

17.307
Spring & Fall 2020

Summary of important dates:

The assignment(s)

April 28	}	Oral presentations about your internship organization
April 30		
May 4		
May 6		
May 12		E-mail me your term paper topic
Sept. 11		E-mail me a paper outline and summary
Oct. 13	}	Oral presentations about your term paper topic
Oct. 15		
Oct. 19		
Oct. 21		
Oct. 23		Both papers due

NOTE: Dates and details of the assignments are subject to change, given the unfolding COVID-19 crisis.

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, it has been the subject of legislative, regulatory, or court proceedings within the past five 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 23, 2020 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.

For instance, if you choose to write about the stimulus bill passed in 2020, you would (1) describe the political forces that led Congress to consider the bill, (2) discuss the initial positions staked out by the principle political actors about elements of the bill, (3) describe how Congress went about considering the bill (committees? Bargaining among party leaders?), and (4) conclude why certain elements were in the final bill and others weren't.

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 Andrew and me 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. You must also send me an outline of the paper, by Friday, September 11 (the first Friday of the fall semester). That outline should contain (1) a one-paragraph summary of what your argument is, (2) a list of sources, and (3) an actual outline, *per se*.

You will also give a 12–15 minute presentation on the subject of your paper during one of the dates in the fall listed at the top of this document.

A couple of words of advice in writing the paper.

- (1) *Be very selective in using Web sources to write your paper.* While it makes sense to start a research project by doing some random Web searching, a serious research paper requires more than that. The best stuff for your paper may very well be primary source material, such as government documents, or well-regarded secondary sources, such as *Congressional Quarterly*, that may not be amenable to random online searching. Some material you need may be in books that are available only on paper. Therefore, you must spend some time doing library research. A good starting place will be to talk with Jen Greenleaf, the political science librarian at Dewey, about the best ways to find good source material for your paper.

- (2) Unfortunately, MIT’s online guide to doing public policy library research is meager, and the political science guide is of limited use for doing research on policy. Harvard’s online library guide is pretty good, and many of the sources listed there are available through MIT. (Unfortunately, you can’t access the links directly off the Harvard web site, because of IP firewalls, so you’ll have to make a note of what the resource is and then search through the MIT library’s site for the resource.) The URL is http://guides.library.harvard.edu/sb.php?subject_id=62539.
- (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 or in-text citations) 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

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

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 23, 2020 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.
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 site for term paper research, the Web is often a very good starting place for figuring out the public persona your organization 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

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 usually 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.

You are required to attend all oral presentations, regardless of whether you are making a presentation or not. (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.