

Final Paper Assignment

The final research paper for the class will be due on Dec 11th. The paper should be 10-15 pages in length (assuming double spacing with 12 point font). You have two options for the final research paper. First, you may select an important piece of legislation and follow it through the legislative process. Second, you may select a topic we covered in the course, propose a thesis related to this topic, and search for and present pro and con evidence. For each of these approaches, I have included a number of suggestions below.

• Follow a Bill Through the Legislative Process

You should select a piece of legislation you are interested in. When you research this piece of legislation, think about the following questions,

- How did the bill originate? Was it written by a member of Congress, the President, lobbyists, etc.
- Was the bill considered in committee? If so, describe the markup process
- Trace the history of the bill. Was the bill introduced in previous congresses? If so, what was different this time?
- What arguments did supporters and opponents make?
- What kinds of procedures were used to consider the bill? Was the bill considered under a special rule? Was the bill considered under reconciliation? Was a discharge petition used? etc.
- Did opponents try to modify the bill through amendment? What was the purpose of these amendments?
- Who voted for the bill and who voted against it? Was it a party line vote? What about the votes on amendments? Who were the relevant pivotal actors?
- What was the effect of the legislation after it was implemented

These are just some ideas of the types of things you should think about, not an exhaustive list of the things you should include. You should consider the following sources of information:

- Roll Call, The Hill, etc.
- Newspaper and Magazine Articles (including opinion pieces)
- www.congress.gov
- voteview.com

• Argue a Thesis Related to a Topic We Have Covered

You should come up with a thesis and try to find support for this thesis. Below I give some suggestions for topics to consider,

- Candidate Strategies in Primary Elections
- Redistricting Reform
- The Filibuster and the Nuclear Option
- Earmarking

For example, if you consider the topic “Redistricting Reform”, you may consider the thesis that partisan gerrymandering is most often ineffective. Think about the following issues:

- Find evidence supporting your thesis
- Find arguments against your theses- why don't you think these are persuasive?
- Why might your thesis be wrong?
- What unanswered questions are there? (i.e. what evidence would you like to see that is not available?)

• **Final Paper Proposal**

You are required to submit a 3-4 page proposal for the final paper by November 20th. In your proposal, you should include the following,

- If you will be tracking a piece of legislation:
 - Report at least 6 references you plan to use. These should be a mix of popular press articles, web sources, and academic articles
 - Report a summary of the path the bill took prior to becoming law, or why the bill did not successfully become law
 - Provide a summary of the goals of the legislation, what the supporters thought about the legislation, and what the opponents thought about the legislation
- If you will be arguing a thesis in your final paper,
 - Report your thesis and your main argument.
 - Identify the type of evidence you would like to search for
 - Report at least 6 references you plan to use to back up your argument. This should be a mix of academic articles, books, and popular press articles

If you plan to take the first option, make sure you get my approval for your choice of legislation (you can ask me after class). Most likely, I will approve your choice. If you choose to argue a thesis, you should meet with me, either during office hours or by appointment, to get approval for your chosen thesis and so I can point you to references in the academic literature.