Task Force (SIS 495 – 5 credits) is a small group seminar required of all International Studies majors in their senior year. Eight or more seminars are offered in Winter Quarter, and each focuses on a current policy issue. In recent years Task Forces have dealt with such topics as terrorism, biofuels and human rights, U.S. intervention in failed states, U.S. policy toward Iraq, and economic sanctions in U.S. foreign policy. This handbook serves as a general guide for Task Force students, instructors, and evaluators.

The Task Force is the capstone project in the International Studies Program - and the most distinctive ingredient in the interdisciplinary education of a Jackson School I.S. student. By focusing in depth on an important global issue, Task Force students sharpen their skills in applying the ideas and tools acquired during the course of their study. They collaborate on a project in which academic rigor, real-world relevance, writing skills and collaboration are combined to produce a polished and presentable report that is introduced to an outside expert and evaluator. The skills acquired and applied in Task Force help our students stand out as they venture into the world and towards the jobs and activities they are passionate about. The abilities to locate, compile, synthesize, evaluate and compellingly present complex and up-to-date information on rapidly changing global issues - and to do so in a team - are highly valued in the worlds of policymaking, research, and enterprise. A successfully completed Task Force demonstrates these abilities to peers, advisers and prospective employers.
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 that underlies the concept of Task Force.

Task Force has been a part of the International Studies major since the program’s inception in 1981. 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 alternate policy proposals, and hammers out a set of recommendations. Students then present their findings in a written report called a policy brief, which is subjected to an oral evaluation by an experienced policy maker.

Task Force offers students the opportunity to deal with a policy question within a “real world” setting, recognizing that many Jackson School students may be preparing for careers in government, NGO, or corporate environments. 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 grounding 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 in identifying and learning to evaluate 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, an understanding of the need for careful organization, and a willingness to help students identify the issues involved in finding workable solutions to the policy issue under examination.

Student Coordinator and Editor
The coordinator is selected prior to the start of the term or during the first week of class. The role of the 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, liaising with Program staff. He or she may also contribute by editing Task Force members’ drafts or serving as a “troubleshooter” throughout the course of the project.

The major contribution of the editor (a role that may be filled by the coordinator or by another member of the group) is to assemble the pieces of the final report prepared by sub-groups within the Task Force and to write the executive summary and conclusions of the report. It is important to note that while the coordinator and editor provide leadership for the group, their opinions are to have no greater influence than another member’s on the final conclusions of the report. The final policy brief should reflect accurately the findings of the entire group, even in its executive summary and conclusion.

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, and members of these sub-groups will be responsible for critiquing one another’s written drafts as well as for
ensuring that their work meets the deadlines established by the coordinator. In some Task Forces, sub-groups engage in critiques of drafts by other sub-groups as well; this type of sharing helps keep the group as a whole in touch with all identified aspects of the issue at hand.

**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, well-documented, 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, therefore, is 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. Recent Task Force reports can be viewed online (https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/4630), and hard -copies of all past reports can be seen and checked out from the Student Services Office (111 Thomson).
Preparation
Seniors register for SIS 495 during autumn quarter, 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 whom 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 often are 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 winter 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 placed on writing quality, and it 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.

Writing a Policy Brief (the Task Force Final Report)
Your final report will be a form of policy brief, and it is important that
you understand the nature of such a document. A workshop during
Autumn Quarter will provide information and practice with this form.
Unlike an academic research paper, a policy brief is governed by the
needs of the person or agency for whom the brief is being written.
And unlike a personal essay or other form of expository writing, the
aim of a policy brief is not to express the writers’ personal judgments
on the topic at hand. Instead, a policy brief gathers information about
a specific policy issue, analyzes it in order to extract several distinct
policy options (policies that could be adopted to handle the issue), and
presents the likely consequences that could be expected to ensue from
the adoption of each option.

As noted by Eoin Young and Lisa Quinn (http://www.policy.hu/ipf/fel-pubs/samples/PolicyBrief-described.pdf), all aspects of the policy
brief must be “strategically focused on achieving the intended goal”
of the person or agency that requested the brief; “professional, not
academic,” because the intended audience “is not interested in the
research/analysis procedures conducted to produce the evidence, but
[is] very interested to know…potential solutions based on the new
evidence”; evidence-based, because the intended audience “will only
be convinced by argumentation supported by evidence” both with
respect to the nature of the problem and the virtues/drawbacks of each
policy option; succinct; and both practical and feasible with regard
to its analysis of the problem and the policy options offered.

A hand-out from the WWS Writing Center (http://
stokeslib.princeton.edu/writingelements.htm) sums it up like this: “A
policy paper is analytical, not descriptive. It does not simply offer
facts or provide a description of events; rather it uses facts and
descriptions to evaluate policies, to develop questions for analysis, to
provide evidence for the answers to these questions, and to make
recommendations for actions.”
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 normally will 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. Early in Winter Quarter, each Task Force section will have a library-created workshop on how to target and evaluate those sources most helpful to the needs of each group and familiarize students with government documents, periodical indices, on-line sources, and database searches. Librarians will be available throughout the quarter to advise Task Force students.

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; librarians will be available to assist Task Force research. In addition, since all Task Force reports become part of the UW Libraries’ permanent digital collection, it is necessary that all sources used in the final report comply with copyright regulations. All Task Force students will be asked to sign a form affirming that the material in the report is used legitimately. Checking copyright status as the research progresses will be far more efficient than letting the matter slide until the busy end of the quarter.

**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. An editors’ workshop in January will provide information and skills crucial for this work. Students also are encouraged to take advantage of the help available from the writing center: [http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/](http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/) 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; librarians will be available for consultation. 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
Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect
Winter 2009

Faculty Advisor: Professor Kathie Friedman
Task Force Members: [listed in alphabetical order]
    Aftin Abdi
    Marc Andenmatten (coordinator)
    Alexandra Barbee (co-editor)
    Gelsey Hughes
    LinhPhung Huynh
    Aubrey Jenkins
    Sophie Kimura
    Amy Lange
    Elizabeth Nelson
    Clare Ortblad
    Ashley Parcells (co-editor)
    Rei Saito
    Javin Smith
    Rachel Williams
    Leah Zajac

Evaluator: Susan Martin
Task Force Poster
Each Task Force will create (using a template provided) a poster representing its topic and indicating the policy option(s) identified. Creating your poster will be a useful part of the Task Force learning process because it requires you to distill the key findings of your research and gives you the experience of creating the kind and quality of poster suitable for an academic/professional conference. This distillation will provide a framework for your presentation at the evaluation session. In addition, your poster will function as one of three entry points (poster, printed report, oral presentation) into your Task Force for those attending the dinner. The Jackson School also encourages Task Force students to submit their Task Force poster to the annual Mary Gates Undergraduate Research Symposium, to be held in the spring. Past examples of Task Force posters can be seen in the Thomson Hall stairwell between the 4th and 5th floors.
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 US Representative Jim McDermott and Ambassadors Kenneth Brill and Ryan Crocker. 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 (the week before exam week). 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 or classroom 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 this 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.

The Task Force Dinner

The Task Force dinner, usually on the same day as the evaluation sessions, is part of the Task Force, part of the SIS 495 section in which
you are enrolled. Your attendance and conduct will be considered part of the course and therefore as contributing to (or deducting from) your overall grade. Students should dress and conduct themselves at the dinner as they would for a job interview with the person or agency for whom their final report has been prepared. All outside evaluators and some special guests – often including retired U.S. Ambassadors, State Department officials, private-sector business executives, and internationally-respected academics – will be at the dinner and will judge us all, in part, according to the behavior of each student.

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, critiquing of other members’ work, and the final grade of the report, may be factors in determining grades. The instructor is responsible for grading.
Final Words

Task Force requires a great deal of 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. Sometimes, the time scheduled for a Task Force evaluation session or for the dinner may conflict with a student’s other commitments. It is expected that the student will give priority to the Task Force obligation, and the School is willing to support students in explaining the need for such a choice to others who may be affected.

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 and instructors because of the generosity of our donors and funders.

The Maxwell M. and Julia Fisher Hamilton Endowment is a gift from Julia Hamilton who 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.

The Hellmann Fund and the Hellmann Endowment for Innovation and Excellence provide opportunities for student learning that enhance and deepen international engagement and understanding. The Hellmann Fund supports practitioner-in-residence programs, student travel, and international fact-finding research and sustained engagement with policymakers in Washington, DC.

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