

American Government (POLS 100, 3 credits) Spring 2009

GROUP ASSIGNMENT

Students will form groups of three (3) or more individuals and select one (1) assignment from the list below. These assignments are designed to illustrate the principles you have learned in this class. Groups will choose from a list of possible projects, some of which are worth more total possible points than others. Thus, unlike other classes you may have taken, students can select their level of involvement and—hence—the potential points earned for this project. The section below details these instructions further.

Each assignment's product is a paper, submitted via d2l's Dropbox. For each of the items below that a group neglects to accomplish, the total points of the Assignment will be deducted by one full letter grade:

- Submit the final project as an MS-Word (2002 or compatible) document as an attachment via the Dropbox in d2l. DO NOT send these assignments via email to my d2l or external e-mail address. If your hardware-software configuration cannot undertake this exercise, please locate a machine that does as soon as possible. Students are obligated to send the material in the appropriate fashion prior to the due date.
- Your assignment must include a title page that indicates the names of those submitting the report (as their names appear in the official registration).
- Submit only one paper per group!

THESE ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE MAY 1 (FRIDAY), 3:00 p.m.

Students are required to locate and identify at least TWO other students to participate in a group project. I encourage you to interrogate your group members thoroughly. Evaluate their commitment and enthusiasm for the project and to the course. If they drop the course before the end of the semester, you will be obligated to complete the project without them or join another existing group.

One of the Discussion Boards on d2l is dedicated to helping students locate group members. Please assemble a group by January 30 (Friday). Students can self-enroll in groups by clicking on Groups, then Choose Group, and Select. Once enrolled in a Group in d2l, students have a private discussion room and a locker box to communicate more easily. If you want to change groups, you will need to contact me. It is often the case that students are unable to contact fellow group members through d2l. So, I strongly urge you to collect and exchange phone numbers, external email and IM addresses, and other means to contact your group members. I will also set aside time some class time for group meetings.

Group Processes

Group projects are beneficial for three reasons. First, mounting evidence from educational research indicate that projects accomplished in groups are more productive, more meaningful, and promotes better learning of the material. Second, in our increasingly connected world, employers and businesses know that large, complex projects require the participation of large numbers of individuals. In the real world,

people work with others who may have only a passing interest in completing the project. The skills you develop here to motivate and discipline wayward members are directly applicable to the workplace.

Finally, group assignments illustrate the problems of democracy, which is the fundamental concept in this course. In democracies, everyone benefits from the outcome, but relatively few participate. Our democracy is only as strong as our weakest member. We must uncover techniques for including the apathetic and disengaged. As is often the case, the few may have to carry the many. Unlike those situations, I allow you to select your own group members. You must sensitize yourself to selecting group members who complement your skill set and are willing to contribute to the overall project. This is a difficult prospect at best. Students should view this as an opportunity to develop leadership skills in selecting and motivating group members. How can you identify and assess the skills and capacities of potential members? Moreover, once you have formed your group, how do you allocate assignments and encourage wayward members?

While this may be a group project, it does not necessarily translate into a group grade. Each semester, one or two groups are dysfunctional. That is, they have one or more group members contribute little to the group effort. If this occurs in your group, please consult with me immediately. I will offer suggestions and guidance to assist your group. If at the end of the project, you think that one or more students did not pull their weight in the group effort, you may choose to take advantage of the group evaluation process. This process simply allows individual group members to communicate with me privately and confidentially to assess the contribution of each member. To do so, please prepare a brief memo outlining the contributions and participation of each group member. No student is required to send me a group evaluation memo. However, if any group member submits a group evaluation memo, I will immediately notify all group members that someone (who shall remain anonymous) has sent me a memo that evaluates each group member's participation. I will invite the remaining group members to submit a similar message. When I assign Group grades, I will take account of these memos and may award fewer points to a group member who has been identified by the others for being negligent in their duties.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION:

Each group selects the particular assignment they will undertake and for how many points. This is unusual, but students can choose their participation and hence potential points. By choosing a simpler assignment with fewer maximum points, students give up the possibility of full credit. Students must choose one (1) of these assignments (the total possible points for each kind of assignment is listed in parenthesis):

- A. Service Learning (30 points)
- B. Citizen Action Project (30 points)
- C. Campaign Simulation (27 points)
- D. Film Review (27 points)
- E. Chapter Review (24 points)

Please note that by selecting any project other than the Service Learning or Citizen Action Projects, students give up the opportunity to earn full credit on their group assignment. These assignments do not contain page length requirements (i.e., there is no minimum or maximum number of pages). Students are expected to complete the requirements of the paper with sufficient explanation but without

extraneous material. For whichever assignment your group selects, you are required to use a wide variety of sources beyond our main texts. Carefully evaluate and assess each source of information, cross-checking all facts whenever possible. Please carefully judge every source you use; learn more at <http://lib.sdstate.edu/infolit/evaluating.htm>. Groups are not required—but it is a good idea—to communicate your choice of assignments to me. Indeed, as I suggest elsewhere, I strongly recommend groups work with me to complete their projects. I strongly discourage the use of general Web resources (e.g., dictionary.com and wikipedia.org). These sources typically provide few insights and offer only very basic information. Moreover, *wikis* are not reviewed by editors and scholars; they often contain numerous errors. Instead, seek out evidence from these kinds of sources: published reports, expert opinion, statistics, surveys, formal observation, and research reviews. **At a minimum, you must use at least two scholarly sources (in whichever combination works best for your particular project):**

- A scholarly book, which is a book published by a University press, written by a college professor, or found in a university library. Use the Briggs Library Catalog <http://lib.sdstate.edu>, FirstSearch, or Books in Print.
- A scholarly article, which is published in a journal edited by faculty or other scholars. The best sources for these are EBSCOHost's Academic Search, ProQuest (click the box for scholarly journals), or JSTOR, which are also available in the Briggs Library Web site (<http://lib.sdstate.edu/databases/>).

A. SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT

Objective: Apply political science concepts and theories through experiential learning, including democratic citizenship, the electoral process, political participation, and community organizing.

This assignment requires the active participation of students in the Brookings community. Service learning involves students in assisting community members to fill community needs. This semester, we continue a process to reach out to those members of our community who are less engaged in civic and public affairs. At present, no organization exists to assist these individuals. Last semester, our initial tasks were tied to the elections in November with a get-out-the-vote effort in the Third Precinct in the City of Brookings. Historically, this precinct has had the lowest voter turnout in the city. Unsurprisingly, residents of these neighborhoods are more likely to rent their home, have a lower educational attainment, and earn lower wages than the citywide average. In essence, these are the working poor. Students involved in this effort found a high level of apathy and disengagement among these residents.

This semester, I propose an effort to assess the needs of those who are less civically engaged. These efforts will have two foci: (1) an effort to reach out to residents to listen to their concerns and interests and (2) discussions and engagement with community leaders to tap into their knowledge. Students will be required to participate in these field activities at least 10 hours during the semester. However, additional time and energy will be spent in researching, planning, and organizing these activities. In short, students will provide the manpower to develop a plan and carry it through.

As we will learn this semester, voting is often an ineffective form of participation; its message does not carry the weight and information precision of other kinds of participation. Previous students learned this lesson and suggest that perhaps a neighborhood or tenants association might be one vehicle to develop and train community leaders. Throughout the semester, students should seek to discover potential community leaders in the neighborhoods and discuss ways to foster deeper

civic participation by residents.

Like the Citizen Action Project below, the service learning project strikes to the core of what this course is all about. To encourage and motivate others to participate in politics, students will have to understand the political process in general and the particulars of the Brookings community (objective #1, learn basic facts about politics). Students will assess the capacity and nature of ordinary citizens to make decisions about politics (objective #2, students' critique democracy). Finally, students will apply the various models of democracy to its actual practice (objective #3, understand democratic citizenship).

The outputs from this project must be much more flexible (and the particular requirements will be subject to negotiation) than the alternate projects. Students involved must be willing to adapt to change. The product of this project will be a group paper as well as two individual papers. Depending on the number of students involved, your group may be only some of the students involved in the Service Learning project. Each group of students will produce a paper that evaluates our effort and offer proposals/ideas for future Service Learning projects involving these neighborhoods. Each group of students will also produce a poster for the Service Learning Showcase on Tuesday, April 28, Student Union, Lewis and Clark Room, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. At least one member of each group must attend this showcase. Details on this poster will be forthcoming.

Each individual student who gets involved will write a pre-project reflective paper and a post-project self-evaluation paper. The first will offer insights into (a) their reasons for choosing this project, (b) their understanding of how this project connects to the objectives of the course, and (c) their hopes and fears about the project. Using relevant stories and experiences, the second will detail (a) their own personal involvement in the project (b) their understanding of what working with community members unlike themselves was like, and (c) tying the experiences to the objectives, especially principles and concepts, learned in the course. This second paper should NOT be offered as a justification for a particular grade, but should examine evidence for student's intellectual growth.

B. CITIZEN ACTION PROJECT

Objective: Apply political science concepts and theories to contemporary issues, including map the politics of a relevant policy area; identify "pressure points" to affect the policy making process; and devise and implement a strategy to influence the policy outcome.

This assignment begins to develop your skills as a citizen attempting to influence politics. You will be expected to become an expert in the policy and politics of a national issue about which you are passionate. This project will map the politics of the issue so that you can decide where your time and energy can be directed most effectively. In this project, you are NOT required to undertake any of the activities you suggest that you MIGHT do. Rather, it is a plan based on rational analysis of where your efforts might be best directed.

You will produce a written report that addresses these items (and use these as headers):

1. Background and History. Describe the nature of issue. When did it reach national prominence and why?
2. Governmental and Non-governmental Actors. Who are the players? Who are your likely allies and opponents? Be as specific as possible. You must include (1) public opinion (especially polling data), (2) the President, (3) leading

- members of Congress, including the relevant congressional committees, (4) the bureaucratic agency responsible for this policy, and (5) interest groups. **For each actor, detail their interest in this area and assess their power.**
3. Possible Outcomes. What options are currently on the table? Where is the current debate on this issue? What proposals are being offered now? Which proposals are likely to become policy in the next few years? List at least three possibilities being currently discussed in the media.
 4. Outline a Strategy. Select a particular proposal to support or defeat that is worth your time and energy. (Do not create a new proposal. These are unlikely to gain much political support. Instead, select a viable proposal that is supported by others.) What is your goal and how do you propose to achieve it? Outline your **strategy** and **tactics**.
 - a. Your **strategy** must first identify which decision makers you wish to mobilize or convert. Characterize or describe key decision makers, i.e., those who are undecided or who can block action on your legislation. What kinds of citizens (i.e., demographic or other groups) can you mobilize to influence their decisions?
 - b. **Tactics** are the means by which you propose to accomplish that objective. Which organization(s) might you join? Describe the types of activities that **you** can do that are most likely to have the greatest effect. In short, what can **you** do to make a difference? This is, by far, the most difficult part of this assignment; and will almost certainly communicating with me.

THE CITIZEN ACTION PROJECT REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND SOURCES:

- At least four total interest groups with at least two on each side of your issue or problem. A Google search, which typically accesses a small fraction of the available Web sites, is an *inefficient* means to identify these groups. It is better to read the popular mass media for articles about your issue and identify groups quoted there.
- At least one government report or document. These cannot be a “political statement” from a Member of Congress or the White House Office. However, they may be from a congressional committee, a bureaucratic agency, or an independent office (like the General Accountability Office or Office of Management and Budget). Again use the popular press to identify these.
- Many newspaper or magazine articles. These will provide important background and information about the players. (Use EBSCOHost or Proquest for an initial search of these articles.)

Many of these sources are available through Interlibrary Loan, but these items must be requested several weeks in advance. I highly recommend the Guide to Political Science Research assembled by the research librarians at Briggs Library <http://lib.sdstate.edu/Lib11/subguide/guideps.html>.

I strongly urge you to discuss this project with me throughout the research process. These are difficult projects to undertake and, especially so, if you proceed without advice and consultation. This project has the additional benefit of developing your understanding of the entire U.S. political system, which will surely improve your ability to answer exam questions.

C. CAMPAIGN SIMULATION REVIEW

Objective: Understand and evaluate relevance to political science principles regarding campaigns, including the logic of the electoral college, advertising, fundraising, and use of campaigners' time.

Submit a paper that reviews these two campaign simulations, which are available for download online: *Political Machine* and *President Forever* (see links on d2l). Each game costs about \$20, so by choosing this option, you will incur additional expenses. Read Chapter 8 to become familiar with this topic. These simulations place you in the role of the candidate or campaign manager for a recent presidential election. For the 2008 presidential campaign, use McCain vs. Obama as your candidates. Play each game at least twice, once managing each party's candidate. That is, you should manage BOTH McCain and Obama for EACH game. Produce a paper that analyzes the games using the framework below.

The central point of this paper is to use principles or concepts you have discovered in your readings and apply them to the game. Use examples from the simulations throughout the paper. Illustrate your points with specific events or features. In particular, your paper should address these ideas: fundraising principles, candidate's allocation of time, the logic of Electoral College, and advertising costs.

The paper must address the following items in this order (use them as headers in your paper):

1. In an introductory paragraph or two, overview the essay's findings. What principles did you find and how did you apply them? Preview your paper by providing a roadmap for the reader.
2. Briefly outline the structure of each game **in a few sentences** (i.e., between three and six sentences).
3. Discuss the similarities and differences between the games. Focus on ideas or concepts discussed in class or in our readings.
4. Explain and describe at least two principles, concepts, or ideas you gathered from the relevant reading assignment. Discuss how this concept is found in the games you played.
5. In a concluding paragraph, explain what you learned about politics from these simulations. Explain the political principles or ideas that you gained.

The above bulleted points MUST be closely followed to earn full credit. That is, I have dictated the outline for your paper. Papers that deviate from this outline will NOT earn all available points. Use these points as headers in your paper.). As discussed above, **use additional scholarly sources** (beyond those assigned as general readings) to understand the nature of election campaigns in the U.S.

D. FILM REVIEW

Objective: Apply the political science principles from a chapter as exemplified in a related set of fictional films, including common themes and particular concepts from the readings.

Submit a paper that reviews four (4) films from one (1) of the sets below. Before viewing the films, read the assigned chapter on that topic. All group members must view each film at least once. The central point of this exercise is to produce a documented research paper. Learn about the nature of the topic (bureaucracy, campaigns, etc). As discussed above, **use additional scholarly sources** (beyond those assigned as general readings) to understand both the topic under study and the particular events of the film. According to this scholarship, what are the core principles of the topic? How closely does the film relate to actual events or phenomenon as discussed in the scholarly literature? For example, in the set of bureaucratic films—which are a very

popular choice—common concepts or themes include: Does the film exaggerate red tape? Does it highlight the challenge to authority by subordinates? How true are these phenomena in real life? If job specialization, hierarchy, and formal rules are relevant principles (Patterson, p. 464), then explain these principles clearly and give specific examples. Thus, the paper must identify key principles discovered in your readings and apply them to these films. Use examples from these films throughout the paper. Illustrate your points with specific relationships, events, or other features of the film.

The paper must address the following items in this order and use them as headers:

1. In an introductory paragraph, overview the essay's findings. What principles did you find and how did you apply them? Preview your paper by providing a roadmap.
2. Briefly summarize each film **in a few sentences** (i.e., **between three and six sentences**). Please do not use a published film review; that would be plagiarism (i.e., stealing someone else's words and claiming them as yours).
3. Discuss common themes in these films. "Common" means that the idea can be found in **each** film to the maximum extent possible.
4. Explain and describe at least two principles, concepts, or ideas you gathered **from the relevant reading assignment**. Discuss how this concept is found in the films you viewed.
5. In a concluding paragraph, explain what you learned about politics from these films. Explain the political principles or ideas that you gained.

The above bulleted points must be closely followed to earn full credit. That is, I have dictated the outline for your paper. Papers that deviate from this outline will not earn all available points. All of these films are available to you in some way. I have purchased a few and placed them on Reserve in Briggs Library in Brookings. Check your local rental outlet and your local library (or use <http://www.netflix.com> or a similar service). Virtually all of the recent films listed below should be available at your local video rental store (and many are shown frequently on late-night television). Please **begin early** to identify, locate, obtain, and view these films well before the deadline! To reduce confusion with other similar-sounding movie titles, I have included the year of the film's original release (and in some cases, the lead actors). I have placed my personal copies on Reserve at Briggs Library (indicated by VHS and DVD). It is possible to nominate other films for a particular set; if you have a potential substitute, let me know as soon as possible. Remember, select one (1) of the following sets of films and view any four (4) films in that set (I also indicate the associated reading from Patterson).

U.S. Political Culture (Chapter 1):

Norma Rae (1979)
The River (1984, Mel Gibson and Sissy Spacek)
Places in the Heart (1984)
Roger and Me (1989)
City of Hope (1991)

Equal Rights (Chapter 5):

Mississippi Burning (1988)
Do the Right Thing (1989)
Driving Miss Daisy (1989)
Murder in Mississippi (1990)
Malcolm X (1992)

White Man's Burden (1995)

Campaigns and Elections (Chapter 8):

Citizen Kane (1941)
All the King's Men (1949)
The Best Man (1964, Henry Fonda)
The Candidate (1972, VHS)
The Seduction of Joe Tynan (1979, VHS)
Power (1986, Richard Gere and Gene Hackman, VHS)

Mass Media (Chapter 10):

Citizen Kane (1941)
All the President's Men (1976, VHS)
The Network (1976)
The China Syndrome (1979)
Absence of Malice (1981)
The Year of Living Dangerously (1982)
Quiz Show (1994)
Wag the Dog (1997)
Good Night, and Good Luck (2005)

Congress (Chapter 11):

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939, DVD)
Advice and Consent (1962, VHS)
Point of Order (1964)
Tail Gunner Joe (1977)
Distinguished Gentleman (1992)
The Contender (2000, VHS)
Charlie Wilson's War (2007)

The Presidency (Chapter 12):

State of the Union (1948)
All the President's Men (1976, VHS)
Secret Honor (1984)
The Final Days (1989)
The American President (1995, DVD)
Wag the Dog (1997)
Thirteen Days (2000)

Bureaucracy (Chapter 13)

Catch-22 (1970)
M.A.S.H. (1970)
Serpico (1973)
Article 99 (1992)
Apollo 13 (1995)
Crimson Tide (1995)
Saving Private Ryan (1998)
The Pentagon Wars (1998)
Space Cowboys (2000)

E. CHAPTER REVIEW

Objective: Review and apply concepts associated with a major topic in American Government.

Select one (1) of the assigned chapters from Patterson that we will be reading this semester (EXCEPT CHAPTER ONE). Your goal is to become an expert on this topic. Visit **all of the online material** associated with your selected chapter on d2l. Prepare a written review that (1) summarizes the main points of the topic, (2) links the chapter's topic to other topics (i.e., chapters) we have studied this semester, and (3) connect these findings to contemporary politics via a current national issue. To earn full credit, all three of these components must be completed with relatively equal weight assigned to each part. I cannot repeat this often enough, this project must provide equal attention to all three parts identified here and include two non-assigned scholarly sources as discussed above.