

POLITICAL SCIENCE 220
U.S. PUBLIC POLICY
SPRING 2008

PROFESSOR: Dr. Kate Stenger

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OFFICE HOURS: Wed 10:30-12:20 & by appointment

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Tues. & Thurs. 2:30-4:20 : CLASS

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This morning I woke up to news from NPR, a station born of the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, on my radio alarm clock. I got dressed and walked over to Lund Center, which I was fairly certain would not topple over because of strict building codes. As I ate breakfast, I read the government-mandated nutrition label on the box of cereal and rested in the comfort of knowing that there are guidelines for food production and processing. I left the house for work, where a portion of my income is retained by the government to pay for various services, including Social Security, which may or may not be available by the time I retire. The regulations that guided my hiring and employment, the programs that protect me from poverty and sickness, the laws that ensure I have access to clean air to breathe and water to drink, these are just some of the many ways in which government policies impact my life, and all of our lives, on a daily basis.

How exactly do these policies that impact our lives so dramatically come into existence? What factors play into the decisions that government officials make on a daily basis? How is it that we have this set of policies rather than some other set? Why do our policies seem to benefit some at the expense of others? These are the types of questions we will examine this semester as we seek to understand the nature of public policymaking in America.

This course consists of two parts. In the first half of the semester, we will look at policymaking through a theoretical perspective but using specific case studies to better understand the process. Using the stages model of policymaking as our guide, we will explore the components of public policy development and implementation with particular attention paid to policymakers and the role of attention in the policy process. In the second half of the course we turn our attention to several specific policy topics in American politics: health, immigration, education, and morality policy. We will use the theoretical concepts discussed in the first half of the course to gain a more complete understanding of these policy areas and to explore the impact of these policies on citizens.

REQUIRED TEXTS

This course includes a substantial amount of reading. I expect you to complete all of the assigned reading before class...even if you are not personally responsible for leading discussion on the topic. Additionally, you should prepare to discuss the readings by being an engaged reader; underlining key passages and writing down questions or comments you have related to the text are both helpful means of achieving this.

- James E. Anderson, Public Policymaking, 6th Edition (2006)
- Otis Graham Jr., Unguarded Gates: A History of America's Immigration Crisis (2004)

- W. James Popham, America's "Failing" Schools: How Parents and Teachers Can Cope With No Child Left Behind (2004)
- Donald Barlett & James Steele, Critical Condition: How Health Care in American Became Big Business and Bad Medicine (2004)
- George Chauncey, Why Marriage? (2004)
- Selected readings available through the Gustavus library on Moodle reserve
- Monday through Friday "National Report" section of the *New York Times*

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Value</u>
Service Learning (& Presentation)	15%
Discussion Leader	10%
Response Essays (4 worth 10% each)	40%
Letter	10%
Class Participation	20%
Response to DL Questions	5%

Each student will have the opportunity to participate in planning the discussion for two separate topics. One of the two will involve your participation in a service learning project that is specially designed to complement our study of a particular public policy topic (I'll call this your Service Learning Presentation (SLP)). The other opportunity will be to facilitate a class discussion about a policy area based on the assigned book from the section (I'll call this Discussion Leading (DL)). For example, you might choose to work with the service learning project about health care policy and the group leading the discussion on Why Marriage? when we discuss morality policy. You will have the opportunity to indicate your topic preferences for the two assignments on the second day of the course.

Expectations for your **Service Learning Project and Presentation:** The Community Service Office has identified four service learning projects that complement the topics we will discuss this semester. The tasks you complete as part of your service learning will vary from project to project, but in general, each student will thoroughly research the organization you choose to work with and the issue/s with which the organization is concerned and will spend a minimum of ten hours working on a project that will assist the organization. Your work for the organization might occur individually or in conjunction with a group of your classmates. During the second half of the class, each group of students will make a presentation to the class about the organization for which you worked and the ways in which the organization impacts public policy. Your group will also lead the class in a discussion about issues that relate to the policy area and the organization. Your group will be responsible for the entire class period so it is essential that you spend time preparing for this presentation. Complete guidelines for this assignment are included at the end of this syllabus.

Expectations for **Discussion Leading:** For each policy area we will read one book. Your group is responsible for leading a discussion on the book. Keeping in mind the main arguments presented by the author, your group will develop a series of discussion questions to help us work through some of the policy implications of the particular issue. You should prepare at least ten questions in advance and send a copy of the questions via email to everyone in the class at the beginning of the week in which we will discuss the book. Complete guidelines for this assignment are included at the end of this syllabus.

Response to DL Questions: DL groups will email at least ten questions to you in advance of the discussion they lead. For each discussion, you should select and respond to two of the questions. Your typed responses will be collected at the end of the class discussion period. Typing these responses in advance will help you to prepare for the discussion (and for those of you who are more quiet, they will give you something to contribute to the discussion) and they will help me see how well you understand the readings or films. I will not grade you on the opinions expressed in your response but I will grade you on the quality of your response and the thought you put into it.

Response Essays: Rather than traditional exams, this course will feature a series of four focused take-home writing assignments during the first six weeks of the semester. For each of the four assignments, I will provide you with a specific question on Tuesday in class and your response, which should be no longer than three typed double-spaced pages, is due in class by the following Tuesday. The questions are designed to assess your comprehension of the reading material (text and supplementary articles) and your ability to succinctly analyze and apply this information. Complete guidelines for this assignment are included at the end of this syllabus.

Letter to the Editor or Letter to Elected Official: You will write either a letter to the editor of a newspaper or a letter to a relevant elected official regarding a specific policy topic discussed in class this semester. Complete guidelines for this assignment are included at the end of this syllabus.

Each year, student representatives from Gustavus and other private colleges in Minnesota travel to St. Paul to lobby in favor of public funding for higher education. Because education policy is one of our areas of focus this semester and because this course focuses particularly on the process of policymaking, you are asked to participate in the 2008 **Gustavus Day at the Capitol** on Thursday, March 6. I consider this opportunity to be a valuable learning experience and it also benefits our college community and so I am canceling our class on this day so that you will be able to participate. This is a full day experience and so I realize that it may be difficult for some of you to participate. Please speak with your professors, coaches, or employers about potential conflicts early and come speak with me if you anticipate having trouble participating in this event.

Class Participation: Your participation is an integral part of this class. Learning requires much more than me simply shoveling information into your open minds. It is an active process that requires you to take the reins in asking questions, seeking out information, working collectively to achieve understanding of complex problems, and critically examining your assumptions about how the world works. My role in this process is to guide and encourage you, but I can not do that without your participation. Participation includes attending class on time (obviously, you can't participate if you're not here), completing the assigned readings, contributing to class discussions with thoughtful comments, and listening attentively, and engaging with the work of your classmates. Here's what these things mean to me.

- I consider your completion of the assigned readings to be your ticket of admittance to class. You cannot participate meaningfully in a discussion of the readings if you have not completed them. In the event that you have not completed the readings or your response essay, I may ask you to leave and you will be counted as absent for the day.
- Your contribution to class discussion may come in many forms: active participation (leadership) in small group activities, asking questions about the course material in class,

contributing meaningful comments and observations in large group discussions, answering questions I pose to the class, etc.

- Listening is a valuable skill. It is important that you learn to hear and respond to the comments made by your classmates as well as to my comments, so always look for ways you can engage with comments from a previous speaker. This means that you should be respectful when other people are speaking.
- This class provides you with a unique opportunity to learn from your classmates through their leadership in seminar discussions and through their research projects and final presentation. I expect that you will participate in the collective intellectual process by using discussion questions emailed by groups to prepare you for discussion and by contributing feedback to the research projects of your classmates, both in formal peer reviews and in informal class discussions.

COURSE POLICIES & GUIDELINES

Attendance: You are an adult and therefore, you do not need to notify me when you miss class and you do not need to explain your absences to me. Please do not send me an email asking if you “missed anything important in class”! If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate for notes. If you have any questions about those notes, please see me during my office hours. Missing more than *two* classes during the semester *will negatively affect your participation grade* regardless of the reasons for the absences. Missing more than five classes may be grounds for an F in the course.

On the Third Day: I understand that as college students you have a lot on your plate. Work conflicts, extracurricular activities, exams and papers in other classes, and personal problems often pop up in the midst of a semester. My late policy is simple and straightforward: I will grant each student one three-day extension on a Reflection Assignment or DL Response Paper for any reason. You do not need to explain to me why you want to take the extension; you simply need to turn in a sheet of paper with your name that indicates you plan to take the extension at the time the assignment is due. You may use your three day extension for any of the four Reflection Assignments or your response to the DL question essays.

Academic Honesty: Gustavus Adolphus College standards for academic honesty apply in this class. If you have questions about these standards, please consult the College Honor Code. Your decision to remain enrolled in this class will serve as your agreement to abide by the following statement for each assignment you submit: *“On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others’ use of unauthorized aid in completing this work.”* Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any thoughts or ideas that are not your own, even if you are not directly quoting a source must be attributed to their source through in text citations. Plagiarized work will be given a zero, cases will be reported to the dean, and the incident may result in failure of the course.



Cell Phones: Please turn off your cell phone before class. If a cell phone rings during class time, the owner will be asked to bring a treat to share with the entire class during our next meeting to compensate us for the distraction.

Grade Dispute: Any grade disputes must be submitted in writing to me no later than one week after the assignment is returned.

Special Accommodations: If you have a physical, psychiatric/emotional, medical, or learning disability that may have an effect on your ability to complete assigned course work, please contact Laurie Bickett, the Disability Services Coordinator, in the Advising Center. She will review your concerns and decide with you what accommodations are necessary. Upon receipt of documentation from her, I will be happy to work with you.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Articles listed by Author's last name are available through Moodle on-line reserve at the library

SECTION I: THEORIES OF POLICYMAKING

Week 1: What is Public Policy?

Tue 2/12

In Class: What is public policy?

Thu 2/14

Read: Anderson, Chapter 1

In Class: Introduction to the study of public policy

Week 2: Theories of Policymaking and the Policy Environment

Tue 2/19

Read: Anderson, Chapter 2

In Class: Theories of policymaking

Response Essay 1 Distributed on Tuesday; Due in class on Tuesday 2/26

Thu 2/21

Read: Truman Article; Mills Article

In Class: The policy environment

Week 3: Agenda Setting

Tue 2/26

Read: Anderson, Chapter 3

In Class: Agenda setting

Due: Response Essay 1

Response Essay 2 Distributed on Tuesday; Due in class on Tuesday 3/4

Thu 2/28

Read: Cobb & Elder Article; Kingdon Article

In Class: Comparing models of agenda setting

Week 4: Policy Adoption and Decision-Making

Tue 3/4

Read: Anderson, Chapter 4; Schneider & Ingram Article

In Class: How target populations affect decision-making

Due: Response Essay 2

Response Essay 3 Distributed on Tuesday; Due in class on Tuesday 3/11

Thu 3/6

In Class: Day at the Capitol

Week 5: Policy Formulation

Tue 3/11

Read: Anderson, Chapter 5

In Class: Formulating policies and budgets

Due: Response Essay 3

Response Essay 4 Distributed on Tuesday; Due in class on Tuesday 3/18

Thu 3/13

Read: Lindblom Article

In Class: National Budget Simulation (Library Computer Lab)

Week 6: Policy Implementation, and Evaluation

Tue 3/18

Read: Anderson, Chapter 6

In Class: Policy implementation

Due: Response Essay 4

Thu 3/20

Read: Anderson, Chapter 7

In Class: Policy evaluation

Week 7: Spring Break

Tue 3/25

No Class

Thu 3/27

No Class

SECTION II: POLICY IN PRACTICE

Week 8: Health Policy

Tue 4/1

Read: Barlett & Steele, Prologue - Chapter 4

Thu 4/3: No Class

(Kate at Midwest Political Science Association Meeting)

Week 9: Health Policy

Tue 4/8

Read: Barlett & Steele, Chapter 5 - Epilogue

In Class: Health policy DL

Due: Response to DL Questions (Health)

Thu 4/10

In Class: Health policy SLP

Week 10: Immigration Policy

Tue 4/15

Read: Graham, Introduction - Chapter 9

In Class: Immigration policy

Thu 4/17

Read: Graham, Chapter 10 - Chapter 17

In Class: Immigration policy DL

Due: Response to DL Questions (Immigration)

Week 11: Immigration Policy / Education Policy

Tue 4/22

In Class: Immigration policy SLP

Thu 4/24

Read: Popham, Introduction - Chapter 3

In Class: Education policy

Week 12: Education Policy

Tue 4/29

Read: Popham, Chapter 5, 6, 10 & Conclusion
In Class: Education policy DL
Due: Response to DL Questions (Education)

Thu 5/1

In Class: Education policy SLP

Week 13: Morality Policy

Tue 5/6

Read: Chauncey, Preface - Chapter 3
In Class: Morality policy

Thu 5/8

Read: Chauncey, Chapter 4 - Chapter 5
In Class: Morality policy DL
Due: Response to DL Questions (Morality)

Week 14: Morality Policy / Wrapping Up

Tue 5/13

In Class: Morality policy SLP

Thu 5/15

In Class: Wrapping up

Week 15: Polstitutional Olympics

Tue 5/20

In Class: Polstitutional Olympics

Due: Letter to the editor or letter to elected official due by Tuesday, May 27 at 12:30 in my office



SERVICE LEARNING GUIDELINES

What is service learning?

According to the American Association for Higher Education, “service-learning means a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully organized service that: is connected in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience.” In short, service-learning is designed to benefit both the student, through enhanced learning opportunities, and the organization, through the service provided by the student. Service-learning makes the material learned in a classroom more meaningful by providing context and real-world connections.

The Mission Statement of Gustavus Adolphus College emphasizes that part of the purpose of a Gustavus education is “to prepare students for fulfilling lives of leadership and service in society.” One way of bridging the gap between what we learn in the classroom and what happens in society is to experience the connections between a theoretical understanding of the policy process and the everyday experiences of organizations working to influence public policies in America.

Why is service learning a component in this course?

The study of public policy can be very abstract until we take the time to closely examine the ways in which policies are created, implemented, and enforced, and to learn about the individuals and groups responsible for these actions. Through the service learning component of this course, you will have the opportunity to learn about and work for a group that is active in one of the areas of public policy we study in depth this semester. Each organization will have a different set of projects for you to work on (either as a part of a group from the class or individually). The projects will help you to learn more about the organization itself, the policy area in which the organization is active, and the processes behind the creation and implementation of public policy. You are required to dedicate a minimum of ten hours of service to the organization you select. You must complete your service hours before your group’s Service Learning Presentation. (Health Care Policy 4/10; Immigration Policy 4/22; Education Policy 5/1; Morality Policy 5/13). With these deadlines in mind, you should contact your selected site as soon as possible so you can begin working with the organization.

What do I hope you will gain from participating in a service learning component?

- Knowledge of the mission, policy goals, and political strategies of the organization
- Development of interpersonal communication skills
- Development of organizational and administrative skills
- More detailed understanding of the policy area
- Greater understanding of the role organized groups play in the policy process
- Deeper connection to the policy area resulting in increased interest and learning

What service learning projects are available?

- Health: Children’s Defense Fund (State Children’s Health Insurance Program)
- Education: MN Private College Council (Minnesota State Grant Program)
- Immigration: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
- Morality: OutFront MN

SERVICE LEARNING PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

After discussing the theoretical foundations of policymaking and reviewing the policy process, we will switch gears to examine some specific public policy areas in more detail. During this section of the course, you (along with other members of the class working at the same service learning site) will lead a class period focused on a topic related to your service learning project. This class period includes a presentation based on your research and service and a class discussion of issues raised by your presentation.

Guidelines:

- Your presentation should focus on a specific public policy that is clearly related to the work you did with the organization for your service learning project.
- Your presentation should be research-based and should communicate a strong understanding of the policy itself, of policymaking theory, and of the organization with which you worked. Your grade is based both on your understanding of the policy/organization and on your ability to connect it with concepts and theories discussed in class. Remember to cite the sources you use in your presentation appropriately.
- Your presentation should have a thesis. You may find it useful to think in terms of how you would present the information in a formal research paper.
- Your presentation should not rely heavily on Power Point. If you do use Power Point or other visual aids, they should be minimal and should serve a clear purpose in communicating an important point in your presentation. Do not use Power Point simply to outline your presentation.
- Your presentation should be delivered extemporaneously. That means, while you are welcome to use notes as you give your presentation, you should not read from a prepared text. Your goal is to communicate your message to me and your classmates who have little knowledge of your topic. Remember to make eye contact and to speak slowly so that we can understand you.
- Your group should prepare a brief (2-3 page) handout for the class.
- Each member of your service learning group should participate in your presentation.
- Following your presentation, you should lead the class in a discussion of the issues, themes, questions, and/or problems raised in your presentation.

Handout Guidelines:

You should produce a brief (2-3 page) handout for the class to distribute at the end of the presentations on the day of your presentation. The handout should include the following information:

1. A brief description of the organization
2. A brief description of the policy (what does it do? how does it work?)
3. A summary of the policy environment (What factors contributed to the development of this policy?)
4. A summary of the policy tools used to implement the policy and the agencies or departments responsible for implementing the policy
5. An evaluation of the policy (how well does it work? What are the moral or ethical implications of the policy? What is the organization's position regarding this policy?)

Grading:

Your grade will include a self-evaluation as well as an evaluation by me. Your grade is based on the following criteria:

- Development of a strong thesis and supporting points
- Accuracy of policy summary and research and accuracy of answers to questions
- Connection to relevant course material, theories, and concepts
- Ability to appropriately synthesize information
- Clarity of presentation (including public speaking style and preparation)
- Effort devoted to making presentation interesting and accessible to classmates
- Accuracy and clarity of handout (including spelling, grammar, and style)

I will evaluate your group as a whole based on these criteria and will ask each group member to evaluate the group performance based on these criteria. I will take your individual assessments into account in determining your grade.

Two Notes:

- A word of warning: you should not approach this as an assignment you can complete effectively the weekend before your presentation. Rather, consider this a semester-long project that culminates with your presentation. I expect you to conduct thorough and accurate research and to put time, thought, and effort into your presentation and into your service learning project.
- I understand that public speaking can be a very intimidating activity and that some of you may suffer from public speaking anxiety. I recognize that this formal presentation may be the most difficult assignment of the semester for some of you because of this anxiety. However, the ability to articulate your ideas in a way that is clear, accessible, concise, and persuasive is an important skill to cultivate. Please remember that the classroom is a supportive learning environment. Our ultimate goal is to learn more about these policies and you are the one who has the information to teach us. The best way to avoid the anxiety that might arise from this assignment will be to prepare well so that you are very familiar with your topic and to practice your presentation (multiple times, preferably!). Nearly everyone will need to speak in front of a group at one point in their life. Consider this a good opportunity to practice those skills in a supportive environment.

DISCUSSION LEADER GUIDELINES

For each policy area we will read a book. Your group will be responsible for leading a discussion on the book. Keeping in mind the main arguments presented by the author, your group will develop a series of discussion questions to help us work through some of the policy implications of the particular issue. Your job in this activity is not to teach the issue or the book to us, but rather to help us think more deeply about this policy debate. Our goal is to engage in a critical discussion of the policy issues, normative claims, and social effects raised in the book. You may find it useful to think about what kinds of arguments the author makes, what evidence supports or refutes their arguments, and what implications their claims have on policymaking or the implementation of policies. You should prepare at least ten questions in advance and send a copy of the questions via email to everyone in the class a minimum of two days before the discussion (questions for a Tuesday class are due on Sunday by 5:00; questions for a Thursday class are due on Tuesday by 5:00). You are, of course, welcome to develop additional questions for the actual discussion.

Discussions sometimes happen spontaneously, but most of the time it takes careful planning on the part of the discussion leader. You should come to class with some specific topics to discuss in mind and should lead the discussion by posing a variety of fact-based, thought-provoking, and/or controversial questions to the class. Some things to keep in mind:

- You should be prepared with a number of different questions in case the class answers them faster than expected.
- You should not spend the entire class period talking “at” your classmates, but rather should work to encourage them to talk.
- Sometimes it takes a few seconds (or minutes!) after you ask a question to get a response. Silence is fine; sometimes people just need time to sort out their thoughts.
- Feel free to use different methods of encouraging discussion: break people into small groups, give people a question on which to write for a few minutes, use role playing scenarios, etc.
- If no one answers your question, think about rephrasing the question to make it easier to understand.
- Sometimes it is useful to start with “easy” questions (either fact-based questions from the book or broad “how do you feel?” questions) to get people talking and then move into the more challenging and/or thought-provoking questions.

Your grade is based on the following criteria:

- Development of relevant and provocative discussion questions
- Discussion leadership (asking questions clearly, facilitating discussion, asking appropriate follow-up questions, engaging all members of the class)
- Effort devoted to making discussion interesting and accessible to classmates
- Clarity of discussion questions provided in advance (including spelling, grammar, and style)
- Ability to work with a group

I will evaluate your group as a whole based on these criteria and will ask each group member to evaluate the group performance based on these criteria. I will take your individual assessments into account in determining your grade.

RESPONSE ESSAY GUIDELINES

Response Essays: Rather than traditional exams, this course will feature a series of four focused take-home writing assignments during the first six weeks of the semester. For each of the four assignments, I will provide you with a specific question in class on Tuesday and your response, which should be no longer than three typed double-spaced pages, is due in class on the following Tuesday. The questions are designed to assess your comprehension of the reading material (text and supplementary articles) and your ability to succinctly analyze and apply this information. Most will be tied to current events featured in the “National Report” section of the *New York Times*. In writing your responses to these assignments, please be aware that I am interested in the following aspects of your response:

1. Your answer should develop a clear thesis that answers the question posed in the assignment.
2. Your answer should use (and define, where appropriate) relevant course concepts and terms. This is your chance to demonstrate to me that you understand the language of the course and that you are able to apply key concepts and terms to real policy problems. The more you can integrate these concepts and terms into your answer in accurate ways, the easier it is for me to see that you understand them.
3. Your answer should reference specific authors we read when appropriate. Often certain authors will develop a relevant concept, term, or theory that you use in your answer. If this is the case, it is important that you give credit for the idea to the author. In addition to understanding *what* the important ideas are, I want to know that you understand *where* these important ideas came from. You do not need to include a comprehensive bibliography; in text parenthetical citations of the authors’ last name and the page number of relevant information are fine.
4. Your answer should provide theoretical insight into the specific policy issue under consideration. The theoretical models presented in the class are useful tools for simplifying the world of politics in order to better understand what is happening, why it is happening, and who is involved in making it happen. Your answers should convey your familiarity with these models and your ability to appropriately apply these models to real policy problems.
5. Your discussion of the public policy in question should be accurate and you should make clear and specific connections between the course material and the public policy. These assignments “test” your understanding of current events (particularly those discussed in the Monday-Friday “National Report” section of the *New York Times*) and your ability to apply course information to real world cases.
6. Your answer should be free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am easily distracted and I don’t want to spend my grading time correcting errors that could easily be caught with a little proofreading. These are short assignments and you have plenty of time to proofread them so I will not be sympathetic to multiple typographical or grammatical errors.

Your grade for each assignment is based on the following criteria:

- Accurate and appropriate use of course concepts, terms, and theoretical models
- Accurate and appropriate references to course readings and authors
- Evidence of familiarity with current events and ability to relate current events to course concepts
- Clarity of written assignment (including style, spelling, and grammar)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR / LETTER TO ELECTED OFFICIAL GUIDELINES

One of the goals of this course is that the material is personally informative but I also believe that information can, and should, have a broader societal impact. Your service learning project is one way that you can use what you learn in the classroom to benefit a larger community. This assignment—to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine or to write a letter to a relevant elected official—is another extension of this goal. Over the course of the semester, you will need to write and send one letter about a topic we have studied that matters to you. The letter that you send must be turned in to me by Tuesday, May 27.

Guidelines for topics:

- Your letter should focus on a specific policy issue that we have discussed in class this semester. Thus, it should fall into one of the four broad categories of public policy: Health, immigration, education, or morality.
- Your letter should be timely and sent to an appropriate venue.
 - Letters to the editor should be written in response to a recently published article in that publication because this increases the likelihood of your letter being published. This means that you will have to spend time reading newspapers and/or magazines (the *NYT* is already one of your required readings), and have the flexibility to spend a few hours working on a letter right after you read something that really moves you.
 - Letters to elected officials should target an elected official who represents you (either from your home or school district) and should focus on a policy, bill, or issue on which the official can and will be making a decision (i.e. do not send a letter regarding a federal policy to a state-level elected official).

Guidelines for letters:

- These letters are not research papers, but you will have to do research in order to produce a letter that is publishable and/or influential. While you should not include a bibliography with your letter, you might consider including the source of your evidence in the letter itself (i.e. “According to the General Accountability Office...”). This style of citation is easier to read and also improves the credibility of your argument.
- Your letter should have a clear and specific thesis (argument).
- Letters to the editor should conform to the guidelines published in the selected newspaper or magazines (usually about 300 words). Letters to an elected official may be slightly longer, but keep in mind that the longer your letter, the less likely the elected official is to read it all.

Administrative guidelines:

- Include Gustavus Adolphus College in your signed name (i.e. Sincerely, Kate Stenger, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN).
- Understand that by enrolling in this class, and thereby writing letters about what might be controversial issues or topics, you release Gustavus Adolphus College and its employees—including but not limited to your instructor—from any responsibility for any benefits and/or repercussions as a result of your letter.
- You may send your letter to any reasonable media source (the *New York Times*, the *Star Tribune*, *USA Today*, the *Gustavian Weekly*, etc.), but this does not include things such as

Internet chat rooms. If you have questions about whether a source is “reasonable,” please come and speak to me about it.

- You may send your letter to any elected official (local, state, or federal). If you have questions about which official would be most appropriate given your topic, please come and speak to me about it.
- You should mail the letter as soon after the initiating article is published or the initiating issue is raised.
- You should provide me with a copy of the letter (by Tuesday, May 27 at the latest), provide me with copies of the newspaper if your letter is published, and be willing to share your accomplishment with your classmates.

Your grade for this assignment is based on the following criteria:

- The timeliness and relevance of your topic
- The clarity and strength of your argument
- The integration of supporting evidence
- The selection of an appropriate destination for your letter
- The absence of errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation

Please keep in mind that once something you write is published, it becomes public record. You are responsible for the ideas you advance in this letter and I hope you take this responsibility seriously. Words and ideas are powerful tools to incite people to action and, short of that, at least awareness. If what you write is really good, it could be read by people throughout the world or people who make policy decisions and truly make them think.

*Portions of this assignment are adapted from Professor Richard Leitch.

GRADING SCALE FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

You can earn an A or A- if you do a superior job of developing original ideas, organizing arguments logically, finding credible supporting evidence, and communicating the information without distracting stylistic or mechanical errors. These papers present a significant and thoughtful position that is both convincing and thought-provoking. These are the kind of papers that leave a memorable and lasting impression. I reserve this grade for papers that are truly excellent, and A grades, in particular, are rare.

You can earn a B+, B, or B- if you do a good job developing your thesis, organizing arguments in a logical way, finding credible supporting evidence, and communicating the information without distracting stylistic or mechanical errors. These are papers to be proud of because they are very strong and reflect a clear understanding of both the assignment and the course material; however, they lack the sophistication and polish of A papers.

You can earn a C+, C, or C- if you do an average job of developing your thesis, organizing arguments in a logical way, finding credible supporting evidence, and communicating the information without distracting stylistic or mechanical errors. These papers reflect the minimum expectations I have for good college-level work. They clearly answer the question, but arguments may need to be more clearly developed, or supporting evidence may be inappropriate and/or lacking. These papers often contain distracting stylistic or mechanical errors or they may be poorly organized in a way that impedes your ability to construct a persuasive argument. This grade often reflects a lack of time or effort in researching, writing, revising, editing, or proofreading.

You can earn a D+ or D if you do a poor job of developing your thesis (you may not even have a thesis), organizing arguments in a logical way (you may not have supporting arguments or any sort of organizational structure), finding credible supporting evidence (you may not have the right kind or amount of evidence or you may not be citing that evidence properly), and communicating the information without distracting stylistic or mechanical errors. These papers reflect poor-quality college-level work with little time or effort put into the writing process.

You can earn an F if you do not turn in a paper, plagiarize your paper in any way, do not answer the question, and/or do such a poor job in writing your paper that it is impossible to understand what message you want to communicate with the paper.

Course Grade Scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	65-69
D	60-64
F	<59

