

A.C.T! - Action Counts Today!

This government class will revolve around awareness, involvement and action. The study of United States government without corresponding involvement, relegates the study of government to irrelevancy. The idea is not only that you know your rights under the Constitution, but that you exercise those rights throughout your life. It is my hope, that by stressing A.C.T! as a significant portion of government class, both in time spent and percent of a final semester grade, that you will begin a tradition of working within your government and Constitution to create a more accountable government and a more just world.



The Basics:

A.C.T! determines the Project portion (25%) of your semester grade.

MP#1 - Research - a special interest.

MP#2 - Contact - political representatives and special interest groups.

MP#3 - Action - volunteer, assemble, and petition.

Students will create their own Special Interest Group of two, three, or four students. They will work for the semester in this group. They will select an issue that is important to them, and become advocates for that cause. In Marking Period #1 students will choose their issue and research it. They will decide upon a name for their interest group and fashion a mission statement that defines their goals. They will research both pro and con, domestic and international sources for their specific issue. Marking Period #2 will see PAC groups contacting similar interest groups and writing to political representatives, news organizations and other interests concerning their group viewpoint. Marking Period #3 will be all about ACTION. Your Interest Group will be required to perform two tasks that promote your cause and create a flyer that advocates for your position. You may choose to assemble and picket for your cause, or you may petition to inform the public. You may volunteer for a similar organization. You may set up an information table in the cafeteria and inform fellow students of carry your message into the public arena. You may create and update both a facebook and blog to spread the message. Or you may attend a political rally. At the end of the course it is my hope that you will recognize the potential benefits of being highly involved in your own government.

On the following pages A.C.T! is specifically laid out. Make sure that you understand the requirements the entire semester. Since A.C.T! constitutes 25% of your total semester grade I suggest you get started today.

Good luck. Go out there and change the world!

THOUGHTS ABOUT GROUP WORK:

Group sizes for A.C.T! will be limited to four people - encouraged to three - allowable at two. One third of each marking period is covered by this assignment. The workload, if dumped onto one person could be significant. With that in mind, choose your associates mindfully.

The world functions within the concept of group work. People seldom work in a vacuum...except of course for vacuum salesmen. However, the classroom is not the real world. On the job if you loaf you get canned. In the classroom, too many lazy students, ride the coat tails of the workers and get the same grade. That won't happen on this assignment.

Groups may place members (All or none) on a probationary contract. The decision whether or not to go on contract will be made at the beginning of each Marking Period. If one person in the group wants members on contract - all members go on contract. All this means is that you sign a prepared document which lays out individual requirements for the marking period. If everybody fulfills their agreed upon requirements all group members receive the same grade. If one or more persons do not fulfill their requirements that person will receive a zero - the other group members will earn a temporary Incomplete and have allotted time to do the work. Remaining members will all earn the same final group grade.

The goal of the probationary contract is to hold individuals accountable to the group.

Please do not forget that Government is a Graduation requirement. A.C.T! counts for 25% of your Government grade. A zero in the A.C.T! portion of your government grade makes it highly unlikely that you will pass the course.

With that in mind please choose your associates mindfully.

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE A.C.T ISSUE:

Two reasons why the issue that you choose is so significant for success on this project.

#1 - Remember the topic must keep your attention for an entire semester. A boring or difficult issue will drag you down. By the end of the semester you will dread working with it. Conversely, an inspiring topic will provide you incentive to dig deeper and deeper and provide incentive to get involved.

#2 - You have a chance with A.C.T! to take an issue and build a better world. It's not often that a school assignment provides you such empowerment. Don't let the opportunity go to waste. Find something to fight for that lights your fire, and then go and enlighten others to your cause.

M.P. #1 - RESEARCH

Before you can influence others you need to know what you are talking about. Knowledge increases directly with interest. That being said, you must find a Special Interest that really turns you on. The choice is totally yours, with instructor approval of course. However, if you feel strongly about the issue and it is a legitimate cause, I will most likely defer to you. Your Special Interest can be in the positive or negative. You may choose to be “for war” or “against war.” You can be “pro life” or “pro choice.” Either is fine. Neither is better. The key is how well you research and present. So first of all, choose a great topic to work with. This may be a Group that already exists. You only need to add the S for students or O for Oakridge.

To find that particular topic - think hard about what it is that you believe in. What causes out there do you have a passion for? Talk with your group associates. Ask your parents and teachers. Watch Channel one or the news. THINK! And then hit the internet! Brainstorm the cause it is that turns you on - and just by linking on, you’ll get ideas.

Once you have your issue you need to create a Special Interest Group. All of the popular ones - Green Peace, NOW, AFL-CIO, NRA, ACLU - have names based on a catchy phrase or an Acronym. With the name you’ll need to create a Mission Statement. A Mission Statement tells the world directly and simply what your group hopes to accomplish. Normally, a Mission or Vision Statement is no longer than a couple of sentences. If somebody were to ask you, “What does this group believe in?” your mission statement would directly answer the question.

Next: Research. Research. Research. The first amendment is the cornerstone of participatory government. You must stay on top of the news. So, I want your group to research FIVE articles written about your issue. (4 articles in support of your issue / 1 article in conflict with your mission. One of the sources and topics needs to be from an international source. These articles should be relatively recent (in the past year) unless you find specific significant press from the past. In that case clear the article with me before you use it. I will provide you basic information guidelines for each article. Copy the article, write up the summary, and turn place it in your notebook.

Please see Appendix #1 at the end of this syllabus for particular guidelines in writing up your news source.

M.P. #2 - CONTACTS

In the second marking period A.C.T! groups will begin to contact various groups in order to:

- 1 - learn more about their issue.
- 2 - assert political pressure on elected representatives.
- 3 - influence the voting public.
- 4 - solidify ties with like minded organizations.
- 5 - send a message to corporations and organizations who violates your principles.

This portion of the assignment will be via US mail or the Internet.

Each Special Interest must write four letters of correspondence to various selected organizations. We will learn how to write a legitimate letter. You will have various guidelines to go by. All letters must be 12 point font, with 1 inch margins, and typed. You may submit letters via E-mail, however E-mail letters, like regular mail, must be okayed for sending by Mr. Wood. I will NOT clear a letter that has any misspelled words, or does not convey what I think is a coherent message. Your Issue may run the letters by me as many times as you wish. When a letter is cleared it counts 100%. If it is not cleared by due dates that letter counts 0%.

Your Interest group must continue in MP#2 to broaden your knowledge base on your issue, consequently you will be required to research five more articles. This time, no opposing viewpoints and two international sources. Because a significant portion of your time will be spent on letter writing, your article research written portion in MP#2 will be abbreviated. Please see the end of this syllabus (Appendix #2) for MP#2 and MP#3 article requirements.

Where do these letters go to?

Political representatives (Local, State, and Federal Government).

Political Action Committees.

Newspaper - Letter to the Editor.

High School & College Interest groups.

Businesses which conflict with your PAC.

Local governmental organizations which influence your issue.

Special note on Letter to the Editor:

The Muskegon Chronicle has been very good at publishing our letters in the paper. Community members have responded in kind. If there is one part of this assignment that has really worked well - it has been this. However, there's been a few instances where return letters to students have upset parents. Because of this - while normal letters to the editor must be signed with home address, the Chronicle has requested that ours provide signature, home phone (which will not be published) and school address.

If the Muskegon Chronicle chooses to run your letter they will contact you for verification.

M.P. #3- ACTION!

This in the end is what it is all about ACTION! Get involved! Take your issue and tell the world what you think. Inform people. Answer questions. March. Petition. Volunteer. You will have a choice for this marking period to involve yourself in two of six action arenas. You may do more for extra credit. In addition each group will learn how to create an informational flyer that could be used for your intervention (s). Guidelines for this flyer follow Groups will also be responsible for five more news articles written up in the shortened version.

Grading for Marking Period #3.

- 1 - Intervention #1 - 25% - *if you do it you get 100% for this portion*
- 2 - Intervention #2 - 25% - *if you do it you get 100% for this portion*
- 3 - Flyer - Group grade variable up to 100%
- 4 - Five more news articles - shortened version

Possible Interventions...

1 - Assembly & Picket

Make some picket signs and hit the road. You must picket for one hour to fulfill this objective. We will have designated days after school for sign making classes. Groups who choose picketing as an Action plan, may combine with other groups who have similar issues. The quality of your message is a direct reflection of this course, this school, and your issue. If Mr. Wood doesn't think the message is adequate or in good taste it will not fulfill the MP requirement and you will not be cleared to picket.

2 - Handout flyers

A MP#3 requirement is for your group to create an action flyer. This flyer needs to include your group name and mission statement. It must be truthful and professional. You cannot handout informational flyers until Mr. Wood has okayed them. Then Find a high traffic location, and talk with people. for interventions #2 or #3 or #5 you may create a petition for individuals to sign. That petition would then be sent onto a third party with the intention of pressuring the individual to better see your viewpoint.

3 - OHS Cafeteria Information

We will set up shop in the cafeteria. In order to fulfill this objective your group must work a lunch. All members must work. You need a sign to identify your Cause and Information flyers outlining your issue to handout to students.

4 - Prezi or Powerpoint presentation to OHS students

You may create a power point presentation concerning your specific issue. That power point will have specific guidelines. Your group then must present the power point to one of Mr. Wood's social studies

classes. You need to be prepared to answer questions about your issue after the presentation. You must have informational flyers to hand out in addition to the show.

5 - Volunteer

Find an organization with which your PAC has a similar view and volunteer. In order to fulfill this objective your group must volunteer two hours per person. Volunteers will not have to volunteer at the same time.

6 - Political Rally

Various rallies take place around the state. Many are in Lansing. Find out when your issue is at the center of a pre-planned political rally. Go. Take photos. Talk to people. Get involved.

7 - Facebook and Blog

Social Networking is powerful stuff. Facebook and YouTube and Twitter and blogs provide citizens around the world to challenge their government while at the same time bypassing traditional forms of media. If you choose the Facebook and Blog route for one of your interventions, you must have the sights up and running and monitored by middle of the second Marking Period. I can help you with the creation of a Word Press blog. I would assume you need no assistance with the Facebook.

Calling Congress 101 for All Students - And all individuals must make a “Call to Congress 101” for a 50 point Homework grade. This grade is individual and is detailed (appendix #C) at the end of this syllabus. This is NOT an A.C.T! group grade. This you do individually.

Extra Credit - Marking Period #3

- **Individual Participation** - Groups may pick up an extra 5% on their A.C.T! grade for every extra intervention they do. Individuals may also pick up an extra 5% on their own individual A.C.T! grade for every intervention that they do with anyother group.
- **Letter Response** - Groups pick up an extra 2% for each response they receive from MP#2 contacts (letters).

A.C.T! – News Guidelines

Appendix A

The first amendment is a cornerstone of participatory government. A free press, devoted to a search for truth can keep a political process honest. That is, if you read! So for this portion of ACT!, read and research five news articles.

#1 - Find a format

Create a like format for all five research articles. Somewhere at the top note your ACT group, your mission statement, the news source, and the title of the article. This same information should be located on each of the summaries. 12 point font. 1 inch margins. make sure in your format that you note the actual source of the article / the paper that it came from & the title of the article.

#2 - Five Stories

I want you to find five news articles (**four support your mission - one conflicts with it**) which have some impact on your ACT group. The news should provide a basis of knowledge about the cause you are working for. Make sure that the source is legitimate – which means stay away from blogs. The news may cover a group similar to yours, or the article might be about the central issue, which yours revolves around. It is your choice on the five articles that you select. However, lousy choices will result in lousy grades. If you have a question about any of the news articles, run them by me first. The best place to find your news is online- whether you go to a newspaper or to a web site which accumulates various news sources. Make sure that you provide a clean copy of the article in its entirety (that means with the stories banner – do NOT cut and paste) with the article in your notebook.

#3 - 5 W's

Who, What, When, Where, Why

Finalize your format and provide brief information on the above five issues regarding your news source. What and Why might run a bit longer than the others - but no more than a paragraph.

#4 - Quote

Select a Quote that in your opinion best characterizes the entire article. Note the quote and the author. If you are quoting the author of the article – note that he wrote the article. And then provide a paragraph or two on the relevance of that quote to the issue at hand and to the article.

#5 - Summary

In paragraph form, explain exactly what occurred in the article. Use your own words, but make sure that you are thorough in your expression. Three to five paragraphs.

#6 - Opinion – ACT group position

How does your group feel about this article? Talk about it. Summarize the various feelings that each of your participants have here. Be opinionated. Hopefully, the information gained and dialogue exchanged will strengthen the resolve that you have for your own cause. You should be able to write three to five solid paragraphs on your take. You may pose the discourse in the first person, in which case your opinion is “I”. You may speak for the group and define your opinion as “We”. You may even separate out and define each individual take on the issue – identifying the person in the group and what each member thinks. Make sure that you provide depth to the opinion piece.

#7 - Q & A

Your final requirement on the A.C.T! news review is to ask a solid question that encapsulates the entire article. Then answer that question in a couple of paragraphs. Your question and answer should be insightful to the article and provide proof that you have a grasp of the issues brought forth in the article.

#8 - International perspective

In an effort to get you to look at your issue from all perspectives - you are required to select one article minimum from international press. This means that the news source that you draw from in addition to the issue covered focus on a foreign country. You may find that you want to do more global research. Your required international selection stands as part of your five articles. It may be a pro or con. You will also be required to select one international article in the second and third marking periods as well.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Make sure as you search for news articles that you take your time. Don't go copy the first five that you come across and use them for your research, they may be weak articles. Dig for good news, informative news, articles that will widen your scope on the issue that you are supporting. In the end, these articles must serve as your knowledge base for further research and correspondence. If you don't know what you are talking about, but you get your five articles a marking period - who cares. You may get a decent grade, but you certainly won't represent your issue with any authority.

The key, remember, is not the grade ...it is to change the World!

PS...bank good articles – you will need five per marking period.