

## 16. Description of Democratic Organizational Biography (DOB)

If you choose this more research-oriented theory-into-practice option, you will select an organization to “study” from the standpoint of (1) democratic ideals and values; and (2) your own understanding of what’s at stake for you with respect to democracy. You will need to spend significant time “working with the people” in the organization, followed by interviews with “key informants” focusing on the organization’s commitment to the theory and practice of democracy. This research will be for the basis of your DOB, which you will write up with an introductory narrative and conclusion based on your understanding of democratic theory and what’s at stake in terms of the particular organization you have chosen for the DOB. I will grade these based on the overall quality of understanding and analysis of democratic theory and practice that each exhibits. More details to come in a separate handout.

### **Project Guidelines:**

Those of you who have chosen the DOB option for a Theory Into Practice project must first select an organization both “worthy” (based on your own assessment of what is at stake in this organization—objectively and subjectively [your relationship to the organization] with respect to democratic theory and practice) and “capable” of study (i.e., it is possible for you to do the kind of research necessary to complete the project by the end of the semester). Once you decide upon the organization for the DOB, I would like all the projects to be designed with the following three components in mind:

- The Context: Democratic Theory. Each DOB should contain a section where you define for yourself the ideals and values connected—in your mind—with democracy

(given our semester's readings and discussions), and how these ideals will serve as criteria by which you judge the organization you have selected for study and analysis. This section should also include the rationale behind your choice of organization, once again in terms of democratic theory and the stakes involved for you.

- The Research: The bulk of the narrative which you submit should contain “research” on the organization: participant observation of meetings, events, practices, and decision making processes; a study of the documents governing the organization (e.g., constitutions and by-laws, mission statement, history); formal interviews with “key informants,” including officers/staff and members of the organization, as well as people who may be affected by the organization and its decisions. The interviews should be conducted according to a predetermined design, and questions should follow the same format for all “informants.” (remember PSC 202?!)
- The Analysis: Your conclusions regarding the organization and how it measures up to the criteria provided by democratic theory, as you established them in the context part of the narrative.

### **Deadlines and Process:**

In order to give you appropriate feedback and for you to proceed in a timely fashion, I am setting the following deadlines for all of you choosing the DOB. (You may choose to hand things in earlier!)

- **October 21.** Submission of final organizational choice, as well as outline of your

research design (what you will read/study, your “observational plan,” who will be your interview participants).

- **November 11.** Submission of final interview list, including questions to be asked all interviewees.
- **December 4 or 9.** Presentation of DOB in class.
- **December 15.** Submission of final DOB narrative.

Please let me know if any of this is unclear, or if the deadlines are unreasonable.