs of the group. Paper topics are often assigned as a result of group discussion. Outlines and drafts of papers are subjected to group critique. In the end, each individual's written contribution should consist of a lengthy and substantive paper, typically ranging between 12 and 20 pages. It is up to each member to represent and defend his or her paper before the group and the evaluator. Thus the individual's oral contribution to the group effort at all stages of the process, culminating in the oral evaluation, is crucial. Each member of a Task Force, through his or her

research, has become qualified to speak on a specific area of the policy question. However, through participation in the group, each one should be familiar with the general topic as well.

OUTLINE OF THE TASK FORCE QUARTER

Task forces in business and government must meet deadlines; task forces in the Jackson School must complete their work within the confines of the academic quarter. The pressure of time at each step of the process is therefore very real and highly inflexible. Simply put, failure to meet deadlines will threaten the project. The following outline gives an approximate time frame for completion of each step of the process, as well as an explanation of the project's evolution.

Preparation

Seniors register for SIS 495 during the fall term, choosing among Task Forces dedicated to a variety of contemporary issues. These topics are of broad importance, yet they have a specific focus that gives students a chance to deal with them in depth. In addition to having a topical focus, Task Forces have a clearly defined audience – whether it be the President, the Secretary of State, or some other decision-maker – to which they address their findings.

While students usually choose a Task force according to their background and area of academic concentration, this is not always possible given the limited number of Task Forces offered; nor is it essential. In fact, task forces created in government or corporate settings are often comprised, at least in part, of individuals having little formal background in the subject area to be examined.

For those students with little prior knowledge of the Task force topic, it is helpful, given the time constraints of the term, if they familiarize themselves with the subject matter

prior to the start of the quarter. Each Task Force instructor may assign pre-term readings to be completed over the winter break. These, combined with initial lectures, should provide a solid starting point so that serious work can begin the first week of class.

Starting the Task Force Quarter

Demands on each student's organizational and writing abilities are high during Task Force quarter. A short paper of 3-5 pages may be assigned during the first week. This assignment can serve as an indication of the emphasis which will be placed on writing quality, and may help spot potential problems at an early stage and avoid greater difficulties further along in the process.

Substantive work on the project begins with development of an outline. The outline defines the Task Force's approach to the problem; it identifies subgroups and the topics on which individual students will concentrate; and it provides the fundamental structure for the Task Force report. The outline may take several weeks to develop fully. Guidance may be found in perusing past Task Force reports, which are available in the Jackson School Office of Student Services, 111 Thomson Hall.

Individual Topics and Outlines

As the group outline evolves and the Task Force divides into subgroups, each individual must choose, or be assigned, a topic. Individual topics should be interdependent, yet avoid duplication whenever possible. As members' research progresses and individual outlines are developed, members may be required to present progress reports during group or subgroup meetings. This communication is part of the political process the group experiences and can be crucial to maintaining consistency and logic in the final Task Force report.

Working Bibliography

The instructor may provide an initial bibliography, but task Force members will normally find it to be only a starting point. As new materials are found, the bibliography must be updated and made available to all members. This helps to screen the vast amount of materials on the Task Force topic. Sharing sources is crucial, for one journal article, book, or government document may suit the research needs of several members. Also, the bibliography provides a common foundation of knowledge for group discussions. While monopolization of a source may seem useful to an individual, it will only serve to weaken the effectiveness of the group. One criterion for judging a student's performance is cooperativeness and contribution to the group's overall effort.

Productive research techniques and familiarity with library resources are essential to a successful Task Force. A library "clinic" is frequently held the first week of class. It can target those sources most helpful to the needs of each group and familiarize students with government documents, periodical indices, on-line sources, and database searches.

A Note About Sources

Creativity and initiative in tracking down sources is encouraged at the Jackson School. Task Force members have frequently gained valuable information from a variety of primary sources such as lectures, interviews (either in person or over the phone), correspondence with major public and private agencies, or local organizations. These may be used effectively to complement library research but cannot be a substitute for the latter.

Drafts of Individual Papers

Individuals should have a preliminary draft of their papers completed by the middle of the term. From this point the editing and rewriting process begins. During this stage the instructor, coordinator, or other members of the group read and critique the drafts. Editors must be sensitive not only to stylistic and technical difficulties, but also to problems of content. Facts, figures, and conclusions that differ from one paper to the next must be accounted for. Unlike traditional course papers that stand by themselves, those for a Task Force constitute chapters of a larger effort. They succeed or fail in the context of the overall report. In order that the entire work be formatted and bound, final individual papers should be completed by the eighth week.

Group Conclusions and Recommendations

As individual drafts are being edited, the group reassembles to discuss findings, policy implications, and the report's conclusions and recommendations. Given the newly acquired knowledge of the Task Force, members must weigh and discuss the implications of various policy options in order to arrive at thorough and meaningful conclusions. Oral contributions by all members of the group are particularly crucial during this period. This phase of the Task Force project culminates as the group hammers out recommendations. Conclusions and recommendations should be expressed in a final chapter, and may be incorporated in an executive summary at the beginning of the report. The group should strive for consensus. If dissenting opinions are strongly felt, however, they may be documented and attached.

Written Presentation

The final report must be finished by the middle of the eighth week, allowing time for the report to be duplicated and bound. The report is then sent to the outside evaluator to be read in preparation for the oral evaluation.

Standardization of footnote and bibliography formats, organizational structure, and spelling of foreign terms helps to create a coherent presentation. As the evaluator may single out a specific chapter for questioning, a table of contents including chapter titles, names of individual authors, and pages is necessary.

The following format has been adopted as the standard first page for all Task Force reports.

The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies
University of Washington

**Task Force Policy Report on the Persian Gulf
and the Arabian Peninsula**

Winter 1994

Faculty Advisor: Professor Robert Burrowes

Task Force Members:
[in alphabetical order]

Audur Ingolfssdottir

Linda Suzman

Carrie Evans

Colin Barnowe

Barri Rind

Kevin McGlocklin

Kathryn Rosewater

Stephanie Graham

Bob Faris

Lisa Brouillet

Benjamin Owen

Kelly Kutzer

Renee Golden

Stephen Moses

EVALUATION OF THE TASK FORCE PROJECT

The Evaluator

Unique to the Jackson School Task Force is the evaluation process that concludes it. The School brings in a highly placed diplomat or other individual involved in policy-making to evaluate the Task Forces. Past evaluators include Undersecretary of State David Newsom and Ambassadors Jane Coon and Arthur Hummel, Jr. Given the evaluator's personal experience with policy-making, he or she may challenge the report based on its factual claims and internal logic. In addition, the evaluator may ask if the recommended policies are likely to work, if they can be administered at a reasonable cost, or if they are politically savvy. The evaluator does not grade the report.

The Evaluation Process

The oral evaluation and defense of the Task Force report occurs during the final week of the term. Members of the Task Force may prepare for this defense by attempting to anticipate the evaluator's questions and by holding practice sessions. All members of the Task Force should go into the evaluation process with a fundamental understanding of each other's work and be prepared to defend the conclusions and recommendations of the group.

The evaluation, which takes place in a conference room on campus, begins with a presentation of the group's findings and recommendations. The presentation may be made by the coordinator or designated members. It is important to note that regardless of who accepts the responsibility, the views and findings of the Task Force, together with dissenting views, should be expressed. The evaluator takes the lead following the presentation. All members should involve themselves in the ensuing discussion.

GRADING OF THE TASK FORCE

While the criteria for grading members may vary slightly from Task Force to Task Force, the individual's oral and written contributions to the report and performance in the evaluation are stressed. The leadership, cooperation, and initiative shown by members, as well as peer evaluations and the final grade of the report, may be factors in determining grades. The instructor is responsible for grading.

Final Words

Task Force requires much time and energy on the part of all members. The final group document may range in length from 200-300 or more double-spaced pages. Organizing, researching, writing, and editing such a document in nine weeks is a challenge. Students may wish to take this into consideration when planning the rest of their winter quarter schedules.

The commitment and sacrifices a student must make in Task Force are significant, but the School feels strongly that the experience merits them. Task Force provides students an opportunity to apply their knowledge about the world to an actual policy problem. For many, Task force is a memorable experience that has more direct relevance to their ensuing careers than any other single course they take as undergraduates.

The Jackson School is able to bring distinguished diplomats and policymakers to campus as Task Force evaluators because of the Maxwell M. and Julia Fisher Hamilton Endowment, a generous gift from Julia Hamilton. She graduated cum laude from the University of Washington in 1919 and took courses at the University in Russian language and literature during World War II. Her husband, Maxwell, had a remarkable foreign service career, which included serving as the Chief of the State Department's Far Eastern bureau beginning in 1937, in the U.S. embassy in Moscow beginning in 1943, and as chief of mission in Helsinki, Finland immediately after the War. Beginning in 1948, he served as head of the Far eastern Commission, composed of the ambassadors of all the countries which had been at war with Japan. He retired from the Foreign Service in 1952, following the signing of the final peace treaty in San Francisco.