

## 17. Description of Historically Informed Political Project and Assessment Criteria

We have developed this course around five overarching skills that we feel are central to any student's college education and crucial if you are to be effective participants in the civic lives of your communities after college. We hope this course will:

1. Help you to become more keenly alert to the world around you;
2. Use what you observe to identify systemic relationships in that world;
3. Acquire historical information that helps you make sense of those systemic relationships;
4. Use what you have learned to take intentional action in the world;
5. And engage in ongoing self reflection as you take action.

In the major project for this course, we ask you to further develop these skills in a context that is meaningful for you.

We call this exercise the **Historically Informed Political Project (HIPP)**. What is a “political project”? Any activity is political if it affects how people in a society govern themselves. In this class, we invite you to embark on a political project that reflects your own personal values and assumptions about the world you live in, and that illustrates a concept of “politics” that you develop.

We ask that your political project engage with a California issue that has both environmental and social dimensions. You will:

- Define a political project;

- Describe the values and assumptions you carry into the project, and reflect on how those values and assumptions change as a result of engaging in the project;
- Conduct historical research that helps you understand how your issues of interest came to be;
- Conduct the project itself, investing at least ten hours in your community work;
- And make a set of policy recommendations informed by both your historical research and your community experience.

Successfully carrying out a political project also requires that you become aware of ways the public life around you is organized, and that you study how social organization either fosters or impedes progress towards your goals. In the United States, two large and interconnected systems of power provide the contexts within which we act politically. These are representative democracy and capitalism. Because of the pervasiveness of these systems it is virtually impossible for persons living in the United States today to act in any way that does not at the same time reflect the imperatives of those systems and affect the lives of others through those systems. This insight is the source of the slogan that was popularized by the women's movement in the 1970s: "The personal is political." Nothing that you do is purely personal or private. Within the context of representative democracy and capitalism, virtually everything you do has some kind of impact on others. This means that part of what you must do for your political project is to demonstrate your understanding of this connection between the personal and the public or political with respect to the issue you have chosen.

Public systems of governance include, but are not limited to, those institutions that we normally

think of as the government at the city, county, state or national levels. Other systems that people use to order or structure their own and others' activities include labor unions, neighborhood associations, universities, organizations that disseminate information for the purpose of changing the ways people behave (e.g. LandWatch of Monterey County or the National Rifle Association), and any other special interest groups that have clearly identifiable political goals. It would be helpful if you chose a Monterey County issue, because you can help us all understand this place in which we now live, and because the research will probably be easier - but any California issue that interests you is fine. You may also concentrate on a local dimension of a national or international issue. Remember that you will be engaged in a local community as part of your political project, so your issue must be local enough to be able to work for meaningful change here.

As you research the history of your problem, we would like you to keep two things in mind:

- 1) We would like you to use historical analysis to help you understand how the problem that interests you came into existence. How has the situation that interests you developed? Why are people acting as they do now? Why does the landscape look the way it does now?
- 2) By coming to understand how and why the problem has developed as it has, you should be uniquely poised to offer policy prescriptions for the future. History is not static: you, in fact, have the ability to help direct the future flow of history. Given what you know about how your problem came to be, how should people behave or act or legislate? How does what you've learned about the history of your problem help you offer creative solutions to the problem?

As we hope you are learning/will learn from this class, all "problems" or "issues" have

interrelated social and environmental components. Whatever problem or issue you choose, we expect an analysis of how social and environmental factors have interacted to create or construct this problem, and we expect you to include social and environmental factors in solutions you propose to this problem.

You are welcome to work with classmates on your political project. You may design this project with classmates, conduct the project cooperatively, and share research. But we ask that you choose distinct topics for your historical research, and we require that all your written work is yours alone.

### **How in the world will you accomplish all this?**

We believe - and student feedback confirms - that this will be one of the most difficult projects you undertake during your CSUMB education. We also believe - and, again, student feedback confirms - that if you engage seriously with the project, this will be one of the most rewarding projects you undertake during your CSUMB education.

To help you complete this project in the most rigorous, enjoyable way possible, we have separated it into eleven assignments that we'd like you to complete before the final draft is due. Each assignment is due Monday in class at 6 PM (see schedule below). In a classroom where all simultaneously act as teachers and learners, this means you will sometimes be asked to share your work with others in peer review. As parts of this project ask you to share personal reflections, you may choose to keep anything *deeply* personal out of the material you might share with classmates or instructors.

Gerald and David will return each assignment with feedback the following Monday in class.

Note that 45% of your grade is determined by how well you complete the preparatory work. *We will not accept late assignments except in cases of emergency.* If you are having problems, please talk to us. But if you do not turn in the assigned work by Monday at 6 PM, and you do not have an extremely compelling reason for not turning in your work, you will not get credit for it. More importantly, we will not be able to give you feedback on your project as it evolves. We believe that every one of you can do a beautiful job on this project — at least, that’s the goal we will work hard to help you achieve — but it will be much harder to complete your project with a minimum of frustration and a maximum of good experience without explicit guidance. In addition to our written feedback, we are always available to help you during our posted office hours.

Please note that a good grade on this project does not depend on complete success in meeting your political goals. Rather, your grade depends on how diligently and thoughtfully you have engaged in your political project, how thoroughly you have examined the history behind your project, and how eloquently and thoughtfully you have written your essay.

Below we provide a set of outcomes for the project. When we assess your work in May, we will be looking for each of these outcomes in your work. This will seem overwhelming at first: **Don’t panic!** Remember: You have almost four months to complete this work, and you will receive lots of guidance from your classmates and from your instructors along the way.

## **Assessment for Historically Informed Political Project**

**SBSC/ESSP 385/Spring 2002**

**A) Outcomes that address the structure, organization, and mechanics of writing:**

- 1) Your essay has a clear main point or thesis (or clear main points and theses) that guides you and your reader through your essay. In other words, it should be clear at all times why you're telling the reader what you're telling the reader.
- 2) Your essay has an introduction that thoughtfully prepares the reader for the analysis you are going to provide.
- 3) Your essay has a conclusion that helps the reader reflect on the analysis you have just provided.
- 4) Each paragraph in your essay is coherent; it does one thing and does it well. This usually means that each paragraph has a topic sentence that makes it clear what the paragraph is about.
- 5) Your essay has an overall coherence and focus with effective transitions between paragraphs.
- 6) Your essay exhibits careful attention to spelling, syntax, grammar, and punctuation.
- 7) You have clearly cited all of your material. If you have taken material from outside of class readings, you have provided full citations. Where you have taken material from class readings, you have provided full citations. If you have quoted classmates' ideas, you have given them credit. Where you are introducing voices from your political project, you have quoted them fairly, but maintained their anonymity. If you are using primary sources, you have described what they are and where you've found them.
- 8) All material that you have taken word- for-word from another source is in direct quotes. All language that is not in direct quotes is your own language.

**B) Outcomes that address content drawn from class discussions and assigned readings:**

9) Your essay shows clear evidence that you have listened carefully throughout the semester: you have attempted to understand the points of view of your classmates, of the authors you've read, of people with whom you've interacted during your political project. If they have helped you change your mind, you have explained how. If you disagree with them, you explain, respectfully, where and how you differ.

10) In your essay, you cite at least three sources we've assigned for this course, using them to illustrate themes you develop in your essay. Each document and essay in Merchant is a separate source.

11) Your essay includes at least one theme from the course that helps you illustrate how this project ties into themes in California history.

12) You explain whether your issue of concern is a "social" issue, an "environmental" issue, or both. This means you have defined what you mean by those terms "social" and "environmental."

13) You explain the "environmental" factors one needs to understand in order to understand the social history of your problem.

14) You explain the "social" factors one needs to understand in order to understand the environmental history of your problem.

15) You take at least one insight from your understanding of the U.S. Constitution that helps explain or interpret your issue. What do you learn about the issue from studying the Constitution? What do you learn about the Constitution from researching your issue and engaging in your project?

**C) Outcomes that address your own life experience and positionality:**

16) You have explicitly discussed the values, biases, and assumptions you bring into your project. In other words, you've explained what the reader needs to know about *you* in order to understand the project you've completed. To put it another way, you've analyzed how your positionality biases your epistemology.

17) You explain how your values, biases, and assumptions about the world have been challenged, reinforced, deepened or changed as a result of conducting your political project and the research that informs it.

**D) Outcomes that address content drawn from your independent research for your HIPP projects:**

18) You describe which aspects of this issue are unique to the geographic region in which it occurs. What aspects of this issue are unique to Monterey County? To California? To the United States?

19) You draw from at least 4 secondary sources (historians or other scholars) that have provided information pertinent to this issue. At least one of these sources must be from an historian. You describe how these scholars have analyzed this issue, and what their analyses contribute to your analysis.

20) You draw from at least 2 primary sources (census records, public documents, laws or policy statements, eyewitness accounts, oral histories, scientific analyses, maps, plants). You must include and analyze at least one map as one of your 2 primary sources. You explain what each primary source says about your issue, and explain why each source is appropriate to use.



**E) Outcomes that address knowledge and expertise you gained from conducting your political project:**

- 21) You define “politics” clearly and explain why your political project fits your definition of “politics.”
- 22) You define your political goal, and explain why this political goal is important to you.
- 23) You explain the strategies you have used to work towards this goal that are appropriate to the goal and appropriate to your values. You explain how effective those strategies were, what you might do differently next time, and why.
- 24) You describe the community organization you have worked with, and explain why you have chosen this group and what you have learned about this group as a result of working with them.
- 25) You have invested at least ten hours in your political project work.
- 26) You explain whether or not you made progress towards your political goal. Did you succeed completely? Did you fail completely? Something in between?
- 27) You provide a description of at least one policy issue that your research and political project help you understand. Who has determined the current policy? Who enforces it?
- 28) You make a set of recommendations on future directions for this policy that stem from your research and political project. You explain why your ideas are better possible future directions to take, drawing on historical research you’ve conducted and the political project you’ve engaged in. You explain how your biases and values shape the policy prescriptions you make.

**F) Outcome that transcends everything else:**

- 29) You survive to the end of the semester.