Profs Baumgartner and McCarthy
Spring 2008
Group assignments

We all know no one likes to do group assignments. Hopefully this will cure you of any previous bad experiences.

Attached is a list of your group members. Each group has 4 members but one which has 5 members. All students got their first or second choice in terms of topic.

Here are some guidelines to make your group go smoothly.

1. Over the first two weeks make sure you decide on the exact, and shared, definition of what your topic is. That is, define the boundaries of your topic. Is it US only? Federal government only, or does it include state and local coverage? Does it correspond to a particular key-word search and agendas-project subtopic, and can these key-words be used in the different search engines? So the first project is to make sure you can all draw precise boundaries around your topic so that you agree what counts and what does not count as part of your study. Remember that your study should preferably cover the entire post-1947 period, though we'll be reasonable if data restrictions require a shorter time frame.

2. Immediately, divide up the work. For most groups it will look something like this, but there may be special cases, and some searches may be very simple whereas others are very time consuming so you should cooperate on that, re-balancing the work as is equitable. Similarly, for some topics it may be better to spend more time on one aspect of this than another, if for example, there simply isn't that much information in a given source, or if it can be found very straightforwardly. In general however, you should divide up the work so that one person takes primary responsibility for each of the following:
   a. Media searches (you decide which media outlets are most appropriate)
   b. Associations unlimited
   c. Agendas project materials (note: there may be many agendas datasets you can use)
   d. Background and other statistics. This will depend on your topic, and there is no single source. However, if the topic is smoking, you should find out how many people smoke over time. If the topic is climate change, some other "real world" indicators will be appropriate.

3. Each of you should participate in bibliographic and qualitative research. You need to learn about the policy and its history and be convinced that the statistical trends you identify accurately reflect social trends that you identify through some qualitative work. Divide this work up. Everyone read a book or two.

4. Cooperate with each other and combine your separate parts into a single presentation for class. The initial presentations may be separate, but by the end we'll want to see them coalesce into a single, consistently formatted, integrated project.

5. Share your knowledge of computer skills and templates of graphs, spreadsheets, etc. Cooperate.

Remember that your own personal project for the class will be to compare what you find in your group project with an additional study of your own, so you should do both of these projects at the same time. This will ensure that you are familiar with all parts of the search processes, all the databases, and two public policy issues. Your term paper can make use of the common material of the group project, but should then add a comparison to a second policy issue.

Group 1: Climate Change

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