

**POLS 235/WGST 235
Gender and Law
Spring Semester 2008
Research Paper Assignment**

As stated in your syllabus, you are being assigned a semester-long research project in lieu of a final exam. This research project will also be the basis of your end-of-semester class presentation.

I) The Basics

- Papers are due **DURING** your final exam period (scheduled for 8:00 - 11:00 AM on Friday, May 9th). So, to avoid a late penalty, you must get me your paper in person by **11:00 AM ON MAY 9TH**. Of course, you are welcome to hand in papers early if you are leaving town before that date. The course policy is that papers are docked ½ of a letter grade for each 24-hour period (or fraction thereof) that the paper is late. I will not accept e-mailed versions of papers.
- Each student must make an appointment to meet with me to talk briefly about their ideas for a paper topic **BY TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH**.
- You should submit to me a brief (no more than one page) explanation of your paper topic **BY THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST**.
- As needed, additional guidelines or handouts **MAY** be provided depending on the paper topics chosen.
- Papers must be typed with 12-point font, double-spaced, stapled, and include a cover page with a paper title that says something about your paper.
- Your paper should be the highest quality work you are capable of producing. Thus, the *basic* expectation is that it will be well-written, well-organized, and devoid of spelling or grammatical errors.
- Although page length may differ depending on topic, I expect that papers will be in the 20-page range.

II) The Topic

The topic for your semester research assignment is anything related to the issue of gender and law (or policy) in American politics. You should begin by examining the course syllabus and reading materials to determine which subjects covered throughout the semester would be of most interest to you. Then, put some thought into what approach you would like to take in examining this subject. My intention is for you to investigate your topic of interest from one of the following approaches:

- How do political scientists, lawyers, and/or other academics study a particular gender-related question or issue? Have scholars in this area tended to reach similar or different conclusions? Are there particular limitations or difficulties with this line of research?
- How have politicians at the federal, state, or even local level affected gender-related policy in a particular area? Is policy in your area generally controversial? Are interest groups or public opinion particularly influential in developing policy in this area?
- How have lower court judges tended to interpret statutes or Supreme Court doctrine in a particular area? Is there any variation in how judges decide cases in this area and, if so, is there any effort to normalize law in this area?
- How would I conduct my own empirical investigation in a particular area? For this, you would need to develop and (as much as is feasible given your topic) carry out a research design on your topic.
- If none of these approaches would be of interest to you, feel free to develop your own research project. Of course, an individually-designed project would be subject to my approval.

Keep in mind that the research for this project must go far beyond what is already provided to you in the assigned class readings. The difficulty in this is that you need to choose a topic that is “do-able” for a one-semester course, but is not so narrow that it is difficult to find enough information for a semester-long project. This is why it is imperative that you talk with me as you think about and develop your research project. The freedom to write about whatever you’d like (so long as it is related to the general course topic) is great, but it can also be scary and frustrating. Putting this off for too long, or failing to discuss your project with me, may only compound problems you may encounter.