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ASSIGNMENT - Democratic Discourse: Policy Letter to Your Representative

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ASSIGNMENT

Democratic Discourse: Policy Letter to Your Representative

DESCRIPTION

This assignment was designed for use in an Introductory Psychology course. In this assignment, students will write a letter to a representative regarding a public policy affecting their communities. Students will explore public policies, identify their representatives on local, state, and federal levels, and apply class concepts and the psychological literature to evaluate a policy.

KEYWORDS

assignment, asynchronous, final project, research, introductory course, psychology, civic engagement, government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify local, state, and federal policies impacting the community.
2. Evaluate a select policy based on its effectiveness.
3. Apply psychological concepts to institution-level processes.
4. Persuade audiences using logic and relevant evidence.
5. Interpret findings from the psychological literature.

Procedure

1. Distribute the assignment description (below).
2. While not necessary, it is suggested that you scaffold this assignment in the following ways:
 - Provide instruction on types of academic sources and using academic databases.
 - Provide instruction or include an activity about citing sources using APA style.
 - In class or online, have students discuss policies impacting their communities. This will increase students' awareness of various policies. Identifying a policy is the part of the assignment that presents the most challenge.
 - In class or online, ask students to identify their local, state, and federal representatives. You can incorporate this into another class topic. For example, when exploring concepts/schemas in the Thinking module, you could ask students to explore their concept of politician. Inevitably, this will be an overwhelmingly negative concept. You can discuss why and then have them learn about their representatives and challenge the associations in their politician concept.

Democratic Discourse: Policy Letter to Your Representative

This project will give you an opportunity to develop and apply your knowledge of psychological theories and concepts as you present a position on a public policy affecting your community.

You will choose a public policy, identify a representative to write to, critique the policy, and argue your position on the policy using your knowledge of psychological theories and concepts.

Since psychology is the science of understanding humans, essentially any public policies that you identify can easily be connected to psychology. Use this assignment as an opportunity to research a topic that is impacting you, the people you know, and the broader community. If you are passionate about education, select one an education policy. If you are passionate about health, choose a health care related policy. If you are passionate about justice, choose a policy related to law or policing. If you are struggling to identify a policy, connect with your instructor and work collaboratively to identify a policy.

Directions

CHOOSE A PUBLIC POLICY

A public policy is a government rule or law that affects the population at large. Public policies are government actions that attempt to solve problems in society. An example of a federal public policy would be that of forgiving a percentage of student loan debt after a designated amount of public/nonprofit service. An example of a local/city policy would be providing housing for asylum-seekers. For this assignment, choose one public policy that interests you to explore further.

IDENTIFY YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

Which policymaker will you write to? Are you going to write to the governor, your state senator, the budget finance committee, the board of education, or someone else? The person you choose to write to should have a current role in policymaking around your topic. Address your letter to the individual(s) that you have chosen.

IDENTIFY YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

Start your letter by introducing the public policy that you have chosen.

1. Describe the current policy.
2. Explore the human issue ostensibly addressed by this policy.
3. Describe any debate around this policy. Be sure to address both “sides” of the issue.
4. Explain why changes to the policy are necessary.
 - This will be a substantial section of your paper. You should reference concepts from class and cite resources that you identified from the psychological literature.
5. Suggest a policy solution.
 - What policy change are you suggesting and why? Support your solution. Again, you should reference concepts from class and/or cite resources that you identified from the psychological literature.
 - Describe what you think your representative should do to resolve the issue. You are trying to convince them to do something. What are you convincing them to do and why should they do it? Your solution might be to maintain the current policy, arguing against those that want to change it, or it could be a new policy you are proposing.

Assignment Details

LETTER FORMATTING

You are writing a formal letter. This is not an APA research paper, though your letter will be academic in nature. There is no strict formatting style for this paper, but it should be a professional letter. This guide from OWL Purdue may be helpful: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/professional_technical_writing/basic_business_letters/index.html. You will need to cite and reference your sources using APA format, however.

APA STYLE CITATIONS & REFERENCES

You will need to find a minimum of three sources for this paper. The sources must be journal articles from peer-reviewed academic journals. Since this is a psychology course and you are applying psychological concepts in this letter, it is suggested that you use a psychology database (e.g., PsycInfo) to find your required sources. While three sources must meet these criteria, you are encouraged to include other sources that may not meet these criteria (news sources, community/advocacy group resources, etc.)

Be sure to use [APA STYLE in text citations](#) for your sources and provide [APA STYLE references](#) for those sources. The reference page can go at the end of your letter, after your signature.

INCORPORATION OF CLASS CONCEPTS

In addition to thoughtfully referencing your required sources, you also need to explicitly apply class concepts in this paper. By “explicitly apply,” this means that the use of class concepts should be incorporated by name, and the application should be obvious to your instructor. *You should thoughtfully apply at least 5 class concepts throughout your letter.*

LETTER OUTLINE

While there are no set requirements regarding the length of your paper, the following suggested outline may be helpful.

- 1 paragraph general introduction
- 1–2 paragraphs summarizing public policy issue, in general
- 2–3 paragraphs explaining the debate
- 2–3 paragraphs explaining why changes are necessary (use course content in this section)
- 2–3 paragraphs explaining your solution (use course content in this section) Are you proposing a new policy or recommending the representative maintain the current policy? Explain.
- 2–3 paragraphs explaining why they should make the policy change you’re proposing or keep the current policy as is (use course content in this section)
- 1 conclusion paragraph
- Reference page

WRITING TIPS

Direct quotes are discouraged. Practice paraphrasing rather than using direct quotes. These sources will help you understand paraphrasing better:

- <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/citations/paraphrasing> (2024. "Paraphrasing." APA Style)
- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/> (2024. Purdue Owl)

When in doubt, cite. It is important to cite your sources. It is better to cite too often than to risk inadequately crediting others' work. See one of the following websites for additional information about APA format or writing help in general.

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html (2024. Purdue Online Writing Lab)
- <https://apastyle.apa.org> (2024. American Psychological Organization)