The Program in

Social & Political Systems

Handbook for Majors

Creating Knowledge, Building Leadership and Taking Action in the World

Pine Manor College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts
This handbook is designed primarily for students majoring in Social and Political systems at Pine Manor College. It describes the central Learning Objectives of the major and discusses how we hope to help you achieve those goals, as well as your own educational and professional objectives.

~ August 2008
Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 5
Program Learning Outcomes: ............................................................................................................. 5
Program Courses .................................................................................................................................. 5

How To Plan Your Courses .................................................................................................................. 6
Senior Experiences and Portfolio ......................................................................................................... 6

Internships ............................................................................................................................................... 7

How to Find an Internship .................................................................................................................... 7
Senior Projects ........................................................................................................................................ 7

How To Plan Your Senior Project ........................................................................................................ 8
Project Report Structure ..................................................................................................................... 9
Tasks and Process .................................................................................................................................. 10
Assessment Rubric for SPS Research Papers ...................................................................................... 13
Senior Portfolio ..................................................................................................................................... 14

How To Make Your Senior Portfolio ................................................................................................. 14
Professional choices ............................................................................................................................ 15
Program Faculty ..................................................................................................................................... 16

For more information, Contact ............................................................................................................ 16
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INTRODUCTION

The BA Program in Social and Political Systems at Pine Manor College integrates sociology and political science into a single program of study. It has a central set of courses that emphasize understanding social and political systems from the neighborhood to the world. We see the place in all communities for activism and leadership. Core courses also provide the capstone senior-year experiences that help you integrate and define what the major means for you.

Program courses reinforce the broad general educational objectives of the College by consciously integrating teaching strategies that reflect the Portfolio outcomes. The Program maintains a website on the College network, providing access to current courses and resources

http://community.pmc.edu/sps

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES:

✓ Be knowledgeable about important aspects of society and politics, such as social problems, social and political structures (including government and institutions), sources of conflict between and within societies, and the nature of globalization.

✓ Have a sense of her personal capacity to be an agent of social action and social change.

✓ Be able to design and undertake social science research.

✓ Be able to write effectively in the language of social science.

✓ Have the ability to interpret and evaluate quantitative information, both informally in their lives and as a social scientist.

✓ Be able to think critically and theoretically about the social and political environment in which we live – to be a “practical skeptic”.

None of these outcomes is achieved all at once, or on the first experience. Thus, we try to integrate learning toward these objectives throughout our courses and approach them differently in different contexts. You will experience increasing demands as you progress through the major – and you will be able to respond with increasing sophistication.

All of your courses will build up a foundation for the capstone experiences of your senior year, and your professional success after graduation.

PROGRAM COURSES

Core Courses

SPS 101: Introduction to Social & Political Systems
[commonly taken in FY]
SPS 211: Topics in Public Policy
[commonly taken in junior year]
SPS 222: Local Action Global Change
[commonly taken in sophomore or junior]
SPS 381: Methods of Social Research – Community-Based Research
SPS 382: Practice of Social Science Research Methods (4 credits)
[taken in fall and spring of junior year]
SPS 490: Senior Seminar  
SPS 495: Senior Internship

**Areas of Concentration**

Community Systems (emphasizes sociology)  
American Political Systems & Policy (emphasizes American politics)  
International Systems (emphasizes international relations and economics)  
Law and Criminal Justice (combines politics and sociology)

**How To Plan Your Courses**

Once you have decided to be an SPS major you will probably have taken the Intro course.

In your first two years you will want to be looking especially to take Local Action Global Change and paying attention to electives in the areas that most interest you. Each year we have a rotating set of electives that are suitable to FY and SO students – such as American Government, Social Problems, Making Morality, Law Literature and Popular Culture, International Relations, and Cultural Anthropology. Any of these are good choices as you begin – they all expand your knowledge as well as lay a broad foundation.

As you enter your Junior year you will want to start thinking more seriously about what really motivates you – what areas of social science are appealing, what career paths you are becoming serious about. You should take Methods of Social Research in the fall and you will want to take Social Policy or Healthcare Policy in the spring if you have not taken one of these.

In addition you will find new, challenging electives at the more advanced level – such as Power and Privilege, Health Medicine and Society, the United Nations, and International Political Economy. You can also apply courses from other departments at Pine Manor to your major if they are appropriate – such as International Business.

In your Junior year you also should be thinking seriously about taking courses at Boston College. BC has much larger departments and therefore can offer a broader range of courses. Pine Manor students may take one course per semester at BC; you must “add” into these during their drop/add period (which is not quite the same as ours – so attention to dates is important). You can examine the BC course schedule for any semester:  
http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/courses  
(click the link for “Search Courses”; select the “College of Arts and Sciences” in the College box).

Finally, in either your Sophomore or Junior year you can begin to consider an exploratory internship.

As a senior you are working on bringing your education together and positioning yourself to be successful after graduation. You will participate in an internship that will put you in professional setting two days a week. You will also design and complete a significant independent research project. Finally, all PMC seniors compile and present a Senior Portfolio.

**SENIOR EXPERIENCES AND PORTFOLIO**

Your education culminates with graduation, of course, but also with a set of experiences that are designed to help you see yourself as an effective professional. These experiences – internship, independent project, and portfolio – bring together your previous learning and experiences in the program and at the college.
INTERNERSHIPS

All SPS majors engage in a professional internship in the fall of their senior year. However, we encourage you to explore the possibility of additional internships, during your junior year or in the summer. These are supervised by program faculty members; with faculty approval, appropriate internships can be counted as an elective in the major.

You can explore potential internship sites on your own and with the assistance of the Career and Experiential learning Office in Ferry Administration building. See the Career Office site: http://www.pmc.edu/current/career

Recent SPS internship placements have included:

- Oxfam America
- Roxbury Trial Court, Office of Probation
- AIDS Action Network
- Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General
- United States Immigration and Naturalization Service
- Massachusetts State House
- Office of Senator Edward Kennedy
- MIRA (Massachusetts Immigrant Rights Agency)
- Boston NOW
- private law offices
- Italian Home for Children
- Greater Egleston Community High School
- Massachusetts Women’s Political Caucus

How to Find an Internship

The best way to find a good internship is to work with the Career Services office – they are a terrific repository of information. Also, consider seriously what kind of setting or experience you want – and talk with us. You may be surprised that you can learn a lot in a site that you hadn’t predicted.

You should have your internship secured by the beginning of the fall term. The College requires you to be at your site for 16 hours each week for 12 weeks. Therefore, the later you start the later you end – including the chance that you will finish your internship over the winter break (not a desirable outcome).

SENIOR PROJECTS

As a senior you will design and complete a substantial independent research project. This is an original piece of social science research – something that draws on everything you have studied and practiced so far pushes you even further along. It is an important way that you can demonstrate to yourself, to us and to prospective employers and graduate schools, your achievement of the learning outcomes set by the program, the college and by you.

You will have gained experience in the practice of empirical social science research in the research methods class in your junior year. In addition, during the spring of your junior year, or at the latest in the fall of your senior year, we will work together to design your project. In this process you will define the general idea and topic, refine the questions you wish to answer, undertake preliminary research in the social science literature related to your project, sketch out the best methods for your original empirical
work and create a basic bibliography. With the completion of this preliminary work you will be in good shape to jump right in to the original research and data gathering and analysis when the spring term begins.

Most senior project reports end up being 30-40 pages long – about the length of the manuscript for a professional journal article. You will also create a professional “poster” presentation, which will be displayed publicly at the College Achievement Day; and you will be present to discuss your research.

Recent projects have explored these questions:

- How well do community youth violence prevention programs integrate “cultural sensitivity”?
- Are the resources for HIV positive women equal to those available for men?
- How much will Bulgarians’ sense of national identity change as they integrate into the European union?

**How To Plan Your Senior Project**

Start early! Begin thinking about topics in your Junior year. If possible you may be able to do a 2-credit independent research course with one of the SPS faculty in which you begin the important background research and craft a solid project proposal.

Be open to creative opportunities. Your senior internship site – or a previous community partner connection – may have a real need for a piece of research that you can provide for them. This lets you actually begin your project during your internship.

Your project requires significant ‘book’ research in the existing literature that relates to your topic. You can begin to do this very early by really digging in the library for books and articles.

Your project also requires an original new piece of empirical research – so you will want to always be asking: “How am I going to find the information that I need to answer the questions my project asks?”

Your project should have these characteristics:

- Addresses a well-focused and interesting "puzzle";
- Examines some important problem;
- Identifies a specific, answerable questions;
- Involves both "background" research / learning (what work has been done on this topic) and empirical work – finding data and evidence to address the puzzle.
- Your project may make use of electronic (internet) sources; but it must make use of scholarly books and articles.
- Your project can be a community project that grows from your internship, or a more traditional research project that grows from your internship or some other interest.

Because scholarship is really a collective enterprise, rather than one pursued by isolated individuals, we will meet as a class periodically to focus on general issues and to share both the substance and process of our projects, as well as having individual conferences on your projects.

At the end of the Spring term, all projects will be prepared as professional "poster" presentations and displayed on the college Awards and Achievements display.
**Project Report Structure**

Your final report structure comprises several elements. Although this list is set in the context of the final report, these are incredibly valuable categories for designing, organizing, and conducting your project. Each section has a logical relationship to the others – with each one building on and developing the sections that came before. For example, the discussion and analysis of the existing scholarship on your topic allows you to explain how scholars before you have investigated this topic, to derive the key ideas that are related to your particular interests and to articulate your personal research questions. The next section, on methods, takes these ideas and research questions and explains how you make them into specific questions that can be answered through investigation, as well as how you conduct that investigation. The section following “methods” analyzes the evidence that you have gained in answer to your questions.

As you work on each part, ask yourself: “What is the job that this section needs to do for my project report?” and “Am I telling the reader what she needs to know?”

Everyone wants to know: **How long does this need to be?** Our annoying answer invariably is: Worry about doing the work well and the length will solve itself. In practice, the most successful project reports have been 30-40 pages long – which is about the length of the average manuscript that is submitted to professional journals in the field or a chapter in a book. By word count, 30 pages translates to 7500-9000 words (figuring 250-300 words per page).

**Title page**
The title of your project is a nice, short way of stating what it is about. The title page gives the title and the information about you (name, date, etc).

**Abstract**
The abstract for your project should be a succinct summary of the general topic, the specific puzzles you are exploring, the most important ideas drawn from the scholarship on your topic, your methods and your conclusions. It should be no more than 200 words. It is challenging - and written last.

**Introduction**
Your introduction provides the reader with an overview of project. This is a good place to offer your discussion of the general purpose and importance of the project - you can think of it as a discussion that combines the purpose of the research with a discussion of the specific focusing questions that your project addresses. Your introductory section should articulate the central puzzle – question – thesis that guides the project.

**Literature Review**
The literature review identifies summarizes and evaluates the important scholarly perspectives on the general topic of your project. You should discuss with some detail and care the work that scholars have already done and indicate how it is relevant to your particular questions. From this discussion you should be able to articulate the key new questions that your project wants to explore. For example, you might want to apply the findings from existing studies to a new area – such as whether the social contexts that help reduce youth violence in African American communities can also be found in the Cape Verdean community. Or you might be able to identify an angle or question that has not been asked before. Or you use existing knowledge to evaluate a specific project or program.
The discussion and analysis of existing scholarship is extraordinarily important because it creates the intellectual context into which your project fits. You should expect to read several books related to your topic, as well as a dozen or so professional, scholarly articles.

Methods
Your methods are simply what you do to discover the information you need to answer the question you have posed. The "right" method depends entirely on the nature of your questions. Nevertheless, you need to be thoughtful, intentional and clear about how you got from A to B. This section need not be long - and may, in practice be integrated as a transitional discussion bridging your literature and your evidence.

Discussion of the evidence you collect
This is the real original and unique portion of your project - in many ways the most important part. All of the other stuff is designed simply to get you to have the best empirical research possible.

Conclusions
What have you learned? Here you look back and summarize the main lessons of the project. you can assess how well you were able to answer the questions you posed. This is also a nice place to "look forward" - what new questions have you generated in the course of the project? How might a community partner find this information useful in their work?

Bibliography
Your project report will be incomplete and unacceptable without a proper bibliography. “Proper” means complete, accurate and in a standard format. (Because the “standards” regarding format vary widely in social science – and even among journals within a single discipline – we do not require a particular format. But you must use one that is commonly accepted. Your best bet to make your life easy is to record all the bibliographic information for every source you consult as you read it – in other words, simply build the bibliography as you go. This will also make your tasks of providing proper citations as you write much simpler.

PMC Library assistance on citations: http://www.pmc.edu/Library/citation/index.html
Advice for avoiding errors: http://community.pmc.edu/sps/plagiarism.htm

Tasks and Process

1) Finding a good topic and defining a good research question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First 2 weeks of Fall term</th>
<th>Suggest possible research topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrow issues</td>
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</table>

- Brainstorm: Think of “Topics”. A “topic” is a broad focus or issue, such as youth violence, child abuse, or political campaigns. Within a topic think of interesting issues or aspects of the topic. An “issue” is a narrower aspect of a broad topic, such as gang prevention, cultural differences in abuse behavior, use of the internet in campaigns.

[NOTE] If you are drawn to a problem that can be addressed in the context of your internship

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1 This list of tasks, sections and process is adapted from Baglione, Lisa. 2008. “Doing Good and Doing Well: Teaching Research-Paper Writing by Unpacking the Paper.” *PS: Political Science and Politics*. Vol. XLIX, no. 3 (July) 595-602.
you should begin to work with the community partner to identify their needs and begin to plan the project with them.

- Preliminary research & Exploration: Do some initial research and reading of materials relating to your issue.
- Construct a more specific question based on your topic/issue. “Interesting” questions are one that do not have obvious answers. “Obvious” answers are one that make you say “Duh” – such as “Do political campaigns use the internet?” Interesting questions, on the other hand, are ones with alternative answers that are both plausible or reasonable – such as “Do a community’s cultural differences make a difference in its incidence of child abuse?”
- Think of some ways that you can explore answers to your question with original research. For example, What are the different strategies to reduce youth violence being used in Boston, and how effective are they?”

2) Identifying, classifying and explaining the most important scholarly answers to that question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall term</th>
<th>Bibliographic research in Library, searching for printed and electronic sources. Preliminary research to sharpen research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of fall term</td>
<td>Clear and informative statement of the project (essentially the working Introduction) Review and analysis of the existing scholarship (the literature review) Outline of the methods and plan for the original research Complete and accurate bibliography (to date)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Having done some preliminary reading of existing related research to help shape the research question, you now have to dig in and dig deep into the literature.
- Your objective is to identify the key ideas that have emerged as people have previously explored your topic. You will find that several authors have pursued similar avenues of inquiry; these may emerge as the dominant perspective or approach to studying the topic. Other authors will have taken different approaches. You want to be able to explain both the dominant and alternative perspectives to understanding the problem as these relate to your project.
- From your discussion, evaluation and assessment of existing scholarship you want to be able to articulate you unique research questions and how these fit into and/or extend what we already know.
3) Carefully **planning** the study by defining and operationalizing the **concepts**, selecting the **cases**, identifying the **data sources**, and, if necessary, providing the **instruments** for generating information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First 2 weeks of Spring term</th>
<th>Refine research protocol</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contact and arrange for interviews if necessary</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify appropriate cases, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- The key specific questions for your project must be translated into operational question or hypothesis in order to direct your own research. For example, if your project explores cultural differences in patterns of child abuse, you have to figure out how you would know if any patterns do or do not exist. One source of data on the existence of child abuse might be police reports. But then you have to come up with a way to identify whether these are connected to different cultural communities. Is this data recorded in police reports? Is “neighborhood” an acceptable indicator? Etc.
- Perhaps you would like to interview social workers to get a different insight into the problem from the people actively intervening to protect children. Who would you talk to? What would you ask them?

4) **Evaluating** the appropriateness of one or more of these **answers** to a set of cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1-5 of Spring</th>
<th>Conduct interviews, case studies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze the evidence you collect</td>
</tr>
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</table>

- This work needs to be done after you have collected the evidence. You should use the research questions you created at the beginning of the process, and the criteria that you established in the methodology section, as the reference points for the assessing your evidence.
- Remember: the goal of your project is **not** to prove that your first thoughts on the topic, before you really knew very much, were “right”. Your goals is to discover something new – to provide the best answer that you can to the questions that you have posed.

5) **Providing a conclusion** that reminds the reader of the findings, discusses why these results emerged, and suggests paths for future research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week following spring break</th>
<th>Final report due</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First or second week of April (achievement day)</td>
<td>Poster presentation</td>
</tr>
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</table>

6) **Revising** and **Editing**. This is an ongoing and continuous process. **Revising** is the process of expanding, rearranging, assessing, and rewriting your essay with attention to the overall structure, logic, and organization of the essay. **Editing** is the process of making sure your writing is clear and accurately conveys your message; and is as free of mechanical (grammatical) errors as you can make it.
# Assessment Rubric for SPS Research Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Beginning (1)</th>
<th>Developing (2)</th>
<th>Competent (3)</th>
<th>Accomplished (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Define:</strong> Show a critical understanding of the topic and show its nature, meaning and scope.</td>
<td>Little or no demonstration critical understanding</td>
<td>Some critical understanding, although many areas require more definition</td>
<td>Good critical understanding, although some areas require more</td>
<td>Excellent critical understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analyze:</strong> Evaluation of primary and secondary sources by examining them in detail and revealing some type of explanation or interpretation</td>
<td>Incomplete evaluation or interpretation with missing sources</td>
<td>Good evaluation and interpretation with some missing sources</td>
<td>Very good evaluation with only a few missing sources</td>
<td>Excellent evaluation with no missing sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organize:</strong> Effective organization of the paper - e.g.: Logical order of ideas, clear thesis and introduction, clear questions that will be addressed, discussion of the topic, wrap up/conclusion</td>
<td>Poor organization; thesis is not clear or non-existent;</td>
<td>Organized, although some areas require better organization</td>
<td>Effectively organized, although a few areas require better organization</td>
<td>Excellent organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investigate:</strong> Selection and implementation of a methodology appropriate to the topic (where relevant)</td>
<td>Partially appropriate methodology used with inconsistent implementation</td>
<td>Acceptable methodology used with somewhat inconsistent implementation</td>
<td>Acceptable methods used consistently (although another might have been better)</td>
<td>Appropriate methodology used with consistent implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarify:</strong> Effective writing with clear expression of ideas and learned concepts. Appropriate use of grammar - e.g.: proper sentence construction, noun-verb agreement</td>
<td>Little or no clarity throughout the paper; more than 5-7 grammatical errors per page</td>
<td>Some parts of the paper are written clearly, other parts are not; 3-5 grammatical errors per page</td>
<td>Clearly written for the most part, fewer than 3 grammatical errors per page</td>
<td>Clearly written throughout the paper; fewer than 3 grammatical errors in the entire assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Apply:</strong> Demonstrate the topic's ties to the contemporary world and its relationship to the social science world; make real life connection between topic and experiences or everyday issues</td>
<td>No application or comparison of issues to real world or current situation (where appropriate and relevant)</td>
<td>Very little application where appropriate and relevant</td>
<td>Some application to real world issues but missing connections between topic</td>
<td>Clear and consistent application of topic to real life and contemporary issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify:</strong> Use of terminology relevant to the topic being discussed</td>
<td>Relevant terminology ignored no use of terms</td>
<td>Relevant terminology used very infrequently</td>
<td>Relevant terminology used occasionally</td>
<td>Relevant terminology used consistently and in correct context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citation and References:</strong> Appropriate and consistent citing of sources using a consistent reference format e.g. APA</td>
<td>Relevant citations and references missing. No mention of authors, books or year of publication</td>
<td>Inconsistent citing with some citations missing</td>
<td>Consistent citing with no citations missing</td>
<td>Consistent citing with no citations missing; and discursive notes used</td>
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</table>

**Grades/assessment:**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>D/F</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
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13
**Senior Portfolio**

The compilation and presentation of a senior portfolio is a graduation requirement of all PMC students.

In the SPS program we intend that your senior portfolio will be a reflection of your entire college experience, including the “capstone” experiences of your senior year, such as your internship and your senior project.

You will find that by your last semester you will already have been creating your senior portfolio. It comprises at least three key components:

- Reflections from your internship experience, focusing on College outcomes. (completed in December of senior year)
- Your senior project report (generally completed by March of senior year)
- Personal “intellectual autobiography” that reflects on your growth throughout your college experience, including your future goals, and the meaning for you of the distinctiveness of Pine Manor. (completed by April of senior year)

Altogether, your portfolio offers a representation of your accomplishments in at least the areas of becoming an effective writer and communicator, an effective analyst and critical thinker, and a mature adult with a professional vision. Because your growth is hardly limited to these “academic” areas, it is likely that your reflections and presentations will touch on other areas of your life as you have succeeded at Pine Manor.

The presentation portion of the portfolio is a collective conversation that brings together all graduating seniors to share, discuss and reflection on their education. We usually do this at the end of the spring semester.

The portfolio is a college requirement – but it is really yours to own and make meaningful. You will find that it offers a level of self-awareness that will serve you well in job interviews, employment, graduate study and elsewhere.

**How to Make Your Senior Portfolio**

We do not have a “prescribed format” for senior portfolios, except to bring together the items above. As you work with your advisor and other faculty in the program you should feel free to explore how best to present yourself. In the past seniors have included videotapes that touched on elements of their lives at Pine Manor, or have made interviews of themselves, conducted and produced by friends. However, in one format or other your Senior Portfolio should be a representation of your work and accomplishments and should present at least the three items listed above:

- Personal “intellectual autobiography”; Reflections on your internship; Senior Project report

The following is a list of the characteristics of previous years’ best senior reflections in the portfolios from students in all majors:

- The reflection essays were personalized, reflecting passion and engagement. They had a clear sense of personal authorship.
- The narrative structure of the essays reflected a sense of past, present and future; in other words the student reflected on her learning over time.
• The College Learning Outcomes were integrated into the discussion rather than listed separately at the top of a page (a la Sophomore Portfolio).
• There was a clear recognition and acknowledgement of the complexity of experiences rather than simple descriptions.
• The reflections and experiences went beyond the experiences in their major.
• There was clear evidence of interdisciplinary connections.
• The essays contained clear statements regarding the student’s application of learning to other aspects of her life and her overall growth as an individual.
• Evidence was given in the text, that is, the senior explained the connections rather than simply giving a description of the experience.

Take the time to make this essay well crafted – you may well find it a useful starting point for a cover letter for jobs or for graduate school applications! Revision is powerful – so share drafts and struggles with us. In any case, you don’t want this reflection to not be at least as good as a “C” essay.

We wish your reflection/essay to be wide-ranging and meaningful to you. But you should be sure to reflect on at least your growth related to your ability to communicate effectively, your capacity for critical thinking and analysis, and aspects of the college mission objectives, such as inclusiveness, leadership, and social responsibility.

PROFESSIONAL CHOICES

SPS majors have followed diverse and challenging paths after graduation. Several recent graduates are working in agencies of the United States Government, and for the governments of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Other graduates are working in law firms; and several are working in education or social welfare agencies. Some are engaged in community education and advocacy on issues such as housing and HIV/AIDS. Program graduates have obtained graduate degrees in law, education and criminal justice.

Each year recent graduates are engaged in rewarding professional work. Within the first few years after graduation a number of graduates decide it is time to continue their professional education. Please feel free to contact us to letters of recommendation – for jobs or graduate study.

In addition, you can continue to work with the PMC Career Services office – to examine materials for graduate school or jobs, and to sharpen your resume and cover letter.

We hope to be able to continue helping you achieve your goals well beyond Pine Manor.
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