

“How to Use Democracy” Videos as a Tool to Engage General Education Students

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Note: This is a very early draft. Please contact author ([parsonsn@jmu.edu](mailto:parsonsn@jmu.edu)) for updates.



## Introduction

Political Science classrooms often treat justice as a natural outcome of democratic political institutions and processes. However, recent events (including the Women’s March, Standing Rock, and Black Lives Matter) amplify the importance of social justice to democratic engagement, particularly among youth. This paper highlights an assignment that asks students to produce a video explaining how-to use democracy to achieve justice. The assignment is utilized in an interdisciplinary, general education course titled “Justice in American Society.” Students are required to identify an injustice, research causes and solutions, and present the information in a how-to video publicly available on YouTube. While doing the assignment, students explore the multiple options available to produce social change. This paper presents the scaffolded assignment components and assesses civic engagement outcomes using a pre and post survey administered to two sections of the course taught by the same instructor with only one section completing the video assignment. Results suggest that the video assignment required students to examine more closely the structural explanations for injustice as well as increased their sense of personal responsibility when witnessing injustice. This assignment is particularly useful in general education courses where students are less interested in politics and may tune out when presented with another lecture on the three branches of government. Students come to see democracy as an opportunity and toolkit rather than institutional monolith incapable of change.

## Political Science’s Responsibility to Democracy

The last thirty years witnessed historical lows in youth political engagement and declarations of concern by political scientists, media, and politicians. Consensus is building that the field of Political Science has a responsibility to not only teach civics, but to prepare citizens who are eager to engage their democracy. Bennion and Laughlin (2018) summarize the efforts



by colleges and the American Political Science Association to reorient civics instruction to civic and political engagement goals. In their review of civic engagement scholarship published in the *Journal of Political Science Education*, they find that most civic engagement interventions and scholarship occur in courses related to US politics.

Bennion and Laughlin (2018) organize civic engagement interventions into election-orientated, simulation-based, service learning, globally-oriented, and internship-based interventions. The intervention used in this paper is located somewhere between election-orientated, service learning, and simulation-based. The course culminates in the production of a how-to use democracy video, which asks students to research an injustice and identify and assess potential solutions. These solutions include election-orientated goals like voting, contacting representatives, and joining a civil society group.

#### Introductory American Government Courses

Political Science traditionally offers an introduction to US Government course as its contribution to general education. This means that students across campus are required to take the course. If the responsibility to renew civic life falls on political scientists, the introduction to American government classroom is where it will happen. The course surveys the evolution of American political institutions and processes. The institutions and processes often organize courses and textbooks: The Founding, Federalism, Congress, Judicial Branch, the Presidency, Political Parties, and Elections. Texts can include chapters on civil rights, public opinion, the media, and interest groups. Stroup and Garriott (1997) assert that textbooks (and the courses organized around them) have changed very little since Ogg and Ray's *Introduction to American Government* published in 1922. They argue that problems with the piecemeal approach to institutions and processes amplify as textbooks provide a static snapshot of American politics without paying attention to changing political and cultural contexts. This presentation is familiar



to students as their social studies and civics course in high school likely followed a similar model. It can leave the student with the impression that the American social contract is set rather than continually renegotiated.

### Justice and American Society

Three course options fulfil the American Experience general education requirement at my institution: US History, US Government, and Justice and American Society. All students must take one of these courses to complete the requirements for graduation. While a political scientist by training, my position is in an interdisciplinary Justice Studies department. Upon joining Justice Studies, I converted my traditional US Government course into the Justice and American Society course. The three options have shared learning objectives for campus-wide assessment that provide basic parameters: Students will be able to identify, conceptualize and evaluate

- Social and political processes and structures using quantitative and qualitative data
- Key primary sources relating to American history, political institutions and society
- The nature and development of the intellectual concepts that structure American political activity
- The history and operation of American democratic institutions
- The history and development of American society and culture
- The history and development of American involvement in world affairs

The Justice Studies department defines justice as rights, responsibilities, procedures and standards, and fairness. These components serve as a framework from which students can conceptualize their own personal definition of justice. Majors complete six core courses and then select six electives within three tracks: Crime and Criminology, Global Justice and Policy, and Social Justice Engagement. Justice and American Society does earn credit in the major but is expected to ‘tease’ the major content to non-majors.

The course utilizes three exams, two stand-alone papers, online quizzes and discussion board posts, and a scaffolded digital assignment to assess course objectives. The first paper



requires students to identify what they consider to be the most pressing injustice facing American society and explain why it is unjust using course theory and readings. The second paper requires students to identify a public policy area influenced by social science research, provide two policy examples in that area, and summarize two pieces of academic research published in the past decade that should inform new policies. In online discussion boards, students debate contentious policies and complete online activities. They are often asked to find an example of an organization working on an issue and summarize its strategies in a discussion board post.

### *Digital Assignment*

The cumulative digital assignment in the course is how-to video for democracy. The course content emphasizes democracy as a tool used to achieve justice. The video allows students to explore that process for an injustice of their choosing. Students contribute to the democracy by showing fellow citizens how they can make change if encountering the relevant injustice. The primary objective of the assignment provided to the students on the assignment description is:

When we encounter a problem as citizens, we always have options. We could revolt, accept that the problem will always exist, or we can confront the problem and effect change. Democracy provides the opportunity for the third option, but how does one do this? Where do you start? What obstacles may block your path? How do you define success? The goal of this assignment is for you to provide an example of this process within the American democracy. If your team consents, your final iMovie presentation will be posted on the course YouTube page where other citizens facing similar problems can use it as a guide for their own action plan.

The workload to produce to a video is rather large so I divide the students into groups of four to five with each group producing one video. I also scaffold assignment components to help direct students to a high-quality final product. Each component is graded and then combined into one final digital assignment grade. The four components are a project proposal and outline,



storyboard, the video, and an individual reflection paper<sup>1</sup>. The project proposal and outline have students identify their selected injustice, explain why it is unjust, and present and evaluate alternative solutions to the injustice. They are expected to use course concepts and theory and support their claims with evidence from a variety of high-quality sources. Students also report on how they plan to approach video production. Will you make your own footage? Will you include an interview? How do you plan to ensure you have the rights to use materials and sounds in your video? This component includes a rough outline of their planned video. In grading, I do not hold them to how closely the final product reflects these plans. Instead, it is designed to force planning conversations and allow me to identify potential problems. The most pressing problem I address at this phase are plans to interview people. Interviews are fine, but IRB approval is needed in most circumstances. In some cases, I veto their planned interview because they want to speak with vulnerable populations. It is easier for me to protect the students and the community at this phase rather than being surprised in the final video.

The second component of the project is a storyboard. I frame this component as a rough draft of the video. In this component, students provide planned frames and narration scripts, most often using PowerPoint slides. They are also required to submit a document that gives insight into their thought process concerning the organization of their video. I make them explain why they are providing certain information and what they want their viewer to take away from the frame. In grading this component, I provide organizational advice; identify concerns about plans versus video length constraints; remind to credit sources appropriately; and evaluate the empowerment angle of the video. I emphasize that viewers must finish the video feeling better prepared to confront a problem than when they started video.

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<sup>1</sup> The Digital Assignment Description is Appendix A.



The third component is the three to five-minute video. I host a course YouTube.com site where the videos are posted and accessible to the public<sup>2</sup>. In the first iterations of this assignment, I required students to use iMovie because there are resources on campus to help in production. However, I came to realize that the general education nature of the course meant that students had expertise in alternative video production software. Leaving the software open allows for groups to utilize their strengths. They must own an MP4 file that is shared with me and compatible with YouTube.com. Over multiple semesters, students have produced 35 videos with topics covering monetary bail, education spending, LGBTQ+ healthcare, mass incarceration, maternity leave, the wage gap, police brutality, sexual assault on college campuses, veteran homelessness, sex trafficking, and rural poverty. The “Effects of Socioeconomic Inequality on Education” video is the most viewed with 216 views. Groups in the Fall 2020 section chose the topics of immigration, human trafficking, mass incarceration, homelessness, marijuana legalization, wage gap, domestic violence, and the mental health epidemic on college campuses. The assignment description includes a rubric that I use to grade the video. It is evaluated according to contribution to democracy, clarity, originality and creativity, quality of production, and whether it is engaging.

The final component of the digital assignment is an individual reflection paper. I wanted to give students complete ownership over at least a portion of their digital assignment final grade. The paper has two sections: the first ties the assignment back to the course content. What did the student learn from the project? How does the story told by the team fit within theories of Justice? What obstacles exist for a Just outcome? Does the student feel more prepared to be a democratic citizen than before the project? The second section allows them to reflect on the

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<sup>2</sup> Channel available here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMYc6pnCbTm3yxl0eR9tckw>



process of preparing the digital assignment. How did they contribute to the project? Are they satisfied with the final product? Did each team member contribute satisfactorily? How did the team overcome challenges? I use this paper as an assessment tool for the digital assignment.

### *Method*

In past semesters, I assessed the civic engagement impact of the course and assignment using a survey at the beginning of the semester and reflection paper content. The Fall 19 semester presented the opportunity to teach two sections of the course and a chance to implement an experiment. At my university, seats in the Fall general education courses are reserved until incoming Freshman have a chance to enroll. Any available seats open to all students before the semester begins. I taught both courses twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays with one at 9:30am and one at 12:30pm. Each section had 33 students. The self reported demographics (Table 1) from the surveys show similarity in class composition. They also align with the composition of the JMU student body.

<b>Table 1: Demographics</b>		
	Intervention	Control
<b>Class Standing</b>		
Freshman	16	18
Sophomore	3	1
Junior	1	0
Senior	0	0
<b>Race*</b>		
White	20	18
Prefer not to answer	0	1
<b>Economic Background</b>		
Poor	0	1
Working	1	4
Middle	18	11
Wealthy	1	3
<b>Age*</b>		
Under 18	0	1
18-20	18	18
21-25	2	0
<b>Gender*</b>		



Male	5	4
Female	15	15
*Other options were available, but not chosen		

The course content and assignments were identical except for the final cumulative assignment. One section (referred to as the intervention class in this paper) completed the digital assignment. The other section (referred to as the control class) completed an alternative assignment. The control assignment was a traditional group presentation at the end of the semester. I wanted to control as much of the experience as possible to isolate any impact of the how-to video production. Students were randomly sorted into teams of 4-5 and given this assignment<sup>3</sup>:

Teams of students will present a justice issue to the class. In a 10-15 minute PowerPoint presentation, teams will inform the class of a justice issue facing American society and highlight at least three organizations working to address the issue with extra attention given to tactics and strategies. Justice issue should be presented clearly, grounded in evidence, and connected to course theory.

To evaluate the engagement impact of the digital assignment, I used a pre-survey completed in the first week of the semester, an identical post-survey distributed during the final week of the semester, and the contents of the individual reflection paper completed at the end of the semester by students in the intervention course. Both surveys were administered using Qualtrics. I offered extra credit to incentivize participation. At the suggestion of IRB, I offered students an alternative extra credit assignment if they were not interested in participating in the study. Upon completion of the survey, students are sent to a SurveyMonkey link to provide their name to claim extra credit. The survey is completely anonymous. I chose to administer the survey during the first week to avoid the course content influencing their answers. The cost of this decision is reflected in survey completion rates after the pairing of the pre and posttest.

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<sup>3</sup> The Control Assignment Description is available in Appendix B.



Students were “lost” between the pre and post survey as some dropped the course. Others added the course after the survey was closed. Of the 33 students in each section, 20 intervention students and 19 control students completed both the pre and post surveys.

To provide external validity to the survey, I leveraged some questions from existing civic engagement evaluation tools<sup>4</sup>. Questions 7-20 capture civic and political activities and make up the The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) Civic Engagement Quiz. Questions 22 and 24 are used to capture two components of the Social Empathy Index developed by Segal (2011). These questions come from follow-up work by Segal, Wagaman, and Gerder (2012). The Social Empathy Index measures interpersonal empathy, contextual understanding, and social responsibility with the intent to measure how people see themselves in relation to the outside world. I choose to use the question sets that measure contextual understanding of systemic barriers (Question 22) and macro self other awareness and perspective taking (Question 24). I did not use the questions that measure individual empathy in an effort to maintain a reasonable survey length.

### *Results<sup>5</sup>*

The first question asks students to define justice. The digital assignment asks that student groups identify an injustice and seek solutions to that problem. It is valuable to see how they define justice before they begin the process. I prepared a word cloud of the 1000 most common words in the qualitative responses. I removed justice from the results as it was in the question text. As evidenced in the Word Cloud 1, post survey responses identified more of the four components of justice used by the Justice Studies major (fairness, rights, responsibilities, and

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix C contains a copy of the survey text.

<sup>5</sup> Note: In the results section, tabled and graphed responses compare the pre and post results for both sections of the course. Data is descriptive as this point in time. Statistical tests of the findings are pending.



Control Pre-Survey



## Intervention Post-Survey





I also use quantitative question sets to measure students' sense of civic responsibility and efficacy. As outlined earlier, civic engagement is a core objective of introductory civic courses. My expectation with the digital assignment is that assuming responsibility for helping a fellow American navigate the system will empower students to utilize the system for themselves and their causes. A traditional measure of civic engagement is voting. It is the most straight forward way to engage democratic institutions. My students were young and some may have been eligible to vote in the 2016 presidential election, but many only had the opportunity to engage in state and local elections prior to this course. Table 2 charts the changes in voter registration among the sections of the course. The question, borrowed from the CIRCLE Civic Engagement Quiz, asks, "Many people are not registered to vote because they are too busy or move around often. Are you currently registered in your election district, or not?" In the control class, three students moved from unsure and non-registered to being certain they are registered to vote. In the intervention class, five students joined the "yes, definitely" registered to vote column. This is a success given Virginia's status as the second hardest state to vote in according to the Cost of Voting Index (Li, Pomantell, Schraufnagel 2018). I do provide students a link to the voter registration site in an LMS module, but more intervention students utilized the resource.

<b>Table 2: Voter Registration</b>			
	Yes, Definitely	I think So	No
<b>Control Class</b>			
Pre	9	3	7
Post	12	1	6
<b>Intervention Class</b>			
Pre	11	4	5
Post	16	1	3

I also use the Typology of Engagement created by CIRCLE to compare the sections according to civic activities (Survey Questions 7, 9a-9e, 11, and 13), electoral activities (Survey



Questions 15-19), and political activities (Survey Questions 20a-20i). For the index, each answer of “Yes, within the last 12 months” is given a point. The sum identifies the type of engagement strategy used by individuals. In Table 3, the average sum of each class section is compared in the Pre-Average and Post-Average rows. Although small changes, the control class became less active in civic and electoral activities and more active in political activities. The intervention class became more active in all three areas although the most growth occurred in the questions measuring political activities like contacting a public official, protesting, signing a petition, and consumer political action. The high numbers of students reporting no change in both sections reflects the short time frame under study although there were statewide elections in November 2019 with many opportunities for electoral engagement.

<b>Table 3: CIRCLE Index of Civic and Political Engagement</b>			
	Civic Activities	Electoral Activities	Political Activities
<b>Control Class</b>			
Pre - Average	3.16	0.47	1.26
Post - Average	2.68	0.16	1.47
# Less Active	9	5	4
# Neutral	4	13	10
# More Active	6	1	5
<b>Intervention Class</b>			
Pre - Average	2.45	0.3	1.4
Post - Average	2.5	0.35	1.85
# Less Active	9	2	5
# Neutral	4	14	4
# More Active	6	4	11

I provide a case example in another question to tap into what engagement options students are most likely to utilize. The question asks “It was recently revealed that Flint, Michigan has toxic levels of lead in their city water supply because of government decisions. If you discovered a



similar problem in your community, how likely would you be to complete the following activities?” Flint, Michigan water quality has been in the national news in recent years. I wanted a problem that was relatable, urgent, but also local enough that change is tangible. The results in Table 4 show a good deal of variety in student’ approaches to change. I chose to highlight average change here since comparison is primarily between the course sections. The digital assignment groups had to explore a greater variety of change options than their control counterparts. The control group assignment simply asked they identify three non-profits working on the cause and highlight strategies used by the group. The results are interesting. The Control Class reported being more likely to call their representatives, more likely to start an online petition, more likely to attend a city council meeting, and more likely to write a letter to the editor in a local paper. This is a wider variety of actions than anticipated. The intervention class reports being more likely to write a letter to the editor and more likely to volunteer with an organization working on the cause. I expected the more likely to volunteer to be present in both sections, but expected the greater variety of options to be present in the digital assignment class given the diversity of problems and solutions they had to explore.

<b>Table 4: Facing a similar problem as Flint</b>		
	<b>Control Class Avg Change</b>	<b>Intervention Class Avg Change</b>
Call your senator or representative.	0.32	-0.45
Vote against current politicians in the next election.	-0.16	-0.15
Sign an online petition.	-0.21	-0.25
Donate money to an organization working on the cause.	-0.16	-0.4
Start an online petition.	0.11	-0.45
Attend a City Council meeting.	0.11	-0.1
Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper.	0.21	0.4
Volunteer with an organization working on the cause.	-0.37	0.05
Protest outside the city government building.	0.00	-0.25
Recruit others to the cause.	-0.42	-0.45
<b>Index of all activities</b>	-0.06	-0.21

The final questions I want to highlight are those measuring social empathy. Questions 22a-22i capture the contextual understanding of systemic barriers and ask respondents to place



themselves on a Likert scale of never (1) to always (6). The statements are listed in Appendix C, but an example is 22b “I believe that people who face discrimination have added stress that negatively impacts their lives.” Questions 24a-24i capture macro self-other awareness and perspective taking and ask respondents to place themselves on a Likert scale of never (1) to always (6). An example is 24a “I have an interest in understanding why people are poor.” As evidenced in Table 5 and noted by Segal, Wagaman, and Gerder (2012), people tend to self-report themselves as highly empathic. The class averages across both courses and categories fell between “frequently” and “almost always.” Despite the high numbers, the intervention section did have a noticeable increase in the contextual understanding of systemic barriers. In my coaching of the groups during the video production process, this comes up often. Students have to identify why the injustice exists and those reasons are more structural than individual. The control class became slightly less empathic toward contextual understanding of systemic barriers. The intervention class moved a tiny amount in the wrong direction for perspective taking, but less than the control class.

<b>Table 5: Social Empathy Index Components</b>		
	Contextual Understanding of Systemic Barriers	Macro self-other awareness and perspective taking
<b>Control Class</b>		
Pre	4.54	4.53
Post	4.46	4.22
AVG Change	-0.09	-0.32
<b>Intervention Class</b>		
Pre	4.42	4.66
Post	4.64	4.63
AVG Change	0.22	-0.03



### *End-Semester Reflections*

My final assessment tool comes from the digital assignment reflection papers. Only the students that received the intervention complete this assignment. Because the survey is anonymous and this is a graded assignment, all students are included in the sample not just those that participated in the survey. For the purposes of this paper, I coded the content of the reflections into five themes. Under each them, I provide examples of quotes from the reflection paper. This tool allows for a more direct connection to lessons learned from the digital video production, but it is also possible that students report on what they think I want to hear.

One theme that emerges is students understanding how important being informed is to democratic health. The process of researching an issue in depth and then having to explain that issue to an audience forced the students to engage the injustice in way they had not before.

Quotes related to this include:

- I feel more prepared to be a democratic citizen because I am more educated on certain topics and issues than I was before.
- Domestic violence compromises the human rights of the victims, as well as responsibilities or standards that the culture has places on the abuser. I did not realize until after this class that abusers break a social contract when they abuse others.
- After this project, I was able to learn about the other side and develop my own views.
- The project started off with myself not having sufficient background knowledge which didn't assist my contribution to the group brainstorming at first; However, with researching immigration it helped me to better understand the key roots of immigration. Being in my group, I gained tremendous knowledge on questions not only about what we need to do about immigration, but why do people immigrate.
- During this process I learned more about working cooperatively and collaborating on ideas with others. I also learned a lot about what justice actually is on a deeper level. Using our topic as an example, yes obviously homelessness is an injustice that thousands of people face, but what does that actually entail? Homelessness is a much bigger problem nationwide than I could've ever imagined.
- This video probably won't reach the masses, but it is taking a step in the right direction when it comes to educating the public on this issue, which is crucial in order to decrease the number of [human trafficking] victims.



- I already knew somewhat of the problems going on within immigration from social media and news outlets. But having to construct a whole presentation about the issues within immigration I learned so much more. I learned that just what is put on the news is so small regarding the injustice of immigration.

Another theme that emerges in the reflection papers is that students offer prescriptions for addressing injustices. This is interesting because these prescriptions are not just for the specific injustice they highlight in their video, but also for society. One of my goals in the course is to help students identify the relationship between personal responsibility and structural injustice. Many of their prescriptions note the problems with assigning blame and responsibility only to individuals.

- It helped me to see that while solutions are easy to think of, they are not easy to carry out. It gave me lots of clarity on why the world faces the problems that it does each day.
- Before making our video, during, and after I can definitely say I learned a lot about what makes something just or unjust.
- There is significant evidence that the current justice system is doing harm to the individuals in its custody. Socioeconomic disparities between classes within the United States contribute to the theory that this is a systematic problem that the criminal justice system fails to account for.
- The first step to dealing with the homelessness epidemic is accepting that there is a problem with the system and not the individual; because our society is very individualistic we as a society point the blame towards the individual.
- Researching statistics and realizing almost half of all college students in America struggle with symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, etc. was a shocking discovery for me. It compelled me to do more research looking for the root of the issue and how I could help address the issue as a student.
- Before I started this project, I had no idea of some of the ways people become homeless and how even if they try to find a job and get off the streets the system is against them and it can be very challenging for them

The average JMU student enjoys a privileged socio-economic background. Most students self-reported as middle class in the survey (Table 1). Some students acknowledge that their upbringing protected them from recognizing societal injustices. Students also note their personal privileges and reflect that that might incur greater responsibility.

- It opened my eyes up to new disparities and inequalities in the society I live in today, but also ways I can use my privileges as a citizen to fix these issues.



- To be a good democratic citizen you need to be aware of the issues facing our society regardless of whether you are directly impacted by them, both at the local and national levels.
- From the outside it is easy to think that others who see the same things will address this problem, but with this comes the diffusion of responsibility. I have learned that if you are waiting for someone else to do something, it may never get done.
- This topic taught me so much more than I was expecting. I knew the gender wage gap existed, but what I neglected to take the time to realize was the wage gap between women of different races. Depending on a woman's race she may be discriminated against based not only her gender but her race as well. The intersection of social identities does not end well for women in this case.

One of their responsibilities in preparing the project was to empower others with the information needed to effect change. Many students reflected on how they personally would engage the tools they identified for viewers. These include the traditional forms of engagement like voting and Dalton's (2008) less traditional forms like volunteering.

- I have grown an appreciation for the injustice college students are facing who desperately need and rely upon these specific services. By being more aware, I can advocate for the changes that need to be made and provide support as a friend or fellow student to those around me that may need it.
- In doing the research for this project, I learned how important it is to really research the policies that the United States puts in place so that I can either defend them or advocate against them, and eventually voice my opinions during elections.
- I know that in future years, as I look at legislation that includes government assistance programs, I will take into account the countless of people who have worked on it. Whether this means me voting a certain way or being less disgruntled when taxes are taken out of my paycheck, I am a more aware democratic citizen.
- I will now focus more on what a candidate feels towards the equality between men and women. I believe that it is significant because prior to this project, I may not have questioned certain decisions made by officials. However, this project has taught me that is important to inquire what is going on around you. Also, I am now further aware of the injustices within our own society and can be a more active member within the community.
- I have become a more effective citizen as I am working toward becoming an attorney and can use the information I have learned about the obstacles and possible solutions that will allow me to be a better activist for the change within immigration reform. Some students do express reservations about their personal ability to effect change.



## Conclusion

Justice in American Society provides an alternative to the traditional American Government course. The course uses justice defined as rights, responsibilities, procedures and standards to evaluate the current American political system in relation to its possibility. The cumulative digital assignment gives students the opportunity to deeply investigate a problem they see as affecting just outcomes in the US. They investigate and present solutions to the injustice. These solutions are grounded in the American political institutions and processes that traditional US government courses teach students. The goal is for students to view democracy as a tool rather than an institution.

Results from pre and post surveys suggest that production of the digital assignment did have positive outcomes on student civic and political engagement as well as their understanding of contextual barriers to a just society. Student reflections suggest an increased personal responsibility to be informed about the justice issues facing fellow citizens, even if not directly affected themselves.

I had hoped to see greater impact on civic engagement measures, but one semester is a very tight time frame to see results manifest. The post-survey was administered two weeks after the digital video screening and in the midst of end of the semester business. I hope that with distance and reflection, students' sense of political efficacy and responsibility increases. I would love to "check-in" with the students in both sections at a later date, but general education courses provide barriers to lasting connections and make participation leverage difficult.



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### Appendix A: Digital Assignment Description

One of the key questions we will address this semester is “How can we use democracy to achieve Justice?” Throughout the semester, we’ll discuss injustices that have arisen in the history of the American democracy and explore *how change can happen in a democracy*. For the final assignment, students will present a more detailed story of change happening in a democracy. Students are sorted into teams that will share the work and responsibility for the project. There are four components to the project due throughout the semester and together they make up 15% of your final course grade:

- 50pt - Project proposal and project outline – Due 10/10
- 100pt - Storyboard – Due 10/24
- 100pt - Final digital presentation – Due 11/21
  - An individual’s grade will be adjusted for failure to contribute
- 50pt- Individual Reflection Paper Due 12/5 on Canvas by 5 pm

**Big Picture Goals of Assignment:** When we encounter a problem as citizens, we always have options. We could revolt, accept that the problem will always exist, or we can confront the problem and affect change. Democracy provides the opportunity for the third option, but how does one do this? Where do you start? What obstacles may block your path? How define success? The goal of this assignment is for you to provide an example of this process within the American democracy. If your team consents, your final iMovie presentation will be posted on the course YouTube page where other citizens facing similar problems can use it as a guide for their own action plan. For example, you could tell the story of a citizen, or citizens’ group, that affected a particular change. Or you can identify an injustice (ex. Poor roads) and explain the avenues available if one wants to enact change. You can focus on the campus, local, state, national, or even international level (although if you go international, be sure it is still from the American perspective). Your final project should be informative and engaging.

**The four components of your final project are as follows:**

**Project Proposal and Outline (50 points):** For your first *individual* writing assignment (Paper 1), you were required to identify a Justice issue. Each member should review one another’s ideas and spend time as a team brainstorming and selecting an issue to be the subject for your final assignment. It does not need to be an issue covered in Paper 1, it is just a place to start.

This component of the final project requires teams to identify their chosen justice problem, explain why it is an injustice, explain what a “Just” solution to the problem would look like using theory, and research and present alternative solutions for the problem. This section should be the bulk of the paper. Credit sources and use a variety of sources (NGO/Non-profit/ThinkTank reports, news articles, academic journal articles, government reports/data, etc). Evaluate the potential solutions. What are their weaknesses and strengths?

The research proposal should also include a methods section that outlines the design plans of the project. This includes a discussion that addresses the following questions: Will your presentation include photos, video, or both? Will you make your own footage or use ready-made resources? How do you plan to insure you have the rights to use the footage you collect? Do you intend to include an interview? What other considerations are relevant to your team’s presentation? Not all of these questions will be



relevant to each team, but the method section should demonstrate that your team is giving thought to the “how” of the final presentation. A rough outline of the video contents should be included.

This portion of the assignment should be 4-5 double spaced pages (although you will find bullet points useful in the outline sections). You will need to research your selected problem and provide sources and citations in your paper. **Each team will submit one copy of the document in class on 10/10/19.**

**Storyboard (100 points):** This component of the final assignment requires you visually map out the different frames of your final project. **This is the rough draft of your digital video.** The “Storyboard” module on Canvas has resources on how to make a storyboard. Utilize them. Given the multitude of options available in how you approach the final project, your frames may be slides, photos, pictures, videos, or some variety of them all. You *do not* need the final materials for this step, just an idea of what you want to include in each frame (ex. A photo depicting the scales of justice on the screen while a voiceover explains the injustice.) *In addition to the storyboard*, teams should submit a document explaining the purpose of each frame, why it is included in the project, why is positioned in a particular place in the presentation, and what information you want the viewer to walk away with from that frame.

The first component of the assignment included a rough outline. This should *be significantly more detailed* than that outline. Teams are encouraged to meet with their professor prior to submitting this piece to ensure it is meeting the requirements. **One copy due in class 10/24/19.**

**Final digital presentation (100 points):** The most important component of the final project is the digital presentation. Each team is making a contribution to the American democracy through this presentation. Your goal is provide a how-to guide to fellow citizens answering the question of “how can we use democracy to achieve justice.” **Each team will produce a 3–5 minute movie presentation.** The software used to produce the film is up to the team. Be careful about choosing a program that only one teammate knows how to use. I suggest iMovie, but as long as the file can be exported as a MP4 file and someone in your team “owns” the final product, it should be fine. Note Powtoon requires a paid subscription for you to export the product as a MP4. The presentations from past courses are posted here <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMYc6pnCbTm3yxIOeR9tckw>. **We will have a premiere of the films in class on 11/21/19. All teams must submit MP4 file to professor on 11/20/19. The file can be copied to the classroom desktop on 11/21/19.** Each team should prepare a very brief introduction to their film. I.e: This is who we are and this is what we did and why. The grading rubric for the movie is below.

**Digital Presentation Reflection Paper (50 points):** Each individual student is to prepare a 2 page single-spaced reflection paper on the digital project. In the first page, the student should bring the digital project back to the course materials. What did the student learn from the project? How does the story told by the team fit within theories of Justice? In this case, what obstacles exist for a Just outcome? Does the student feel more prepared to be a democratic citizen than before the project? The second section should include a discussion of problems the team encountered and how they were overcome. What was the student’s contribution to the project? Are they satisfied with the final product produced by the team? Why or why not? Did each team member contribute satisfactorily? This is another opportunity to identify teammates who did not pull their weight. **Every student will submit this paper on Canvas on 12/5/19.**



*Final digital presentation grading rubric:* The product produced by the teams will vary greatly. That is expected and encouraged. The digital presentation will be graded according to the following rubric:

- Contribution to Democracy (30 pts)
  - Does it address an injustice? Does it explain paths to overcome that injustice? Would it be useful to someone facing a similar issue?
- Clarity (30 pts)
  - Does the organization make sense? Is the purpose of the presentation clearly communicated? Is it cluttered? Is the content sacrificed to the tool?
- Originality and Creativity (30 pts)
  - Is this an original idea? Is the method used to tell the story original? Are the proper sources credited? Does it contain images, videos or audio that the team does not have the rights to use? Does it contain interviews that violate IRB protocol?
- Quality of Production (30 pts)
  - Does the final project work? Is it of good quality: free of glitches, clear audio, good photo quality, etc? Are there mistakes in grammar and spelling? Are there awkward gaps in the transition or narration?
- Engaging (30 pts)
  - Does the final project engage the audience? Is it boring? Is it presented in a way that encourages the viewer to finish the video/presentation?

Some important notes:

- Teams can utilize iMovie to complete the digital assignment. JMU has resources to support this tool. Primarily, the JMU MADLab which offers training workshops and the Design Lab where peer tutors can help with the mechanics of your production. As you prepare the digital assignment, this is where you can find answers to technical questions about iMovie. **Students unfamiliar with iMovie can sign up for a MADLab 1-hour class at this link ASAP** <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/media/madlab/register.aspx>. There are only a few, small sections of this course offered each semester. JMU also offers access to Lynda where there are at least 10 videos on how-to use iMovie. Very little class time will be devoted to the mechanics of iMovie so these resources are vital!
  - MADLab: <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/media/madlab/>
  - Design Lab: <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/media/designVideoLab/>
  - Lynda Video Training Guides: <http://sites.jmu.edu/lynda/>
- Do not lose sight of your content! It is the most important part of the final presentation. Exercise restraint in selecting content. Only include what is necessary for your message.
- Be sure you have the rights to the material included in your presentation. People and organizations own the audio and visual materials they produce. *You're welcome to use your own photos and videos*, but you can also use what is available on the internet. Just be sure you have the rights! This JMU Libraries website has excellent resources and collections of materials that you can use without worry <http://guides.lib.jmu.edu/freemedia>.
- **If you intend to interview someone to include in your presentation, let me know ASAP as we may need to go through the Institutional Review Board.**
- Each team member will evaluate themselves and their peers according to contributions throughout the semester. Each student's final digital presentation grade will be adjusted up or down as needed based on the peer evaluations. If a member of your team fails to pull their weight with the earlier assignments, please let me know ASAP.



## Appendix B: Control Course Assignment

Teams of students will present a justice issue to the class. In a 10-15 minute PowerPoint presentation, teams will inform the class of a justice issue facing American society and highlight at least three organizations working to address the issue with extra attention given to tactics and strategies.

	5	10	15	20
Justice Issue Content	Issue is not clear and based in evidence. No connection to course theory. Unoriginal.	Issue clearly presented but lacking evidence or connection to course theory.	Issue clearly presented based in evidence and theory.	Issue clearly presented based in evidence and theory. Adds to course content rather than repeating what we've already learned.
Highlighted organizations	Less than 3 orgs highlighted. No tactics or strategies provided.	Very surface presentation of orgs. Not much info beyond "about us" paragraph on website.	Informative presentation of organizations and tactics/strategies. Some connections to tactics/strategies mentioned in class.	Very informative presentation of organizations and strategies. Some connections to class. Real-life examples of tactics and strategies provided.
Collaboration	1 or 2 members dominate the presentation. Clear that some members did not contribute equally.	Clear that members did not communicate with one another on the "parts" of the presentation. Repetition, surprise at content, imbalance of time, etc	Everyone participates. Clearly giving one presentation rather than 3-4 mini presentations.	Everyone participates. Clearly giving one presentation rather than 3-4 mini presentations. Clearly rehearsed. Good group dynamic.
Organization	Presentation lacked organization and little evidence of preparation.	Minimal signs of organization and preparation. Hard to follow.	Clear organization but could be stronger or is a little hard to follow.	Well organized, prepared, and easy to follow.
Presentation Style	Significantly over or under time. Slides not visually appealing. Most slides too wordy or hard to read. Use video content more than presenters. Presenters seem bored with their own presentation.	Presentation style could be more interesting. Clear that slides were prepared by different people (some slides too wordy or hard to read).	Good balance of words, narration, and pictures. Presenters are confident in material they are presenting.	Good balance of words, narration, and pictures. Presenters are confident in material they are presenting. Clear efforts made to make presentation interesting to audience.



### Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire

1. Please create a unique identifier using the first three letters of your high school and the day you were born. Example: I graduated from Harrisonburg High School and my birthday is June 4. My unique identifier is HAR04. This will allow for comparison with a later survey.
2. Which section of the course are you in? (Options: 9:30 or 12:30)
3. Define Justice. (Open response)
4. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of Just American Society? (Open response)
5. In your opinion, what does it mean to be a good citizen? (Open response)
6. In your opinion, what are the most pressing social problems currently facing the United States? (Open response)
7. Have you ever worked together with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live? (Options: yes, within the last 12 months; yes but not within the last 12 months; no, never)
8. Have you volunteered or done any voluntary community service for no pay? (Options: yes, within the last 12 months; yes but not within the last 12 months; no, never)
9. Have you volunteered with any of the following types of organizations or groups? (Options: yes, I have within the last 12 months; yes, I volunteer once a month or more; not within the last 12 months)
  - a. Religious group
  - b. Environmental organization
  - c. Civic or community organization involved in health or social services
  - d. An organization for youth, children, or education
  - e. Any other group: (open response available to list)
10. Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally such as charities, labor unions, professional associations, political or social groups, sports or youth groups, and so forth? (Options: Yes; No)
11. Are you an active member of this group or any of these groups, a member but not active, or have you given money only? Mark all that apply. (Options: Active member of at least one of them; member, but not active in at least one of them; given money only; no)
12. Have you personally walked, ran, or bicycled for a charitable cause – this is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event? (Options: yes, within the last 12 months; yes but not within the last 12 months; no, never)
13. Besides donating money, have you ever done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause? (Options: yes, within the last 12 months; yes but not within the last 12 months; no, never)
14. Many people are not registered to vote because they are too busy or move around often. Are you currently registered in your election district, or not? (Options: Yes, definitely; I think so; no)
15. We know that most people don't vote in all elections. Do you vote in both national and local elections? (Options: Yes, always; Yes, usually; no)
16. Have you volunteered for a political organization or candidate running for office? (Options: yes, within the last 12 months; yes but not within the last 12 months; no, never)



17. When there is an election taking place, do you try to convince people to vote for or against one of the parties or candidates, or not? (Options: Yes, always; Yes, usually; no)
18. Do you wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign in front of your house? (Options: Yes, always; Yes, usually; no)
19. Have you given money to a candidate, political party, or organization that supported candidates? (Options: yes, within the last 12 months; yes but not within the last 12 months; no, never)
20. Have you done any of the following to express your views? (Options: yes, within the last 12 months; yes but not within the last 12 months; no, never)
  - a. Contacted or visited a public official – at any level of government – to express your opinion?
  - b. Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue?
  - c. Called in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you did not get on the air?
  - d. Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?
  - e. Signed an e-mail petition about a social or political issue?
  - f. Have you ever signed a written petition about a political or social issue?
  - g. Have you ever NOT bought something from a certain company because you disagree with the social or political values of the company that produces it?
  - h. Have you bought something because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it?
  - i. Have you worked as a canvasser – going door to door for a political or social group or candidate?
21. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Options: 1-5: Strongly Disagree – Strongly Agree)
  - a. Government policies pursue the best interests of the people.
  - b. Americans all have an equal chance for success.
  - c. Good citizens do not criticize the government.
  - d. Media sources do their best to present non-biased information.
  - e. The American justice system treats all people fairly.
  - f. It is the government's responsibility to ensure a minimum standard of living for all Americans.
  - g. A good citizen challenges the government to live up to its ideals.
  - h. A just society is possible if all citizens work together.
  - i. Citizenship entails rights and responsibilities.
22. Please respond to the following questions by selecting the choice that most closely reflects your feelings or beliefs. (Options 1-6: Never – Always)
  - a. I believe there are barriers in the United States' educational system that prevent some groups of people from having economic success.
  - b. I believe that people who face discrimination have added stress that negatively impacts their lives.
  - c. I believe people born into poverty have more barriers to achieving economic well-being than people who were not born into poverty.
  - d. I believe adults who are poor deserve social assistance.
  - e. I believe government should protect the rights of minorities.



- f. I believe the role of government is to act as a referee, making decisions that promote the quality of life and well-being of the people.
  - g. I think it is the right of all citizens to have their basic needs met.
  - h. I believe that by working together, people can change society to be more just and fair for everyone.
  - i. I think the government needs to be a part of leveling the playing field for people from different racial groups.
23. It was recently revealed that Flint, Michigan has toxic levels of lead in their city water supply because of government decisions. If you discovered a similar problem in your community, how likely would you be to complete the following activities? (Options: 1-5; Extremely unlikely – Extremely likely)
- a. Call your Senator or Representative
  - b. Vote against current politicians in next election
  - c. Sign an online petition
  - d. Donate money to an organization working on the cause
  - e. State an online petition
  - f. Attend a city council meeting
  - g. Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper
  - h. Volunteer with an organization working on the cause
  - i. Protest outside the city government building
  - j. Recruit others to the cause
24. Please respond to the following questions by selecting the choice that most closely reflects your feelings or beliefs. (Options 1-6: Never – Always)
- a. I have an interest in understanding why people are poor.
  - b. I can best understand people who are different from me by learning from them directly.
  - c. I feel it is important to understand the political perspectives of people I don't agree with.
  - d. I believe it is necessary to participate in community service.
  - e. I believe that each of us should participate in political activities.
  - f. I believe my actions will affect future generations.
  - g. I confront discrimination when I see it.
  - h. I am comfortable helping a person of a different race or ethnicity than my own.
  - i. I take action to help others even if it does not personally benefit me.
25. What is your class standing? (Options: Freshman; Sophomore; Junior; Senior)
26. What is your major? (Open Response)
27. Are you White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or some other race? (Options: White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; From multiple races; Some other race (please specify); Prefer not to answer)
28. Which of the following best describes your family situation growing up? (Options: Poor; Working Class; Middle Class; Wealthy)
29. What is your gender? (Options: Male; Female; Prefer not to say; Prefer to self-describe (open response)).
30. What is your age? (Options: Under 18; 18-20; 21-25; 26-30; 31-35; 36-40; Over 40)