**Tips for Writing Course Descriptions**

Writing convincing course descriptions is more important now than before. Here

are some of the top tips for writing course descriptions.

1. **Use the second or “you” person.**

Write your descriptions using the second person. Use “you” or imply you in your

descriptions. Do not use the third person, such as “students will” or “participants

will find.”

1. **Create an engaging first sentence.**

The first sentence is the most important of all. Spend time on the first sentence,

especially the first six to seven words. The first sentence needs to be engaging.

Outcomes, fascinating facts, definitions, and new information are all good openers.

1. **Use action verbs.**

The worst opening line is “This class will…” Instead, use action verbs like discover,

acquire, get, take home, and find out. Save the word “learn” for the second or third

sentence.

1. **Vary words and techniques.**

Vary your words and writing techniques for your course descriptions. Do not have

each description read the same. Get out a thesaurus or go online and find

alternative words.

1. **Spice it up.**

If you have a successful course, do not modify the course description. But for those

courses just doing average or below, jump start those with some juicy words, those

rarely used words that have impact.

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**Course Description**

Include on your course syllabus a description of the course that is alluring yet informative, concise yet captivating. Some good examples from courses at Penn State:

**Microbiology**

*Microbiology is cool (and important):* From the microbial point of view, we are guests

in a microbial world. Microbes existed at least 3.5 billion years before humans inhabited

the planet. There are more microbial life forms on earth than any other organisms, and

they can be found in nearly every environmental niche on the planet. Microbes play

integral roles in biochemical cycles required for life on earth. Microbes play integral

roles in our health for good and bad. In short, microbial processes shape us and the

world around us.

*Science is experimentation:* Everything we know about biology was discovered by

scientists posing important questions, formulating hypotheses, designing strategies to

address the hypotheses, and drawing evidence-based conclusions. In this course, you

will learn how to practice science, while exploring core concepts of microbiology. The

fundamentals of the scientific method you will master in this course will prepare you to

perform research throughout the rest of your education, to understand science as a

discipline, and to become educated consumer of science beyond the classroom.

You will play an active role in this course. You will develop your own hypotheses and

design experiments to test them. We hope that these investigations will help you

appreciate the fun and excitement of doing microbiology, instead of just learning about

what others have done.

**Sociology**

Sociology is the study of human interaction. Sociologists aim to identify, explain, and predict human behavior. The sociological approach takes a step back from the limitations of individual experience to pose broader questions about social and cultural influences upon human activities and worldviews. This course offers an introduction to the theories, methodologies, vocabulary, and themes of the discipline of sociology.

The broader purpose of the course is not unlike that of the best of the liberal arts: to see and think sociologically about their own lives and the social worlds around them, to read more critically, to understand how the world has come to be, how it can be different, and yet how it is difficult—but not impossible—to fashion real, enduring change.

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This is not quite like some other introduction-to-sociology courses, especially those which rely on a textbook and neatly cover 15 topics in 15 weeks. Instead, we will spend extended time on several themes—like socialization, the self, culture, family, and religion. Some very important subjects are just not covered directly or extensively here.

**Information Sciences and Technology**

What can an athlete “choking” during a big game tell us about user interface design? What do public radio donation campaigns and Wikipedia have in common? Why do computer users do things that seem irrational even when interfaces are designed to be “user friendly”? This semester, we’ll grapple with these questions by studying one of most complicated parts of information systems design: people and the contexts in which they live, work, and play. In the first half of the semester, you’ll learn surprising facts about individual, group, and cultural characteristics that can predict whether a technology will be usable and useful. You’ll also sharpen your visual communication skills. In the second half of the semester, you’ll apply these facts and skills to design and evaluate technologies that meet the needs of a target audience, and learn how to communicate with design clients. The goal in this class is twofold: to challenge your assumptions about human nature and provide you with knowledge and skills requisite for designing usable, useful, and enjoyable technologies.

**Wildlife Behavior**

The course will provide a working knowledge of animal behavior; how animals behave and the ways in which this relates to wildlife. To effectively manage and understand the needs of wildlife, we must understand what affects the decisions that animals make and what influences key behaviors such as finding food, courtship, reproduction and migration. Ecology, evolution, physiology and neurobiology all influence behavior and the course will use examples from these sub-disciplines to illustrate how behavior is generated and adapted to the current environment. The class will be oriented around discussion of current scientific understanding of animal behavior.

**Marketing**

Marketing begins and ends with the customer, from determining wants and needs to providing customer satisfaction. This course will emphasize fundamental marketing concepts (e.g., segmentation, targeting, and positioning, the 4P’s) and the use of marketing research to inform managerial decision-making.

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The goal of this course is to introduce you to a) the role of marketing within business organizations and society, and b) the concepts and activities in marketing that create and deliver value to customers.

**Political Science**

What did the Founders mean when they wrote the Constitution? Does the President

and national government have too much power? Why do some bills pass and others fail?

What causes people to become Republicans or Democrats and why can't the parties get

along? What is the influence of money and the media on politics? To the untrained

observer, American government can often seem confusing, frustrating, mean-spirited, and

dominated by self-interested elites and corporations. However, politics is a process by its

vary nature designed to take these preferences and combine them with those of everyone

else, enacting policy decisions without the need for violent conflict. Given this goal, what

expectations should we have of our political system and how well do we believe it is

representing the will of the public?

In this course we will focus on the lessons learned from the systematic examination of

political phenomena. Applying the scientific method to politics we can better learn

about the causes and effects of government. While most of you are not, nor will you

become, political science majors, government is innate to your daily lives. The purpose

of this course is not to train an army of political scientists, but to explore the nature of

government, how you the individual citizen fit into this system, and how well it performs

compared to the democratic ideals on which it is based.

**HD FS Honors Seminar in Research Methods**

Should a new mom invest $300 on a prenatal learning system? Why are some children more likely to drop out of school? Should the government provide funding for a community resource center? Whether your interests are in providing advice, treatment, or influencing policy-level decisions the one thing that informs all of these questions is research. Many people think that psychology and human development are “common sense”, but there are many examples of well-conceived and well-intentioned programs that have been shown to actually make people’s lives worse. Being an educated advocate for others means being able to think about research

from a scientific perspective. Whether or not you aspire to do research, the process of conducting an honor’s thesis will help you develop invaluable skills in critical thinking, using evidentiary support, and both written and oral communication. This course is designed to help you establish a strong foundation for the skills you will use in the thesis writing process.

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