

## Research Letter Assignment – POLS 2311 (Fall 2021)

General Instructions: Each student must write a 1-page letter about a current national policy issue.

Detailed Instructions: Your paper must be directed to **any** member of the Texas delegation to the US Congress (2 US senators and 36 representatives) and should address a controversial national policy issue. I recommend that your paper begin with an introduction that clearly states 1) the bill/issue you are addressing, 2) the action you are urging the senator/representative to take, and 3) your reason for urging a particular action. Your letter must rely upon facts and ideas presented in class, your textbook, and **at least five** valid external sources (e.g., national newspapers/news magazines, academic papers, or government documents). The purpose of this assignment is to create a paper that is personal (your paper expresses your thoughts and feelings about the issue) and well researched (your paper relies upon concepts, facts, and arguments from valid sources to make a convincing case for or against your bill/issue). Things to consider:

1. Of the national policy issues in the news, which are you most interested in? Can I narrow the issue to something very precise, rather than something very broad? (If yes, your task will be easier.)
2. What position do I believe the senator/representative should take on the bill/issue? What position do others (pundits, party leaders, the president, interest groups, etc.) think should be taken on the bill/issue? (For the latter, basing your argument on knowledgeable people will help you be more informed and persuasive.)

To explore your bill/issue, you will benefit most from issue coverage in newspapers and news magazines. I recommend daily reading of both (e.g., the *Washington Post*, *Time*) and use of newspaper search tools through the UTA library, as well [realclearpolitics.com](http://realclearpolitics.com), [thehill.com](http://thehill.com), and [politico.com](http://politico.com). Academic papers and government documents are also strongly encouraged, whereas television news stories are not. For academic papers visit UTA's library site for political science at <http://libguides.uta.edu/polisci/articles>.

**A properly formatted references page must be attached to your letter**, though in-text citations (e.g., Boyea 2021) are not necessary. Consult a style manual about the reference format (use the *Chicago Manual of Style*, UTA's IDEAS Center and Writing Center can provide advice). APA and MLA are recommended formats.

Use of Websites: Many sites on the internet are venues for biased, uninformed viewpoints (e.g., blogs). If you wish to use a non-newspaper website or a video as a reference, you are required to 1) visit the IDEAS Center, Writing Center, or consult a style manual to consult how to correctly cite; and 2) provide at least two lines of information (after the citation on the reference paper) that supply evidence about the legitimacy of the organization or person. Ask yourself, does this seem like a valid and informed source? (If not, do not use.)

Due: Document (doc, docx, pdf) submitted to the “Research Letter Assignment” link in Canvas’ Assignment page before 12:00PM on Tuesday, October 12th. *Emailed letters will not be accepted. Late papers (after 12:00PM on 10/12/21) will receive a 30-point deduction.*

Grade: Your grade will be evaluated according to the criteria below.

- **Minimum Criteria (50 points; otherwise, 0 points if any of the following are not met)**
  - Letter must be one single-spaced page; typed and properly addressed to a member of the Texas delegation to the US Congress; margins must be 1-inch, font either Times New Roman or Calibri and 10-12 point.
  - The letter must be addressed to the recipient’s Washington, DC office.
  - The letter must include a **properly formatted** reference page with **at least 5** external sources.
  - The letter must provide the student’s perspective on a current national policy issue.
- General Content (0-20 points)
  - The letter must clearly identify one bill/issue and what action should be taken.
  - The letter must clearly articulate **why** such action should be taken and opposing viewpoints considered.
  - Is the letter both **personal** and **well researched**?
- Research/Sources (0-20 points)
  - Do the references originate from quality sources? (Or do they include TV sources and blog citations?)
  - Is a proper citation format used in the attached reference page?
- Style/Grammar Spelling/Etc. (0-10 points)
  - Is the letter logically organized?
  - Is the letter nearly free of grammatical, spelling, usage and other errors?
  - Is the letter and tone respectful and courteous?