

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 - 14th Amendment & Civil Rights Movement - learning how to win.

MP#2 - Research - create your own A.C.T! group - research your issue

MP#3 - Contact - political representatives and special interest groups.

EXTRA - 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 #2 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 #3 will see ACT groups contacting similar interest groups and writing to political representatives, news organizations and other interests concerning their group viewpoint. Extra Credit Options in Marking Period #3 will be all about ACTION. Your Interest Group 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 or carry your message into the public arena. Any such organized action will be rewarded with substantial extra credit and will serve as a capstone for your efforts. An intervention - flyers, public or private, assembly, or petition will result in a grade bump of 10% for the Marking Period. Maximum bump of 20%. 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 quarter of your marking period grade 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; that is if you choose the probationary route.

Groups may place members (All or none) on a probationary contract in MP# 2 & #3. 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. #2 - 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 (If you have a group of two - four articles are required). 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. The format for reflection of these articles will follow the RWE guidelines and are listed in this syllabus. Copy the article and actively read the article...The active reading portion of all four articles combined will amount to 20% of the MP ACT grade. The other 80% will consist of the quality of the reflections of the four articles. Place article and reflection in your A.C.T! notebook.

Grading Rubric for Reflections:

You will be graded on four specific criteria regarding the article reflections. Each will weight equally in your final grade. 100% of A.C.T! grade for MP #2. 33% of A.C.T! grade for MP #3.

I - Format - Did you fulfill the requirements? Five articles - one international. did you follow format instructions? Are all five evaluations the same? Are they neat and well organized?

2 - Article Quality - Do your article choices do a good job of defining your mission statement? Are the sources reputable? Do they provide a thorough view of your issue? Do you have an international source?

3 - Reflection / Summary / Quotes / ???? Are your reflection, summary, quote and Q & A well thought out and definitive of your Mission Statement?

4 - Active Reading - Did you do a thorough job of actively reading each of the five articles.

M.P. #3 - CONTACTS

In the third 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.

Every A.C.T! Group must write one letter of correspondence per group member to various selected organizations. We will learn how to write a quality 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. You 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 date that letter counts 0% no matter how many times you've rewritten the letter.**
The letter portion of the MP #3 grade is 66%.

The other 33% of your MP #3 grade is five more articles. Your A.C.T! group must also continue in MP#3 to broaden your knowledge base on your issue; consequently you will be required to research five more articles. All articles must be actively read - AR of all five articles will count for a reflection like in MP #2/ Let's go back and take a look at requirements on this portion of the assignment...

Where do your Letters go?

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. You may identify yourself a student at Oakridge or as an individual in the community.

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

On the issue of Probation...

Probationary contracts are merely an Insurance Policy. You write out group member names, you decided what individual responsibilities will be, you write those down and each member is required to fulfill his or her contract. If at the end of the MP that contract is NOT fulfilled, then the said individual earns a zero for the A.C.T! grade. Other members who have fulfilled their contractual obligations will receive a temporary "I" and can choose how much time they need to complete the assignment. All members who fulfill their contract earn the same group grade for the Marking Period.

Remember Probationary contracts are optional, but if one group member wants it...they all are on.

EXTRA CREDIT- 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. While this part of the intervention is so important for success, time has relegated it to Extra Credit...but it will be A LOT OF EXTRA CREDIT...

EXTRA CREDIT GRADES.

- 1 - Intervention #1 - 10% add on to MP #3.
- 2 - Intervention #2 - 10% add on to MP #3.
- 3 - You can earn 20% max bump on MP #3.

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 Extra Credit requirement and you will not be cleared to picket.

2 - Handout flyers

I will introduce to you - how to make a flyer for your cause. We will work on it, MP #2 and MP#3. 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 - 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.

5 - 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. Hand out your flyers. Get involved.

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.

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 four 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 (groups of two - four required)

I want you to find four news articles 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 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. Make sure that you provide an actively written and read 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 - Reflection – ACT group position

Reflection may be as an individual or a group. If you write as a group, note how you all 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 to 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.

#9 - Active Reading

Make that news article BLEED. Read it thoroughly, with the idea of the written assignment in mind. Ask yourself questions. Make comments. Draw stars, circles, pictures, exclamation points - anything to remind you of the specifics that matter most in the article. Your combined actively read articles will count the equal of one ACT Reflection for grading purposes.

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 four per marking period. And below - some very good sources to look for information:

New York Times - <http://www.nytimes.com/>

Washington Post - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

Los Angeles Times - <http://www.latimes.com/>

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

National Public Radio (NPR) - <http://www.npr.org/>

Wall Street Journal - <http://online.wsj.com/home-page>

Economist - <http://www.economist.com/>

The World - <http://www.theworld.org/>