

Declaration of Independence Assignment

Instructions:

In this assignment you are required to read and interpret the major points of the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence is a document that we refer to often in a discussion of American Politics or in looking at the role of the founders. However, despite our reverence for this document, we don't seem to have a detailed knowledge of its actual text and what that text means.

This assignment is designed to remedy this as well as investigate several arguments surrounding the nature of the founding and the role of the document in our society.

The reading for this assignment comes in three parts. All PDFs can be found at the end of these instructions.

1. The Declaration of Independence itself. The full text can be found at the beginning of the PDF titled "Our Declaration, Part 1."
2. The commentary by Dr. Danielle Allen, a professor of Political Science at Harvard in her book *Our Declaration*. This can be found in the remainder of the PDF titled "Our Declaration, Part 1" and the PDF titled "Our Declaration, Part 2". I highly recommend this book if you are interested in the Declaration of Independence and its relation to our society.
3. The commentary provided by the 1619 Project. The 1619 Project describes itself in the following way:

"The 1619 Project is a major initiative from The New York Times observing the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history, understanding 1619 as our true founding, and placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are."

This can be found in the PDF titled "The 1619 Project, Edited." This is an excerpt from the larger project. We will revisit this project later in the class, when we discuss Civil Rights. If you are interested, the entire project can be found at this link: [The 1619 Project](#)

Please read the PDFs and answer the questions in the form of a Blog Entry of at least 400 words below.

Read through the Declaration of Independence carefully. This document was written in intentionally ornate language, language that today seems antiquated. It may take several tries to fully understand this document. If you don't know a word, look it up. If you are having trouble deciphering a concept feel free to ask me.

- What is the Declaration of Independence actually DOING?
- What is its purpose?
- How should we read the Declaration of Independence? Is it an optimistic call for equality, or a document steeped in the prejudices and evils of its time? Can it be both? Neither?
- What impact does reading the Declaration of Independence have on our time? On our lives?
- What was your reaction to reading both the Declaration of Independence and the commentaries?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Remember to comment on two of your classmate's submissions as well.

1619 Project Edited

[Our Declaration 1](#)

[Our Declaration Part 2-1.pdf](#)

Bill Tracker Assignment

Background

In this assignment we are going to be looking at the practical application of some of the things that we have been discussing, specifically how a bill becomes a law.

To do this, we are going to be looking at the GovTrack.us website. This is an incredibly useful website that allows you to track the action of specific bills. To complete this assignment you will need to follow the instructions that allow you to explore the passage of a particular bill.

Following this assignment, submit the answers to the questions below in a blog post of at least 400 words.

A note on accessibility: If you are unable to access this website because you use a screen-reader or other device, please contact me. I will work with you to provide you with an accessible copy of a bill of your choice, so that you can complete the assignment.

Instructions:

Step 1: Go to www.govtrack.us

A Tip: The US Congress passes a lot of bills and resolutions that are administrative in nature, and do not go through the entire process. If you find a bill that seems like it skipped steps, or was simply voted on unanimously the same day it was proposed, it is probably a simple administrative bill. Try again, and find a bill that went through the whole process!

Step 2: Click on the "Congress" drop down menu, then on "Bills and Resolutions"

[IN THE ORIGINAL ASSIGNMENT THERE ARE GUIDING SCREENSHOTS HERE]

Step 3: Click on the "Find a Bill" link at the top of the page

Step 4: On the Subject Areas which is located on the right of the page and select the area that interests you! For the purposes of these instructions, I picked "Agriculture and Food."

Step 5: Check to see if you can filter by "Enacted" so that you get a view of the whole process.

In this case, no bills have been enacted. This is to be expected, we are early in the congressional session, so not many bills have been passed into law.

In this case, we now need to look for historical bills. Click on the dropdown menu under "Congress" on the right side of the page.

Step 6: Choose the 116th Congress: 2017-2019 or 117th Congress: 2019-2021. This will give you historical bills that have been enacted.

Success!

Step 7: Now, sort by "Enacted" using the check box in menu under "Search" on the right side of the page.

Step 7: Now pick a bill! Click on the main title of a bill in the center list to go to the bill's summary page.

This will bring you to the main page of the bill

Step 8: Explore this main page, look at the bill summary and explain your bill and answer the following questions regarding your bill in a blog post of at least 400 words. Be sure to use your own words. **Do not simply copy and paste from the website.**

- What is the title of your bill?
- Who is the Sponsor?
- What is your bill about?
- When was your bill introduced? When was it signed?
- What committee was your bill referred to?
- Was it referred to a Sub-Committee? What one was that?
- Scroll down to details and click on a committee.
- What committee did you click on?
- What does that committee do?
- Who is the Chairman of the Committee?
- What is the partisan breakdown of the committee? (How many Republicans and Democrats?)

Submit your results.

Remember to comment on two of your classmate's submissions as well.

Interest Group Assignment: Learn about a specific Interest Group.

In this assignment we will be getting some hands on experience with a specific interest group, using the Open Secrets website. This will allow us to fully understand the scope and influence of interest groups that we discussed in Lesson 2. Following this assignment, you will be required to create a blog post of at least 400 words.

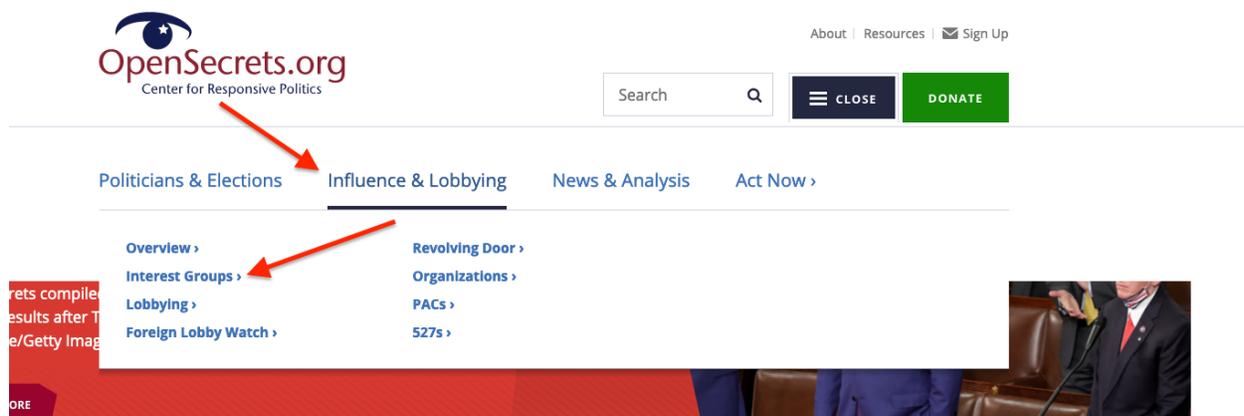
Remember to also comment on two other submissions.

A note on accessibility: If you are unable to access this website because you use a screen-reader or other device, please contact me. I will work with you to provide you with an accessible copy of an interest group of your choice, so that you can complete the assignment.

Instructions:

Go to the OpenSecrets website from this link: www.OpenSecrets.org

Under the “Influence and Lobbying” tab click on Interest Groups



Then, On the left-hand menu, scroll down to see the Categories of Interest Groups.

Select a Category. The website call this “Jump To an Interest Group”

Interest Groups

[Interest Groups List](#) ▾

[Top Interest Groups to Congress](#)

[Search](#) >

[Methodology](#) >

Search for an industry:

Enter at least 3 characters

Q

Or jump to an interest group:

- Abortion: Anti-Abortion
- Abortion: Pro-Abortion Rights
- Casinos/Gambling
- Commercial Banks
- Computer Equipment & Services
- Gun Rights
- Gun Control

We follow the money. You make it.

For each interest group, we offer:

- **Totals:** A summary of political giving dating back to 1990 election cycle, including breakdowns by type of contribution and political party
- **Top contributors:** A list of organizations (usually U.S. companies) that have given the most from that industry through their employees and political action committees
- **Top recipients:** A list of candidates that have received the most from a particular industry

Plus more!

Sector Totals, 2019-2020

2020

Rank	Sector	Amount	Total to Parties & Candidates	Dems	Repubs	SPENDING GRPS
1	Other	\$2,258,435,899	\$1,957,018,797	50.4%	49.2%	
2	Finance/Insur/RealEst	\$1,817,491,339	\$883,900,350	53.5%	46.2%	
3	Ideology/Single-Issue	\$1,540,616,251	\$846,720,043	73.9%	25.4%	
4	Misc Business	\$766,792,208	\$515,118,804	53.7%	45.9%	
5	Health	\$573,990,955	\$397,627,255	64.0%	35.5%	

Review the Summary Page of the Interest Group Category.

- How much does your interest group category spend?
- Who is providing the money for the category?
- What Party do they spend on?
- What is the overall trend in money spent? Is it Increasing or Decreasing?

Home / Influence & Lobbying / Interest Groups / Communications/Electronics / Electronics Manufacturing & Equipment / Summary [Tweet](#)

Electronics Manufacturing & Equipment

Summary **Totals** Background **Lobbying** Money to Congress Contributors Recipients News

The electronics manufacturing and equipment industry develops software and hardware computer technologies. It's made up of some of the older players in what we commonly think of as tech, and their Washington presence is everywhere, just like the parts and technologies they produce.

Just like the electronics industry itself, political contributions from its component companies have risen meteorically. In the mid-1990s, its donations surpassed \$10 million, nearly doubling from 1994 to 1996. Contributions have rocketed since to a total of \$29.6 million in 2014 (2012 was the biggest year on record at \$54.6 million). [\[Read more Background\]](#)

2020

Top Contributors, 2019-2020
(Move your cursor over the chart to see dollar amounts.)

Contributor	Amount
Asana	\$48,208,956
Microsoft Corp	\$11,800,290
Oracle Corp	\$11,748,850
Apple Inc	\$10,347,596
Duchossois Group	\$5,182,215
IBM Corp	\$4,921,634

Industries in this Sector:
Electronics Mfg & Equip

Pick another Sector:
Communications/Electronics

Search for an industry:
Enter at least 3 characters

Then click on the Lobbying tab.

From here you should be able to look at each individual interest group under that specific category.

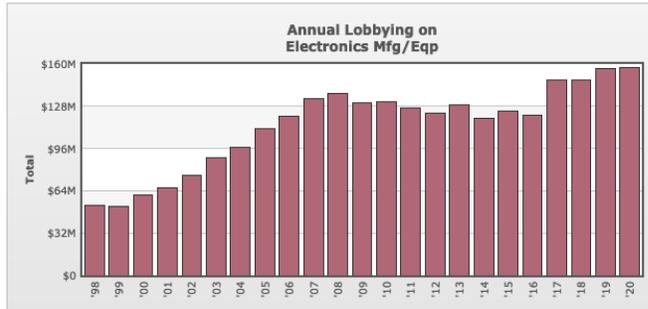
- Who is spending money on politics? How are they spending it?

Choose one. Click on it to go to the specific interest group's summary page.

Electronics Manufacturing & Equipment

Summary Totals Background Lobbying Money to Congress Contributors Recipients News

Electronics Manufacturing & Equipment: Lobbying, 2020



Industries in this Sector:

Electronics Mfg & Equip



Pick another Sector:

Communications/Electronics



Search for an industry:

Enter at least 3 characters



Choose one of these

Only on OS

Total for Electronics Mfg & Equip: \$156,898,269
Total Number of Clients Reported: 280
Total Number of Lobbyists Reported: 1,167
Total Number of Revolvers: 828 (71.0%)

Client/Parent	Total
Oracle Corp	\$9,570,000
Microsoft Corp	\$9,374,000
Qualcomm Inc	\$7,940,000

Look for the same things as in the overall category page.

Client Profile: Oracle Corp

Explore a "Client Profile" page to complete the assignment

Summary | Hired Firms | Lobbyists | Issues | Agencies | Bills | Report Images

This menu lets you select different aspects of the interest group

A special interest's lobbying activity may go up or down over time, depending on how much attention the federal government is giving their issues. Particularly active clients often retain multiple lobbying firms, each with a team of lobbyists, to press their case for them.

Select year:

2020

\$9,570,000 Total Lobbying Expenditures, 2020	\$8,070,000 Subtotal for Oracle Corp	\$1,500,000 Subtotal for all subsidiaries
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Search our lobbying database

e.g. Comcast or Jiri Krol



Annual Lobbying by Oracle Corp



If you scroll all the way down you can see the interest groups specific "revolving door" rating. You should also be able to click on a link and see exactly who is working for the interest group and their previous employment status.

Now go to the Lobbying Tab.

This allows you to look at each specific bill that your interest group is lobbying for.

Home / Influence & Lobbying / Lobbying / Clients /

Client Profile: Oracle Corp

Summary | **Hired Firms** | **Lobbyists** | Issues | Agencies | Bills | Report Images

\$9,570,000
Total Lobbying Expenditures, 2020

63
Number of Lobbyists

54 (85.71%)
Number of Revolvers

Select year: 2020

Search our lobbying database
e.g. Comcast or Jiri Krol

Lobbyists representing Oracle Corp, 2020 | Export to CSV | Reset Filters

Filter by Revolving Door Profiles: All | Filter by Former Members of Congress: All

Lobbying Firm Hired	Total Amount*	Client	Lobbyist
American Continental Group	\$240,000	Oracle Corp	Sheryl Cohen
American Continental Group	\$240,000	Oracle Corp	Manus Cooney
American Continental Group	\$240,000	Oracle Corp	Patrick Grant

Click Here to see the Lobbyists

You can filter to only see Former Members of Congress

These are lobbyists. The circle of arrows means they are revolving door lobbyists

Click on one.

- What is your interest group doing with that specific bill?

Answer the previous questions, as well as those following in a Blog Post of at least 400 words:

- What was your interest group?
- What Category were they in?
- How much money does your interest group spend?
- What do they spend this money on?
- Does your interest group employ any "Revolving Door" lobbyists? Who are they and who did they work for before your interest group?
- What kind of laws does your interest group lobby for?

Ballot Exploration Assignment

Background:

One of the most visible forms of democratic participation is voting. However, as we have seen, many people choose not to vote. One reason for this may be confusion around who is up for election and what elections mean.

This assignment is designed to bring together a number of elements that we have talked about in previous lectures by analyzing a historical ballot. In doing this we can see how the various elements of Congressional Representation, political parties, interest groups, and the specific aspects of Californian direct democracy, all come together on election day.

I have also provided the CA Voter Guide, which every CA citizen gets in the mail prior to a statewide election. This provides a good source of information for the individual elections and the propositions.

[CA Voter Guide](#)

California also provides a number of accessible versions of this information on their website.

[Audio-Accessible Voter Guide](#)

Instructions:

Your assignment is to choose 4 races from the 2018 election, one national, one statewide, one local, and one proposition and write a blog post of at least **400 words** explaining each race, the candidates or propositions, and who won. Remember to also **comment on 2 other posts**.

You should cover:

- A brief description of each office
- Who is running and a quick description of who they are and what their positions are
 - If there are a large number of people running for office, you do not need to investigate everyone. Just describe a few of them.
- Who won, and by how much

For the propositions:

- What your proposition is
- What it is about

- Some of the arguments for and against
- Which side won, and by how much

Please feel free to pick an obscure race! You don't need to look at just the Governor. The California Supreme Court elections can be just as interesting and have a major impact on state politics! Choose something that interests you!

In order to get some information about the outcome of the races, you might also check ballotpedia, a wiki-type resource for all things elections. You might have to select a city or county from this website in order to see the local elections. I have provided a link below:

[Ballotpedia Website](#)

This is not the only resource! In addition to the Voter Guide and Ballotpedia, many newspapers also provided information about the election. Here are a few links to explore:

[THIS LINK WAS PROVIDED TO ME BY MY LOCAL NPR STATION, I AGREED NOT TO SHARE IT PUBLICLY]

Note: The KPCC Voter Guide is an archived version of a website that was provided to me directly by the KPCC public radio station. Not all of the links work, so if you find a link that is broken, don't worry, just use your browser's "back" button to return to an earlier page.

[OC Register Election Coverage and Results](#)

A note on accessibility: If you are unable to access any of these websites because you use a screen-reader or other device, please contact me. I will work with you to provide you with an accessible copy of the propositions and races of your choice, so that you can complete the assignment.

Some additional information/Guidance:

National Races - This includes the race for Senate or any race for the House of Representatives. You should feel free to look up your representative on either ballotpedia or the KPCC website.

Statewide Races - This is any race where the election is for an official who will go to state government. This includes the race for Governor, a number of members of the state executive branch, state legislators and even state judges.

Local Races - This includes mayors, members of the city council, or other local officials.

Propositions- As we discussed in our California lecture, citizens in the state of California get to vote on amendments to the California Constitution, and some state laws. These are presented to voters as "propositions." Choose any of the 12 propositions that were on the ballot.