**TILT Project POLS&202 American Government Assignment Sample**

***TILTED ASSIGNMENT***

**Civic Engagement: Write a Letter to Your Senator**

**DUE DATE:** xxxx, 2020

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this assignment is to show students how accessible government is to everyone and how letter writing is one easy way to participate in civic engagement. This also teaches students a way they can be active citizens after class ends. Writing letters is the most time-honored way to communicate with your elected representatives. Even if you cannot vote, you can take part in the political and legislative process by writing letters.

**KNOWLEDGE:**

You will practice the following skills that are essential to your development as a political science student, including:

* Locating information on a political/policy topic by utilizing academically and politically sound sources
* Locating contact information for an American Government leader
* Identifying a policy or political issue of interest and summarizing its purpose
* Evaluating views on issue of public concern by examining the potential impact of the issue

**TASK:**

Write letter to you Senator, and mail it.

**1. Determine your U.S. Senators and choose who to write.**

Visit [www.senate.gov (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.](http://www.senate.gov) if you are unsure of who your Senator is.

**2. Choose one political or policy issue about which you feel strongly.**

Pick something that is on the national level that is of concern to you (for example: environment, national security, immigration). To get ideas, look at newspapers, magazines or online news sites from the pasts two weeks, scan the websites of the Senator, or watch the national news on TV. Prior to writing your letter, brainstorm ideas about your issue by answering the questions below.

* What is your issue and what is causing the problem?
* Why is your issue an important one for you as a citizen of Washington state and a constituent of this Senator? How is it affecting you personally?
* What can this Senator do to fix the problem?

**3. Review the letter writing format: opening paragraph, body, and conclusion.**

* See tutorial on how to write formal letters at [https://www.toppr.com/guides/english/writing/formal-letters/ (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.](https://www.toppr.com/guides/english/writing/formal-letters/)
* See tutorial on how to write letters to member of Congress at [https://www.writeexpress.com/How-to-Write-a-Letter-to-Congress.html (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.](https://www.writeexpress.com/How-to-Write-a-Letter-to-Congress.html)

**4. Begin your letter**

State your purpose. Be specific and succinct. Focus on just your one chosen policy or political issue.  Example: My name is Jane Smith. I live in Seattle, WA, and I am a constituent. I am writing this letter to ask that you vote for S353, legislation that would cap the out-of-pocket costs of necessary healthcare services.

**5.Write body of letter**

Personalize your letter. Form letters or postcards are just not as effective. Both Senator Murray’s and Senator Cantwell’s staffs have indicated that they look for personal stories.  Example: My cousin, Joe Smith, has Type I diabetes and relies on certain medical devices and medications to stay healthy and alive. I know the great costs he must pay and that his healthcare coverage does not cover some necessary healthcare needs. The resulting costs have bankrupted my cousin, putting him at risk of losing his home. Passage of S353 would allow my cousin to cover his required healthcare needs while also maintaining a decent standard of living. It would allow him to pay his other bills too.

     Be informed when you write your letter, and as you write, be honest and accurate in the information you present. Legislative leaders and staff rely on information from constituents so accurate information is vial. Use specific statistics, numbers, or examples. Saying generally that you don’t like a certain law or regulation is not nearly as impactful.  Example: My cousin is not the only voter in your district struggling with healthcare costs. S. healthcare costs in 2016 were 16.9% GDP according to the OECD, over 5% GDP higher than the next most expensive OECD country. With U.S. GDP of $19 trillion, healthcare costs were about $3.2 trillion, or about $10,000 per person in a country of 320 million people.

**6. Write Conclusion**

Indicate the specific action that you would like the Senator to take and by when. If you would like a reply, you may request that as well. Example: Again, I urge you to vote for S353 to protect ALL your constituents. I would like to receive a reply to this letter. Thank you for your careful consideration.

**7. Copy the letter and submit a copy in the class Canvas courseroom here by March 3. The dropbox can be found by clicking on “Assignments”. It is marked “CivicEngagementAssign.”**

**8.  Mail the letter.**

**9.  If/When you get a response, please share in class.**

**CRITERIA**

*Sample letter to US Senator Patty Murray*

Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The Honorable Patty Murray (D-WA)

154 Russell Senate Office Building

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Your Name

Your Address

Your City, State, Zipcode

Your E-mail

Your Phone Number

Dear Senator Murray:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I live in Seattle, WA and am a constituent. I am writing this letter to ask that you vote for S353, legislation that would cap the out-of-pocket costs of necessary healthcare services.

My cousin, Joe Smith, has Type I diabetes and relies on certain medical devices and medications to stay healthy and alive. I know the great costs he must pay and that his healthcare coverage does not cover some necessary healthcare needs. The resulting costs have bankrupted my cousin, putting him at risk of losing his home. Passage of S353 would allow my cousin to cover his required healthcare needs while also maintaining a decent standard of living. It would allow him to pay his other bills too.

My cousin is not the only voter in your district struggling with healthcare costs. U.S. healthcare costs in 2016 were 16.9% GDP according to the OECD, over 5% GDP higher than the next most expensive OECD country. With U.S. GDP of $19 trillion, healthcare costs were about $3.2 trillion, or about $10,000 per person in a country of 320 million people.

Again, I urge you to vote for S353 to protect ALL your constituents. I would like to receive a reply to this letter. Thank you for your careful consideration.

Sincerely,

Your name

Grading Rubric – Worth 30 points

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| **CRITERIA** | **EXCELLENT** | **GOOD** | **FAIR** | **NEEDS WORK** |
|  | 10 points | 7 points | 4 points | 0-2 points |
| **Content** | -Included key information-summarizing topic and request  -Provided a well-thought-out solution,  -Include facts to support idea and personalized reason(s) | -Included key information  -Provided a solution-provided facts or personalized reasoning but not both | -Missed some key information  -Cited only one example  -Failed to provide reasoning or support for request | -Missing key information, did not provide adequate examples, or failed to provide a plausible solution |
| **Format** | -Stated the purpose at the beginning of the letter  -Letter is concise (approximately one page)  -Kept to one issue  -Tone is polite, yet respectful | -Stated the purpose at the beginning of the letter  -Tone is appropriate | -Stated the purpose at the beginning of the letter  -Tone is inappropriate | -Letter is not written in letter format  -Meaning is unclear  -Tone is inappropriate |
| **Conventions** | -Demonstrates careful proofreading | -Good vocabulary  -Good sentence structure  -One spelling or grammar mistake |  |  |

**ASSIGNMENT BEFORE TILT**

Write a letter to WA Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) Writing a personal letter to your Senator is an effective way to let your voice be heard. When done well, a carefully crafted, concise letter is a powerful tool that can influence lawmakers and bring about change. Nonetheless, Senators are incredibly busy, so take the time and put forth the effort to make your letter well-written and powerful.

**1. Sen. Murray prefers emails.** You can access her email at [https://www.murray.senate.gov/public/ (Links to an external site.)](https://www.murray.senate.gov/public/).

**2. State your purpose.**   
Be specific. Keep your letter focused by addressing only one issue or topic that you find important, and state your main purpose in the opening paragraph of your letter

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**3. Make your letter personal.**   
Keep your letter unique; don’t just copy a form letter and send it. Sending one hundred (or even one million) copies of the same letter is not an effective way to communicate the real concerns of real people.Instead, write a personal letter, from your heart.

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**4. Support your stance.**   
Be informed when you write your letter, and as you write, be honest and accurate in the information you present. Use specific statistics, numbers, or examples.

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**5. Make your request.**   
Indicate the specific action that you would like the representative to take, and by when (if applicable). You can request, but do not demand, a response to your letter.

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**6. Remain professional and courteous.**   
No matter how upset you might feel, be courteous and professional. Again, it is perfectly acceptable (even preferable) to show your passion for the topic in your writing, but that does not mean you should resort to mud-slinging, name calling, swearing, or similar tactics.

**7. Keep you letter clear and concise.**   
As you write, don’t resort to being long-winded. Your representatives are busy; make their lives easier by stating clearly and concisely what you want, why, and by when. Generally, you should keep your letter to one page.

**8. Close your letter.**   
Close your letter by restating your purpose for writing the representative and repeating your request for action. Then thank the person for taking the time to read your letter.

**9. Know to whom to send your letter.**   
Send your letter to your local representatives (your house representative and your two senators). You may think it worthwhile to let your voice be heard by sending a letter to every member of Congress, but they will likely forward the letter on to your local officials (who in turn may get quite annoyed at receiving dozens of copies of the same letter from the same person).

**10. Proofread your letter.**   
Before you sign and seal your letter, make sure to proofread it first. Ensure that you have not left out any important, pertinent information.  If you’ve repeated yourself or if something isn’t as clear as it could be, revise. After making any necessary changes, read over your letter one more time to check for spelling, punctuation, grammar, and other errors.

**11. Know that your vote counts.**   
Congressional leaders exist to serve you, a representative of the American people. Most of them truly want to represent faithfully the concerns of those they serve. And they understand that without your vote, and that of others like you, they will not remain in office.

### Key Takeaways from TILTing this assignment:

* When I first began TILTing, I wrote it from the perspective of the instructor and as someone who also works on the school’s assessment committee. I had to go back to use language that was more commonly used to make this more accessible and understandable to students.
* Kathleen Chambers was essential in my first TILT. Training on this is extraordinarily helpful.
* Spending time thinking about and articulating the purpose of the assignment led me to discuss with students how the skills they’re learning might be valuable and meaningful in real life.and how this could help them be better citizens.
* I struggled a bit with changing the course level and program level outcomes into meaningful language that did not sound too academic. I wanted this to be more accessible and will now include discussion on this in the best practices section of the North Seattle Assessment Committee Canvas shell. In other words, TILTing an assignment for class actually helped inform other work.
* In terms of skills, I focused heavily on writing and organization as well as navigating political websites.
* About the time I started working on this, the New York Times published an article on how the new generation doesn’t know how to write letters and/or send them. I did an unscientific survey in my class and found this to be true. I decided to provide both links to examples of letters written to members of Congress and a mock one I wrote to highlight the process. It has never occurred to me that students would not know how to write a formal letter but it is not included in the public school curriculum.
* Now that I have a much more detailed set of instructions and examples for students to reference when working on these letters, the question arises, have I done too much of the work for them? This is the primary concern I have heard at TILT trainings and in meetings. For me, I think it is incumbent upon us to make assignments accessible while still helping foster the skills we seeking to foster. Looking at how little I included in my original assignment, I now realize how much I assumed my students knew.