

17.307
Spring & Fall 2009

Summary of important dates:

The assignment(s)

April 29	}	Oral presentations about your internship organization
May 5		
May 7		
May 14		E-mail me your term paper topic
Oct. 9		Both papers due
Oct. 13	}	Oral presentations about your term paper topic
Oct. 15		
Oct. 19		
Oct. 21		

The purpose of 17.307 is to provide an intellectual focus to the internship you will be experiencing this summer. For a variety of reasons, it doesn't make sense to structure 17.307 like a traditional MIT subject—you are all entering with different expectations, backgrounds, and plans. It doesn't seem fruitful to press you through the same mold and lecture at you as if you were all pointed in the same direction, or as if you all were equally politically naive or sophisticated.

At the same time, I want your summer experience to be something more than simply a summer job, even if the summer job is pretty neat and educational. Therefore, I have structured two sets of assignments for you to pursue over the next six months. They both will focus on your own internship, in different ways. One paper will focus on a subject of public policy you will deal with over the summer. The other project will focus on the organization for which you work and its political context.

The policy issue

You will choose an issue of public policy that has two characteristics. First, it is relevant to the work of the organization you will be interning with. Second, been the subject of legislative or regulatory proceedings within the past two years. Preference is given to topics that have already been resolved (e.g., a bill passed Congress), but good topics can sometimes be made out of subjects that are actively being considered as we speak. You will write a 15–20 page research paper, due Friday, October 9, 2009 about the proceedings. You should make sure there is information about the following topics in your paper:

- (1) a description of the issue and the points of disagreement in policy debate,
- (2) a description of the principal actors in the policy disagreement and what their positions are,
- (3) a description of how the issue was handled in the legislative/regulatory process, and

- (4) an analysis of what the most important factors (political, technological, or otherwise) were that determined how the issue was finally resolved.

So, for instance, if you choose to write about the law establishing the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Energy (ARPA-E), you would (1) describe why some people thought that establishing such an agency would be a good idea, (2) discuss who thought it would be a good idea and why, and who opposed the idea, and why, (3) describe how the federal government had handled R&D spending for energy in the past, and (4) discuss why the ARPA-E idea passed, and including why it got included in the COMPETES bill.

You will be well-served by picking a policy area you will be working on this summer, or one that interests you that is a major concern of the group/organization you will work with. In addition to traditional library research, I expect you to spend some time during the summer making phone calls and visits in order to interview people in Washington about your paper. In other words, I expect you to make contacts in Washington in the field you write about and to use those contacts to inform what you write in the paper.

You will be in contact with me and Reo during the term and the summer as the subject matter of the paper develops. You must preliminarily report to me, by the last day of class this semester, what your topic will be.

A couple of words of advice in writing the paper.

- (1) *Be very selective in using Web sources to write your paper.* Most interesting and important policy areas have been around for a long time, so that covering of them on the web will be spotty. Nowadays, only about 50% of everything you might learn about an issue will be on a Web site. The best stuff will be primary source materials (like government documents and interviews) and well-regarded secondary sources (like *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, the *Washington Post*, etc.) that appear online. However, a great deal of material is only in paper format and only in a library. You must spend time there!
- (2) The form of the paper should follow the standard term paper style. If you've not written a term paper before, or are uncertain what "term paper style is," consult Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.
- (3) Your paper should have an *argument* that flows throughout the paper. So, you should certainly cover all the points I've outlined above. At the same time, you should think about the unifying thread that will run through the paper. I don't want it simply to be a one-damned-thing-after-another story.
- (4) You must include citations (i.e., footnotes) appropriate for a term paper. Recall the following two basic and universal rules regarding citing sources:

- **If you use the language of your source, you must quote it exactly, enclose it in quotations marks, and cite the source.**
- **If you use ideas and information *that are not common knowledge*, you must cite the source.¹**

As for the second point, if you are in doubt about whether you should cite a source, ask yourself the following question: Would this idea or piece of information be familiar to someone like you (someone else in the internship program, for instance) who has not researched the subject? If the answer is “no” for each and every assertion you make, you *must* provide a citation.

Finally, I hate to bring this up, but experience suggests otherwise: It is very tempting to borrow heavily from the policy analyses that other people have written and posted on the web. We are very good at spotting this material, so be squeaky clean about attribution and proper use of others’ materials.

Your work environment

Each of you will work in a highly political environment. The purpose of the second assignment is for you to learn about and report on the political context of the organization you work for this summer. In particular, you will write a 5–7 page memo to me, also due on October 9, 2009, that describes the political context of your working environment, including answers to the following questions:

1. What is the political² position of the organization you work for?
2. Is there internal consensus within your organization about its political goals?
3. Who is the most influential in your organization in setting political goals?
4. What are your organization’s principal political opponents and allies? Describe the nature of this opposition and alliance.

¹*Guide to the MIT Writing Requirement*, p. 20.

²Note I am asking about the *political* position of your organization, not the *partisan* position. For many of you, when you ask your supervisor what the political position of your organization is, she will answer “we’re a non-profit educational organization, we’re not allowed to have a political position.” This answer confuses “partisan” and “political.” Even if an organization is prohibited from “taking sides” on issues, it is almost always true that (1) the organization is *perceived* as taking sides, rightly or wrongly, and (2) the organization still has political goals, even if those goals are to improve the quality of information that informs public policy debates.

5. What are the biggest political worries of your organization?
6. Who funds your organization and what particular problems does that present for your organization's activities?

There are other questions that might strike your fancy, too. I expect you to rely on press accounts and library sources, to the extent possible. However, the types of questions I want you to explore are the types in which it will be necessary for you to talk with people in your organization—and perhaps outside, too—to get their sense of the answers to these questions.

Preliminary to your summer trip to Washington, you will make a 7–10 minute presentation to the class during dinner meetings in the last few weeks of class. Those dates are given at the top of this assignment. Unlike my previous rantings about using Web sites for term paper research, the Web is often a very good starting place for figuring out the public persona of your organization's projects, and for figuring out basic organizational things, like who the boss is, what the budget is, and who the allies are.

A final word about attendance

You are required to attend all oral presentations, regardless of whether you are making a presentation. (The only exception will be an excuse because of a conflict with another class.) You are also required to participate in the Q&A that follows every presentation.