

Essay Assignment
EC 485
Prof. Scott Imberman

Directions: Suppose that you are an advisor to the Governor of Michigan. The Governor is deciding on her education policy initiatives and wants to propose some education policies. She has put forward three proposals:

1. Change Michigan's accountability system from one where schools are evaluated based on the percent of students who pass the state exams to one where the schools are evaluated based on how much students' achievement improves each year (a growth-based system).
2. Introduce a cap on the number of charter schools that are allowed to operate in Michigan (there previously was a cap but that was removed in 2011).
3. Implement a teacher incentive pay program that will pay teachers a \$1000 bonus to teachers who are in the top 10% of value-added scores statewide.

Choose **one** of the proposals above and provide a written policy brief of **600 to 1000 words** that advises the governor on whether the proposal is a good or bad idea, or if the existing research cannot provide a consensus one way or the other. In your brief you should make sure to discuss the following

- A brief overview of the state of the particular education policy you choose in Michigan and nationwide.
- A discussion of relevant research on class-size, teacher tenure and value-added, or teacher incentive pay – depending on which policy proposal you choose – and how it the findings relate to the proposed policy.
- A recommendation to go forward with the policy, not go forward with it, or suggestions for changes.

In your research discussion, you must draw upon at least **four academic sources from the list at the end of this document** and make sure to provide a reference list (including references to course readings used in the essay). The reference list does not count towards your word requirement. These sources must be articles from the publications listed at the end of this document. To conduct searches for your sources you should use either Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com>) and/or Econlit (<https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/econlit>). For the latter you may need to provide your MSUNet ID and password. To retrieve the articles there is typically a link you can click after searching, otherwise you can search for the journal name and then find the article using the volume and issue number via MSU Library's electronic journals portal (<https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/eresources/ejournals>).

You may also use popular press outlets like newspapers and magazines in your essay and readings from class not included in the source list (e.g. the textbook) but these will not count towards your four required references (though you should still include them in your reference list). **You may not use any**

other writings such as blog postings, Wikipedia, or websites (other than those from news organizations) in your essay.

In your essay, when referring to the reference material make sure that you cite your sources. This can be done in text with the author's name and publication date in parentheses at the end of a sentence. For example,

“Research has found that people are grumpy when the temperature drops below 10 degrees (Johnson, 2003).”

The reference list should follow APA citation format. Details on how to do this can be found at

Article - <http://www.easybib.com/reference/guide/apa/journal>
Book - <http://www.easybib.com/reference/guide/apa/book>
Chapter - <http://www.easybib.com/reference/guide/apa/chapter>

Formats for other types of sources can be found at the links at the top of these websites.

Quotations should be used sparingly if at all. When in doubt it is better to paraphrase than use a quote. If you do feel you need to quote a source then the quoted text should not exceed one sentence. Excessive use of quotations may affect your grade. Keep in mind that in keeping with the College of Social Science's Tier II writing requirement, in addition to the substance of your essay grammar and writing style will compose a portion of your grade.

You must upload the first draft of your essay as a MS Word document **by 11:59pm on Wednesday, August 4th** to the “Essay Assignment – Essay File Upload” dropbox on D2L. This is a Turnitin dropbox and so an “originality report” will be generated. This report provides a guide to the instructor as to what elements of the writing may not be original, but the final judgment is in the hands of the instructor. Please see the course syllabus and <https://tech.msu.edu/teaching/tools/turnitin/> for more details. The essay will be graded on a scale of 0 to 100. Late submissions will be graded but also penalized. There is an initial penalty of a 25 point deduction followed by another 25 point deduction for each additional 24 hours late. You may submit as many versions as you like. If there are multiple versions I will grade the last submission provided before the deadline.

If you turned in the assignment and wish to make revisions you may do so by submitting again to the same dropbox **by 11:59pm on Tuesday August 17th**. Your final essay grade will be the average of the two essays. Your second essay grade may be lower than the first if you do not sufficiently address the feedback I give you on the first one. Resubmitting an essay with no changes or only minor revisions (unless I only ask for minor revisions) may lead to a lower grade. The same late submission penalties as the first draft will apply. **You must submit the first draft to receive a grade on the second draft. Revisions submitted without a first draft will receive a zero.**

This assignment is a formal essay. Hence, it should be well-crafted and demonstrate your general knowledge of economics of education and the particulars of the topic. Grading is rigorous. Thus, your thinking should be clear, your writing should be polished, and your sources should be cited. Grades will

be assigned based on the following formulae. **Note that exceptionally poor writing and grammar may lead to a lower grade, and possibly a grade of zero, even if the content is good.**¹

4.0	Professional work that is rooted in strong economic analysis. All aspects of the assignment are addressed coherently and completely. External sources are properly cited and fit well in the narrative while clearly helping answer the question. Your answer to the question is reasonable, based on the supporting evidence you provide, and shows exceptional understanding of the topic. Writing is logical and clear with minimal spelling and grammar errors.
3.5	Solid work that is rooted in economic analysis. All aspects of the assignment are addressed completely. External sources are properly cited and fit well in the narrative while clearly helping answer the question. Your answer to the question is reasonable, based on the supporting evidence you provide, and shows good understanding of the topic. Good writing without major errors.
3.0	Some understanding of the underlying economics. Most aspects of the assignment are addressed. External sources are properly cited and fit decently but not exceptionally well in the narrative. Evidence from one source may be tangential to the argument but others generally support your argument. Your answer to the question is reasonable and shows a decent understanding of the topic. Writing has some errors and is choppy but is overall understandable.
2.5/2.0	Lacks a solid understanding of the underlying economics. Some aspects of the assignment are addressed. External sources are not properly cited and/or do not fit exceptionally well in the narrative. Evidence from one or two sources may be tangential to the argument but others generally support your argument. Your answer to the question is reasonable and shows a functional understanding of the topic. Writing is understandable but has numerous errors.
1.5/1.0	Shows only a minimal understanding of the underlying economics. Some aspects of the assignment are addressed. External sources are not properly cited and/or are unrelated to the narrative. Evidence from multiple sources may be tangential to the argument but others generally support your argument. Your answer to the question is unclear and shows little understanding of the topic. Writing is very poor with numerous errors and but is still understandable.
0.0	Unacceptable work that misses the mark or writing quality is poor enough that I cannot follow the argument you are making and hence cannot assess the other aspects of the essay.

Here are also some guidelines to help you focus on what is important as you write your essay.

Criteria	Strong	Satisfactory	Weak
----------	--------	--------------	------

¹ This rubric draws heavily on Chaudhuri, Soma (2010), "4 Short Papers Rubric," FW 858, Michigan State University and Bellon, Richard (2016), "Paper Assignments," IAH 206, Michigan State University.

Economic thinking and understanding of policy	Arguments and explanations utilize sharp economic logic and show a deep knowledge of the policy issues surrounding the topic. Key concepts from class lectures, readings, and/or outside sources are referenced throughout the essay when relevant.	Economic logic and understanding of policy issues are fuzzy or weak, but is present throughout. Concepts from class lectures, readings, and/or outside sources are referenced and applied, but may not demonstrate mastery.	Economic logic and understanding of policy issues are not present. Proposed solutions or recommendations are inconsistent with basic economic thinking. Concepts from class lectures, readings, and/or outside sources are not referenced or are fundamentally misunderstood.
Research	Evidence from external sources is referred to throughout the report. Citations are consistent and present throughout. Reference list follows appropriate APA guidelines.	Evidence from external sources is referred to occasionally. Citations are consistent and present throughout. Reference list follows appropriate APA guidelines.	Evidence from external sources is non-existent. Citations are inconsistent. Reference list does not follow appropriate APA guidelines.
Clarity	Writing is easy to understand. Any numbers presented are explained clearly and interpreted in words. Arguments are coherent.	Writing is generally easy to understand. Some statements may be ambiguous, but as a whole any arguments made are understandable.	Writing is vague or convoluted. Arguments are hard to understand or are not stated in simple terms. Some numbers are unexplained or unclear.
Organization and flow	The essay and argument is logically structured and reads well from paragraph to paragraph. Use of quotations is limited.	The essay and argument is logically structured, but transitions may be choppy between some paragraphs. Use of quotations is limited.	Essay reads as if each paragraph was written by a different person and it is difficult to read the essay as a whole and cogent argument. Excessive use of quotations.
Spelling, grammar, punctuation	The essay is free of mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.	Some mistakes here and there.	Many typos that should have been caught by spell check, poorly worded sentences, inappropriate use of articles (e.g. "a," "of," "the") etc.
Style	Essay is written concisely, using vivid language, and is even fun to read.	Written straightforwardly. Perhaps a bit wordy and could use some polish.	Messy, hard to follow, or wordy.
Strong introduction and conclusion	Introduction concisely lays a road map of the following paragraphs and demonstrates an understanding of the major issues being asked about. Conclusion sums up the major points of the essay.	Introduction rambles or does not define the scope of the essay to follow. Conclusion is vague.	No attempt to introduce the topic. Conclusion is missing or abrupt.

The MSU Writing Center (<http://writing.msu.edu/>) can be a valuable resource to help you refine your essay. If you think you will have difficulty with the writing assignment and the grammar in particular, I highly encourage you to make an appointment to review your essay with a writing center staff member prior to the submission deadline. If you decide you wish to do this make your appointment ASAP as slots can fill up.

Finally, here is a list of publications that contain articles you may use for your four sources:

American Education Research Journal
AERJ - Open
American Economic Review
American Economic Journal: Applied Economics
American Economic Journal: Economic Policy
Applied Economics
Economics of Education Review
Economic Journal
Education Economics
Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Education Finance and Policy
Education Policy Analysis Archives
Educational Researcher
Empirical Economics
European Economic Review
IZA Working Paper Series
Journal of Applied Econometrics
Journal of Economic Perspectives
Journal of Economic Literature
Journal of Education Finance
Journal of the European Economic Association
Journal of Human Capital
Journal of Human Resources
Journal of Labor Economics
Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness
Journal of Public Economics
Journal of Policy Analysis and Management
Journal of Political Economy
Journal of Urban Economics
Labour Economics
NBER Working Paper Series
Quarterly Journal of Economics
Review of Economics and Statistics
Review of Economic Studies

When reading the papers, do not get bogged down in the math and statistics. Focus on the introduction, the data they use, and their main findings. If the details are very technical skip over them - they are not important for your purposes – or select another study. There are many different studies on this topic so you can easily skip a few and still end up with four.