

**iCitizen Project**  
**PART 3: CHAOS OF DEMOCRACY PROJECT**  
**POL 120 – Fall 2018**

**Overview.** In the *Dune* series (written by Frank Herbert), House Atreides resists efforts to “democratize” the imperial government it controls, with the emperor’s sister, Alia, characterizing it best: “Atredies power must *never* be marginalized by the *chaos of democracy!*” As you know, negative characterizations of democracy are not new; James Madison famously (in Federalist 10) described direct democracy as “mob rule.” Indeed, the word *democracy* was never commonly used prior to the Cold War to describe the U.S. governmental system; the Founders favored a “republican” government, not a “mob.”

As a term, though, *democracy* today equates with representative forms of government and is often synonymous with popular sovereignty. Much political debate focuses on whether the American political system is democratic enough – and how far, exactly, the people’s collective influence and direct participation should extend. Voting is just one method of civic engagement; participating in civil discourse, attending governmental meetings, and conversing with fellow citizens are other, potent examples of political action. Civic participation, therefore, is the lifeblood of democratic governance; a government “by the people, for the people,” is only true to the extent that citizens actively engage. And, as Alia Atredies contends, democracy can be chaotic – especially in a federal system which offers myriad opportunities to participate beyond voting.

**Expectations.** For this assignment, you will practice your civic prowess by engaging in two (2) political activities of your choosing. Each option combines both civic action and individual reflection. In completing these activities, I encourage you to argue/advocate/support your own political beliefs; your grade will be based on how well you incorporate what you have learned thus far into your action. Put another way, you should promote your own opinions – but make sure they are informed by the course’s concepts. This is an opportunity to practice your persuasive argumentation and critical thinking skills alongside informed political engagement.

**Directions.** You are required to complete TWO (2) of the four (4) assignments listed below. Each is worth 100 points, for a project total of 200 points. Each assignment will be graded independently of the others (i.e. each has its own grading criteria, see below), and should be submitted separately on Blackboard, as indicated. Directions for each option (including submission details) are available on the following pages.

**Due Date.** BOTH of your assignments are due no later than Monday, November 26, 2018 @ 11:59 p.m. via Blackboard.

### **OPTION 1: Editorial Blog**

Write a blog post where you either:

- A. Support a 2018 federal or state political candidate for office; OR
- B. Support/Oppose a Michigan ballot initiative that will appear on the November 2018 ballot.

You should be prepared to compose a meaningful blog that demonstrates that you have a solid base of knowledge on the candidate or ballot initiative and, consequently, a logical conclusion for why you are supporting/opposing the candidate or ballot proposal.

**Specifics.** Your blog post should be concise, approximately 500-700 words (roughly 1-2 pages), and clearly articulates a position and rationale for why readers (and the public) should vote your prefer way. It is expected that you will have done some research on your candidate or ballot initiative, incorporating such evidence in your blog.

When writing about a (federal OR state) political candidate, you should:

1. Identify who the candidate is (name), which office he/she is seeking, and his/her political party.
2. Briefly describe the candidate's *platform*. Recall that a platform is the list of issues and what the candidate would do on those issues if elected to office. Most candidates have a theme of 2-3 major issues which encapsulates their campaign, so you should strive to describe the candidate's message so that readers are informed.
3. Clearly state why you support the candidate. Think of this as a thesis statement: a brief synopsis, or reason, for why you believe the candidate is the best choice.
4. Defend your opinion! You should provide evidence for your position beyond "Because I said so." Demonstrate that your opinion is informed. For example: You can use a candidate's prior record in office to illustrate how she will tackle crime. You can cite external facts and figures (from legitimate sources) that back up a candidate's assertions. Alternatively, you can also make more philosophical arguments using our course's readings and concepts, including that a particular candidate's views on American ideals is better than the others. In short, you should make sure that you use evidence to back up your opinion.
5. Briefly conclude with a reminder for your reader to vote in November!

When writing about a state ballot initiative, you should:

1. Identify the proposal's name, including its sponsoring organization (i.e. the "committee" that got the proposal on the ballot). Check with the Secretary of State's [website](#) for further information on each "certified" ballot proposal.
2. Briefly describe the ballot proposal. What will it do? How? Is this a constitutional amendment or not? Bear in mind that most persons will not be familiar with many ballot initiatives, so you should make sure you provide an apt summary of what may be a very complex issue.
3. Clearly state why you favor or oppose the proposal. Think of this as a thesis statement: a brief synopsis, or reason, for why you are supporting the initiative.
4. Defend your choice! You should provide evidence for your position beyond "Because I said so." Demonstrate that your opinion is informed. For example: If you support legalizing recreational marijuana, you could cite facts and figures demonstrating how marijuana differs from "hard drugs" relative alcohol (using legitimate sources). You can also make more philosophical arguments using our course's readings and concepts. In short, you should make sure that you use evidence to back up your opinion.
5. Briefly conclude with a reminder for your reader to vote in November!

**Submission.** Submit your completed assignment using Blackboard’s blog functionality. You may either upload your blog as a WORD document or otherwise “copy and paste” into the blog window. NO EMAILED SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. If you encounter difficulties, please email me as soon as possible.

**Grading.** In scoring your blog, I will use the following rubric (100 points possible):

1. **Identify Candidate/Ballot Proposal:** The blog should identify early either the candidate or which ballot initiative being discussed. Readers should also get a good general sense of who the candidate is or what the ballot proposal entails.
2. **Argumentation:** Blogs should strive to provide accurate representations of candidates and ballot proposals, incorporating class concepts, discussions, and readings as appropriate. Justifications for support or opposition will be logical and persuasive.
3. **Organization:** Blogs should follow a logical layout, preventing the reader from becoming “lost” or unsure. Paragraphs should be of sufficient length (i.e. 5-7 sentences).
4. **Veracity:** Top-notch blogs will prove their arguments with sufficient and appropriate evidence, while ensuring that such evidence is properly cited (i.e. inform the reader where the evidence is coming from).
5. **Articulation:** Well-written blogs will be devoid of spelling, grammar, and syntax errors. Blogs should strive to follow the format guidelines above.

## **OPTION 2: Letter to Legislator**

Write a letter to your federal or state legislator supporting or opposing a pending piece of legislation (i.e. a bill). Doing so will allow you to practice your writing abilities in a different medium, while exercising your right to petition the government. Complete the steps (below) to prepare and correctly format your letter. A sample letter is also included below.

**Specifics.** Complete the following steps to determine (1) what to write; (2) whom to write; and (3) how to properly format your letter.

1. **Pick your bill and level.** You should select a piece of federal or state legislation that is being debated by the U.S. Congress or Michigan State Legislature. You can peruse the websites for each to conduct bill searches (see below). I suggest using general topics to search for bills which you find important. For example: If you are interested in federal student loan funding, you should search for “student loans.” Once search results display, you can select a bill for more information, including its text, summary, sponsors, and current status (including any committee markup and amendments). Make sure you select a bill that is pending and NOT one which has been signed into law.
  - a. **Federal legislation:** Visit the U.S. Congress’s [website](#). Use the top search bar to enter search items. Do NOT select bills which have been signed by the president.
  - b. **Michigan legislation:** Visit the Michigan Legislature’s [website](#). This website is not as user-friendly. I suggest that you select a topical category you find interesting and then click “Show Bills” to see a current list of pending legislation. Again, be sure to select bills that have NOT been signed by the governor.
2. **State and research your position.** Once you have identified a bill, you should formulate an opinion on it. Do you support the bill’s passage or not? Why? You should support your opinion with 3-5 facts or evidence identified through research using legitimate sources (scientific and un-scientific are fine). The bulk of your letter will be devoted to flushing out your position using this evidence.
3. **Identify your legislator.** Remember: If you are writing about a STATE bill, then you should consult your Michigan state representative or senator. If you are discussing a FEDERAL bill, you should write your U.S. Representative or one of Michigan’s U.S. Senators.
  - a. If you wish to write your U.S. Representative, you should consult the House of Representative’s website to determine which representative is yours. Simply visit the [website](#) and input your zip code. (You may need to provide your street address if your zip code straddles multiple districts.) Your representative will then appear. Click his or her name, and then note his/her Washington, D.C. office address (normally found at the bottom of his or her webpage).
  - b. If you wish to write to a U.S. Senator, you should visit the Senate’s [website](#) and click on Michigan. You can then click on either Senator Stabenow or Petters to access their contact information.
  - c. If you wish to write your Michigan state representative, you should consult the Michigan House of Representative’s [website](#). You should input your street address, city, and zip code to identify your state representative.
  - d. If you wish to write your Michigan state senator, you should consult the Michigan Senate’s [website](#). Since the Michigan Senate is based on population, you will need to input your street address, city, and zip code to identify your state senate district.
4. **Draft your letter.** Compose your letter using the information you have collected. Remember that an effective letter is a personal one: concise, informed, and polite. Senators and representatives pay attention to constituent mail since it affords them a means of securing

reelection; responding to your concerns, helping you with issues, or just acknowledging your opinion goes a long way in establishing trust.

5. **Tips on writing your letter.** Some other guidelines to following in writing your letter:
  - a. Try to not exceed more than two (2) pages. Your letter should also be single-spaced and follow the format noted below.
  - b. In a short introduction paragraph, state your purpose (i.e. tell the representative/senator what bill you are discussing and how you want them to vote on it). Stick with a SINGLE bill. Support your position with the rest of the letter.
  - c. Cite the bill by name and number. Example: "I'm writing today to discuss your support for HB 1001, the Clean Up America Act."
  - d. Be factual and support your position with evidence about how the legislation is likely to affect you, others, and/or the country/state. Avoid overly emotional and philosophical arguments.
  - e. If you oppose the legislation, indicate likely bad effects and suggest alternatives.
  - f. Ask for the legislator's views, but do NOT demand support. Remember, legislators respond to a variety of views and even if they do not support your position on this particular bill they may support it in the future under different circumstances.
6. **TYPE your letter.** Use templates following this direction sheet to correctly format your letter.

**Submission.** Submit your completed letter as a WORD document (.doc or .docx) using the SafeAssign link on Blackboard. Failure to upload a WORD document will delay grading. NO EMAILED SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. If you encounter difficulties with uploading your letter, please email me as soon as possible.

**Grading.** In scoring your letter, I will use the following rubric (100 points possible):

1. **Thesis/Position:** The letter identifies early the (1) bill being discussed and (2) the author's opinion on how the legislator should approach the bill. Superior letters will briefly identify what the bill is about, its major functions and provisions, and other relevant information (e.g. co-sponsors and prior activity).
2. **Argumentation:** Letters should strive to provide accurate representations of bills, incorporating evidence as appropriate (including external sources alongside class concepts and readings). Justifications for support or opposition will be logical and persuasive.
3. **Organization:** Letters should follow a logical layout, preventing the legislator from becoming "lost" or unsure. Paragraphs should be of sufficient length (i.e. 5-7 sentences). All components of the assignment appear in the letter.
4. **Veracity:** Top-notch letters will prove their arguments with sufficient and appropriate evidence, while ensuring that such evidence is properly cited (i.e. inform the legislator where the evidence is coming from). For example: "According to the U.S. Department of Labor...."
5. **Articulation:** Well-written letters will be devoid of spelling, grammar, and syntax errors. Letters must follow the format guidelines.

First Name Last Name  
123 My House Rd.  
Town, MI 48613

[Present Date]

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_ (name) \_\_\_\_\_  
United States Senate **OR** United States House of Representatives  
Michigan State Senate **OR** Michigan House of Representatives  
\_\_\_\_\_ (address from legislator's website) \_\_\_\_\_  
Washington, D.C. (zip code from website)  
**OR** Lansing, MI (zip code from website)

Dear (Senator [Name] / **OR** Congressman [Name]):

I am one of your constituents and I am writing in regards to

(Short paragraph about the purpose of your letter and your position/argument)

(Next, use facts and details regarding your bill to show you have researched it – use multiple paragraphs)

(Close by asking for the legislator's views but do not demand support)

Sincerely,

First Name Last Name

**NOTE: THIS IS A LETTER TO A STATE SENATOR**

Kevin G. Lorentz II  
1811 Bentley Road  
Bentley, MI 48613

November 14, 2017

The Honorable Michael Green  
Michigan State Senate  
P.O. Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Senator Green:

I write to you today to urge you and your Senate colleagues to take up consideration of increased funding for Michigan's higher educational institutions. As you know, the affordability of college has been decreasing in recent years, a nationwide trend, despite politicians from both political parties stressing the importance of a college education. As part of that commitment, I would like to see you support an increased pupil allowance in the higher education budget presented by Governor Snyder.

An increase in funding for our state's colleges and universities will help thousands of Michigan students to attend college and jump-start their careers. As a former businessman, you know the importance of having an educated workforce pool. Giving our higher educational institutions appropriate means in which to educate and train this workforce is not only right but essential for Michigan's economic recovery.

Thank you for reading my letter. I would welcome hearing your thoughts on this issue. If I can be of any further service, please do not hesitate to contact me at the return address herewith.

Sincerely,

Kevin G. Lorentz II

**THIS IS A SAMPLE – YOUR LETTERS WILL BE MORE INFORMATIVE AND LONGER**

### **OPTION 3: Attend a Local Government Meeting**

Attend a local government meeting, either in person or via recording, composing an essay where you reflect on the experience. For this assignment, a local government means a meeting of the legislative board (e.g. a council, a commission, a board of trustees, etc.) for any of the following: village, township, city, county, or school district. You need attend only ONE (1) meeting and write a single reflection paper. Additionally, I encourage you to choose a local governmental body which you have an interest in. If the body offers an opportunity for public comment, I encourage you to speak during it. Remember: this assignment is about getting you to be an active participant!

**How to attend a meeting.** First, identify which local government (“municipality”) council meeting you would like to attend. Most local governments hold either monthly or biweekly meetings depending on the jurisdiction’s size. For instance, county commissions tend to meet biweekly, while township and school boards tend to meet only monthly. Check the municipality’s website for a listing of meeting dates and whether meetings are recorded or not. Given the frequency of meetings, you should PLAN AHEAD if you choose to pursue this option. Alternatively, you may also watch the recording of a meeting (if available) as an alternative to physically attending.

Some major, local municipalities and their websites (click on the name for the link) [NOTE: You may choose other local governments not listed here]:

- [Genesee County Board of Commissioners](#)
- [Livingston County Board of Commissioners](#)
- [Oakland County Board of Commissioners](#)
- [Flint City Council](#)
- [Swartz Creek City Council](#)
- [Flushing City Council](#)
- [Howell City Council](#)
- [Fenton City Council](#)
- [Brighton City Council](#)
- [Linden City Council](#)
- [Clarkston City Council](#)
- [Flint Community Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Carman-Ainsworth Community Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Swartz Creek Community Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Hartland Consolidated Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Howell Public Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Fenton Area Public Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Brighton Area Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Linden Community Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Clarkston Community Schools Board of Education](#)
- [Hartland Township Board](#)
- [Flint Charter Township Board](#)
- [Flushing Charter Township Board](#)
- [Fenton Charter Township Board](#)
- [Brighton Charter Township Board](#)
- [Handy Township Board](#)
- [Putnam Township Board](#)

**Write a reflection paper.** After attending (or viewing) your chosen local government meeting, compose a 2-3-page reflection essay where you discuss the following questions. Your essay should be structured in a way that not only demonstrates that you attended the meeting but also extensively references class concepts and readings. Reflections that only address the questions without incorporating examples from the meeting AND class concepts/readings will not receive full points.

Things to address in your reflection essay:

1. What government meeting did you attend? When was it held?
2. Was the meeting well-attended? Did anyone speak during the public comment portion? What issues were brought up by the public?

3. What issues or items were addressed during the meeting? What decisions did the elected officials take? Do you agree/disagree with the decisions taken? Explain.
4. Do you believe the elected body represented the community's interests? Why or why not? It is okay to consider your own opinions here relative the board.
5. What are your overall thoughts on the meeting? Surprised with anything which transpired? Any improvements or changes you would like to see? What is your overall assessment of local government in America?

**Technical Details.** Your reflection essay should:

1. Be double-spaced;
2. Be 2-3 pages in length;
3. Use a readable, 12-point font;
4. Have normal, one-inch margins;
5. Use citations to course materials (if applicable);
6. Have your name placed at the beginning of the paper; and
7. Be paginated.

**Submission.** Submit your completed reflection essay as a WORD document (.doc or .docx) using the SafeAssign link on Blackboard. Failure to upload a WORD document will delay grading. NO EMAILED SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. If you encounter difficulties with uploading your reflection, please email me as soon as possible.

**Grading.** In scoring your reflection essay, I will use the following rubric (100 points possible):

1. **Thesis:** A good thesis statement is clear and tells the reader what the paper argues. Theses should appear in an introduction that provides a broad overview of the paper's topic and communicates to the reader "where" s/he will end up at the end.
2. **Argumentation:** Reflections should strive to provide a cohesive and accurate depiction of the meeting while incorporating class concepts, discussions, and readings. Conclusions drawn are logical and persuasive.
3. **Organization:** A good reflection will follow a logical layout, preventing the reader from becoming "lost" or unsure. Paragraphs are of sufficient length (i.e. 5-7 sentences). The essay also appears aesthetically pleasing.
4. **Veracity:** Top-notch reflections will prove their conclusions with sufficient and appropriate evidence, while ensuring that such evidence is properly cited.
5. **Articulation:** Well-written reflections will be devoid of spelling, grammar, and syntax errors. Essays should strive to follow the format guidelines above.

**OPTION 4: Attend a Civic Engagement Discussion (Coffee & Conversation)**

Attend a session of Coffee & Conversation, sponsored by the Department of Political Science and write an essay reflecting on the experience. For this assignment, you will attend and participate in one of the three Coffee and Conversation events that take place before the due date (September 18, October 24, or November 14). You need attend only ONE (1) event and write a single reflection paper. Each event has a different topic, so you should choose the one both fits your schedule and suits your interests.

**How to attend a Coffee & Conversation.** Attend one of the Coffee & Conversation events sponsored by the Department of Political Science. There are three that will take place prior to this assignment's due date and they are as follows:

- October 24, 2018, 1-2 pm, French Hall Room 329
  - Topic: What College Students Want from Government
- November 14, 2018, 1-2 pm, French Hall Room 329
  - Topic: Midterm Election Results Discussion

**Write a reflection paper.** After attending a Coffee & Conversation event, compose a 2-3-page reflection essay where you discuss the following questions. Your essay should be structured in a way that not only demonstrates that you attended the event but also extensively references class concepts and readings. Reflections that only address the questions without incorporating examples from the meeting AND class concepts/readings will not receive full points.

Things to address in your reflection essay:

1. What session of Coffee & Conversation did you attend? What was the subject?
2. Was the event well-attended? Who spoke the most? What issues were brought up that interested you the most?
3. Did you learn anything new by attending this conversation-style event?
4. Do you believe individuals should attend more discussion-like events such as this one? What would be the consequences or benefits of having greater participation in these types of events on campus? In the community? Across the nation?
5. What are your overall thoughts on the event? Surprised with anything which transpired? Any improvements or changes you would like to see?

**Technical Details.** Your reflection essay should:

1. Be double-spaced;
2. Be 2-3 pages in length;
3. Use a readable, 12-point font;
4. Have normal, one-inch margins;
5. Use citations to course materials (if applicable);
6. Have your name placed at the beginning of the paper; and
7. Be paginated.

**Submission.** Submit your completed reflection essay as a WORD document (.doc or .docx) using the SafeAssign link on Blackboard. Failure to upload a WORD document will delay grading. NO EMAILED SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. If you encounter difficulties with uploading your reflection, please email me as soon as possible.

**Grading.** In scoring your reflection essay, I will use the following rubric (100 points possible):

1. **Thesis:** A good thesis statement is clear and tells the reader what the paper argues. Theses should appear in an introduction that provides a broad overview of the paper's topic and communicates to the reader "where" s/he will end up at the end.
2. **Argumentation:** Reflections should strive to provide a cohesive and accurate depiction of the meeting while incorporating class concepts, discussions, and readings. Conclusions drawn are logical and persuasive.
3. **Organization:** A good reflection will follow a logical layout, preventing the reader from becoming "lost" or unsure. Paragraphs are of sufficient length (i.e. 5-7 sentences). The essay also appears aesthetically pleasing.
4. **Veracity:** Top-notch reflections will prove their conclusions with sufficient and appropriate evidence, while ensuring that such evidence is properly cited.
5. **Articulation:** Well-written reflections will be devoid of spelling, grammar, and syntax errors. Essays should strive to follow the format guidelines above.