Assignments Overview

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Self Goals + Self Reflection

Keeping with our objective of lifelong learning, it is of paramount importance to understand what you mean to get out of this class. As much as I can attempt to force themes and paradigms and evidence suggesting solid conclusions to you, this is your learning experience, and to get the most out of it [particularly with things like the Do Something policy]. This assignment takes two parts – setting goals for yourself, and reflecting on your achievement in the end. You will not be directly assessed on meeting them unless you tell me too. The purpose of this is to either improve, or recognize and analyze other important lessons to walk away with.

If you’re wondering about grading, I will be looking for you to have taken things seriously and provided useful feedback for both you and me. I would love to see you strive to accomplish some of your own personal goals in the course too.

Self-Goals

You should write up a minimum of two, a recommendation of three to four, and a maximum of five goals for this semester. What is important to you about this class and what do you want to make sure you get out of it? What can make this more interesting and more worthwhile to you? Try to identify some skills to improve upon, as well as some topics you’d like to make sure you become an expert in. I’d recommend framing this assignment in the context of: How do I maximize my learning experience?

Examples:

- Development of writing, presentation, or critical analysis skills
- Developing above-and-beyond outside engagement in the course
- Taking ownership over some element of the class or curriculum to help improve it
- Becoming a class discussion extraordinaire
- Producing a portfolio of high-quality deliverables

Comment [CM1]: I think careful thought about one’s effort, participation, and expectations [both personal and of the class] leads to a more valuable and comprehensive learning experience. This assignment and its brethren later on in the semester give students a chance to reflect on this before, during, and after they put in all of their work. Given the fact that a lot of assignments are open-ended and power is given to students to make their learning experience their own, I feel even more strongly that this is essential and very positive to helping provide some guidance to the class.

Goals:
- Empower students to think about what they want to get out of the class
- Encourage students to start thinking about experimental learning
- Get students to invest themselves in the experimental nature of the class early on.
• Becoming the foremost expert on any topic in the environment, technology, policy, history, or anything related to the course
• Being Meta: Contributing to the experimental nature of the class however possible

Check-in

Shoot me a quick email telling me which goal you are succeeding most on and in what ways, and which you need to work most on and in what ways. Alternatively, let me know if any were just plain wrong, and if you are changing anything. Don’t be afraid to ask questions of me, as well.

This is intentionally informal, because it is for your own benefit to figure out how you are meeting your own goals. If you’re on track and you prove to me things are going well, that’s great, but otherwise it’s a great starting point for a conversation.

Reflection

Think about it – how did you do, and how did the course do? Spend a little time thinking about these, and write up some of your thoughts for me. You should address roughly everything below, but focus on whatever areas are most important to you personally. This is an important assignment both for you to assess yourself and learn from the experiences of the semester, and for me/the class in order to make it even better the next time we run it. Putting in a lot of effort to this assignment is good for you, and good for me.

- Reflect on the class
  - (+) What was great?
  - (-) What was not great?
  - (ʌ) What has potential if changed?
  - Did it meet all, some, or any of its goals? If so, why, and if not, how could it have done better?
  - What did you learn from the experience, and what might you or I do differently in the future?
  - If you learned one thing, or were attempting to summarize what you got out of this class – what would you say?

- Reflect on yourself
  - How did you do on your learning objectives? Did you meet them? Were they actually far different than what you expected? How did they evolve for you throughout the class?
  - Do self-assess each one, and note how or why it did or did not work, for your own benefit.
  - I’m not specifying a metric to assess yourself on, and I encourage you to develop one you think works for the questions you’re answering. A sample set could be: “Insufficient, Borderline, Slightly Positive, and Positive.” It’s all up to you how much granularity you want, and which connotations of certain words you want.

Comment [CM2]: I figure that this assignment is absolutely essential for about half of the class, and not for the rest. By keeping it really informal, everyone gets to email in a status report, and people who give insubstantial ones, are struggling, or think they are not meeting their own goals get an opportunity to touch base, explain why, and solicit feedback from the teacher.

A more structured assignment would lose some of the organic nature that lets this feel more conversational and less evaluative.

Goals:
- Let people do a quick check-in, but be introspective as they please.
- Have a chance to touch bases with people slipping the cracks / who would like more guidance.
- Do it in an informal way that adapts to each person’s needs, but can be controlled by either the teacher or the student in that aspect.

Comment [CM3]: This assignment is intended to accomplish a LOT all at once – feedback on the class, improvements for next time, evaluation of one’s learning objectives, and general thoughts on just about everything. I expect people to spend a non-trivial amount of time on it by the nature of what I’ve laid out as topics to address, but there are no requirements on length.

Goals:
- Get useful feedback on impressions of the course, both good and bad, and how it might be changed.
- Get some targeted feedback on how certain experiments or ideas were perceived.
- Give students a chance to reflect on their own goals.
- Empower students to change the class however they want in as freeform of a fashion as possible.
- Reflect on the future, and think about how you might carry these successes or unaccomplished goals going forward into other work.

- **Changes for the class**
  - What should be done differently if this class is taught again?
    - I'm leaving this open ended, but here are a few things to think about.
  - Were the assignments ever too open-ended? Did you understand what you were supposed to do? How comfortable were you with putting your own spin on assignments?
    - What was your favorite assignment? Least favorite?
  - Do you feel like you had a clear understanding of how you would be evaluated?
  - Were any classes poor uses of time to you? Are there any classes or topics you wish we had more time with?
  - Would you change any of the class' goals?
  - Where could the class have tried crazier things possibly to great effect?
  - What changes to the class would have enhanced your learning experience?
  - **What else?**
    - Pretend you are me and this is your class and you are in total control—tell me anything and everything you would do with it.

**Presentations & Discussions [x3]**

Across all three presentation/discussion combos, here are the kinds of things you should aim for that I will be looking for. There are surely more, but this should give you a good idea. Overall you want to make sure that you are making a point, keeping the class engaged, and advancing learning on the whole.

- Connections to previous content in class
- Teaching us something new and fascinating. Period.
- Analysis of your topic using previous frameworks/themes/trends the class has identified, or identification of new ones
  - I realize that there are no frameworks/themes/trends that are given here—these will emerge from things you identify in class, and can be brand new or build off of each other. You will guide how we analyze things.
- Effective discussion leading—do your best to include everyone fairly, manage time effectively when the class is or is not engaged, leave most of the talking to non-group members, etc.
- Provoke topics that the class seems to be interested in
- Keep it interesting—If we have a consistently compelling experience during your group’s presentation and discussion, you can consider that a success
City Case Studies

For this assignment class will be split up into four equal teams, each of whom will then get to pick a time period to focus on, and choose a city(s) from that time period that would make an interesting case study.

- Ancient [pre-1000]
- Past [pre-1800]
- Modern [20-21st century]
- Developing [now / developing world]
- Future [things on the horizon that people are talking about]

These groups will each get a half of a class period to present about the city they chose, perhaps for about 10-15 minutes, in whatever medium they choose. Afterwards, they should facilitate a discussion that links the city back to themes and concepts we previously talked about, and highlight the interesting aspects of that city's relation to the environment or the implications of the way that city approaches its interactions.

Each group should assign a short reading or research assignment about the city to provide context for our discussions. Your readings do not need to relate to your presentation, and can be there for any educational purposes you decide are worthwhile.

One member of the group should also devote themselves to playing the role of Scholar during their team's class discussion. The Scholar is in charge of recording the major themes of the discussion, along with large questions that emerge either in conversation or that they notice on their own. They should email out this summary, with large takeaway questions and points, to the class within two days of their group's discussion so that you can continue discussing things it found significant or interesting.

Technological Innovations for Better or Worse

Similar to the previous discussion leading assignment, we will again split ourselves into four equal teams to each get half a class period. This time, however, the focus is on technological innovations. Two teams will choose large-scale innovations (oil refinement is a good example) that have enabled positive or sustainable effects in our interactions with the environment, and the other two will choose negative ones.

Teams should be prepared to again give a brief presentation on their findings, and facilitate a class discussion on this and perhaps how it connects back to things we've previously studied. The same format as before will be used for 10-15 minute presentations, a class discussion, assigning reading, and having a designated Scholar during their discussion.

The focus of these presentations and discussions should be on the new scenarios enabled by these technologies, and how they have markedly changed the world—whether in a noticeable or behind the scenes kind of way. Discussing why these technologies succeeded or were innovative will also be helpful to understand the problem space.
Policy

The final presentation and discussion leading assignment probably feels familiar at this point – the class will divide into four teams, each covering a piece of legislation or domain of government intervention relating to the environment, and give a presentation on either the effects of their legislation, or the current status of a piece of proposed legislation. After a brief presentation, they will again facilitate a discussion on the topic of their research. The legislation can be domestic or international, past or present or future, and does not even have to have been successful. Anything that promotes an interesting look into environmental policy issues is sure to make for a good discussion.

Teams should be prepared to again give a brief presentation on their findings, and facilitate a class discussion on this and perhaps how it connects back to things we’ve previously studied. The same format as before will be used for 10 or 15 minute presentations, a class discussion, assigning reading, and having a designated Scholar during their discussion.

These presentations should focus on the broad impact of the legislation or government intervention, and then the team should lead an engaging discussion on topics related to what they researched. Teams are also encouraged to use and/or assign primary source readings related to their legislation [government reports, the actual bill itself, etc.]

Synthesis [x2]

For both main units of our class you should write up a synthesis paper after our last class discussion – which will itself focus on synthesizing. You should write between one and three pages about any topic you want from that unit, picking out one topic you find to be particularly significant. Aim to inform about your topic of choice in ways that we did not achieve in class by tying in themes, frameworks, paradigms, external examples, and even comparisons to other parts of class.

You will probably find the class discussions particularly helpful in choosing what to write about, and whether you want to focus on the importance of specific things or the presence of an overarching theme across several, you noticed, or even an observation about your own interests in the space.

These papers are entirely at your discretion, so long as they are informed by what we have been studying and break new ground for what we’ve done in class. You should include references to the sources we have been discussing in class, and doing some external research is heavily encouraged so you are even more of an expert in your topic area.

Before submitting, you will swap papers with a partner and read over each other’s work. Challenge each other’s ideas and see how much more you can get out of the collaboration.

Comment [CM7]: In contrast to the previous two presentations, this one is a little broader and asks for teams to take a look at legislation. I felt that engaging students with a mix of primary source and contemporary reporting would make this a very, very interesting.

Goals:
- Get students to research primary sources and use them in class.
- Encourage a broad exploration of global policy as it relates to the environment, and what the effects of various acts have been.
- Let students look into the biases that might influence the passage or blocking of various pieces of legislation without trying to introduce a bias.

Comment [CM8]: The point of the synthesis assignment in my mind is to get students to think very critically about what they just learned in the past several weeks and try to draw meaningful connections throughout that. The papers are not meant to be cursory overviews – they are to challenge students to hone in on something particularly interesting to them, or a theme that they noticed running consistently throughout the topics.

These papers are not meant to be research heavy, and can rely on a few external sources and references to what we have read / discussed in class.

Goals:
- Draw connections between different topics, paradigms, and frameworks discussed in this portion of the class.
- Use in class and external sources to further develop knowledge within a space of interest.
- Reflect on knowledge acquired within this portion of the class and identify spaces that are compelling and interesting to the student.
One Page of Anything

This is by far the strangest assignment in here, so have some fun with it. It is also the simplest. Literally, just write me a page, about anything. If it turns into three, that is ok too, but above all I would like you to present an interesting point to me, and make a cool argument. Your grade on this will be 60% completion, 40% making me think about whatever it is that you presented.

Data Viz Re-Creation

In the name of inter-disciplinary learning, I’d like you to spend some time working on re-visualizing some information. Your objective is to find data somewhere* – in whatever hybrid of quantitative and qualitative – and write up to three pages on the following. Your write-up will probably play heavily off concepts that we mention in the previous class, so take the following with a grain of salt.

1. **What is wrong with the current visualization?** Think about how it might be misleading, or lack a central argument that it is trying to prove. Consider if the information is being used to prove the wrong phenomena, or if there are trends being hidden in the way it is being used. What appeals to you as problems in the data or its visualization? Is there anything missing? There is a lot of potential here.

2. **Improve it.** In whatever manner you choose to, re-visualize the data. You can do this in whatever manner you find fitting. You are welcome to do this in whatever manner you find fitting – poster, website, computer application, etc.

3. **Why did you do that?** Justify the changes you made, and why they improve upon the original visualization. Did you improve their argument? Make a new one? Remove bias? Make it easier to discover trends? Does your visualization help or hurt the agenda the original author might have had?

*: Recommended sources for this would be graphics heavy newspapers (USA Today in particular, or The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Boston Globe, etc), or annual/environmental reports from corporations. You might also look at federally published data sets.

Final Project

The final project is left intentionally open ended so that students can feel empowered to explore whatever spaces they want to, in whatever variety of ways will suit their ideas and goals best. However, to make sure that things don’t go drastically bad, there is still a proposal phase for us to all get on the same page about what you expect to deliver, in what format, on what topics, and how you will do it.

Here are the requirements:

- **Do significant external research**
  - Your final deliverable should include references to at least three external sources.
  - You will probably research much more than that.
Primary sources are always a lot of fun for their perspective, but it is understandable if they are not available.

- **Provide strong analytical content**
  - Do not restate your research – bring it all together to make conclusions, draw connections to our previous topics, examine your topic with the frameworks/trends that emerged as significant during classes.

- **Produce a deliverable of non-trivial effort and content**
  - I’ve suggested a five to ten written page paper as a benchmark, but certain deliverables might be different.
  - A recorded presentation of 20 minutes with supplement, an ~7 page paper, an Expo-style poster (consult with me on what good examples of those are though), a website of comparable length to the paper/poster, etc.
  - All of these ought to include references to external sources somewhere, and varying degrees of visual explanations to support your arguments / format

- **Deliver a presentation**
  - Inform the class of what you’ve done at the end, focusing on telling us what you did, teaching us something new, and telling us why we should care. Have an objective of what you are trying to inform us of.

- **Use of visual display techniques**
  - Regardless of your deliverable, I would like to see a compelling visual explanation of something – data, phenomena, etc. This does not have to be a focus, but ought to be there.

- **Document and reflect upon your process**
  - In addition to a bibliography, provide a brief reflection on your process

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**Proposa**

You will be assigned randomly to a partner and pitch your projects to each other – content, deliverable, research strategy, timelines, other random plans – the whole shebang. You will each then write a proposal document to me about your partner’s project. You are welcome to change around certain things on them, and make suggestions for how they execute on their deliverable or precisely what topic they cover, but they must approve of what you have written before it is sent to me.

By communicating your ideas of what your final project is to someone else but not having control over the actual form of it, you will have a chance to collaborate on your ideas and be forced to accurately know what you want. Your partner can also suggest research paths, check for feasibility of completion, and just be a general advisor on your project throughout, thanks to their intimate knowledge into what you committed to deliver.

**Deliverable**

Produce a non-trivial deliverable that incorporates at least two of the major topics we’ve been covering in class – from the environment to technology to policy to history. The intellectual content of it should be similar to a small research paper – perhaps five to ten written pages, but you can...
accomplish this via whatever medium you prefer to work in. The goals of this project are to demonstrate significant research and analysis work of whatever topic you choose, using whatever sources or techniques are most relevant to you. I will schedule meetings or email conversations with everyone early on to make sure that you are on track with a well-scoped topic, a sufficiently challenging deliverable, and a good plan to accomplish it all.

Good topic scopes might include visualizing information about recycling or waste for a couple of different places or variables, investigating the market for carbon credits, researching upcoming legislation around the globe relating to industrial pollution, or even correlating the effects of tourism in Europe to trends in its average environmental impact.

Some ideas for mediums:

- Poster
- Website
- Paper
- Recorded Presentation [make your own TEDTalk]
- Challenge me!

**Presentation**

As part of your final project, you are also going to deliver a presentation that relates to whatever topic you've chosen. For this, we will take some time in class the week before to pair everyone up with a partner who has a similar topic to theirs, so that your presentation can be a combined effort that builds off of the other person's topic. Your presentation, together, should be no more than 20 minutes, with up to five afterwards for questions. You can do it in whatever format you want, and talk about whatever you want, but having one or two central theses is probably a good idea.

Your presentation should encompass the following points, which will be assessed on:

- **Significance** – Make an interesting point that is non-obvious to someone other than you.
- **Accessibility** – Non-experts in your field should be capable of picking up on what you are talking about.
- **Structure and Presentation** – Make your presentation well organized and well executed, with effective support from whatever resources you need.
- **Connections** – Bring it back around to something we all know from the class, and help us understand how and why you chose this topic.

*Comment [CM14]: The goal of this is for everyone in the class to benefit from the work students have done and get educated on the topics their classmates have been researching.

Goals:
- Get each student to stand and deliver on a small subset of their project
- Make students synthesize all of their projects down to a few salient and presentable points
- Everyone learns a bunch in the process!*