This course introduces many new topics to students and examines American politics with a comparative emphasis on state politics. However, no matter how many topics we cover or how well the lectures and readings cover them, there is no substitute for students personally engaging some aspect of state politics for themselves. To this end, this course requires students to write an issue summary paper about one topic or issue related to state politics. While the final product is not due until near the end of the course, we will dedicate some class time to discussing and working on the topics well before the final deadline.

**Step One: Preliminary Topic Choice Due February 23 (1 page)**

The first step in the issue summary assignment is for students to select a topic and decide which aspect of the topic interests them. The topic can be anything related to state politics and the course materials. Remember, this is not a research paper, so you will not be required to being in much outside materials (although you may read some outside sources).

Generally, students choose one aspect of one of the weekly topics as their state politics issue to summarize. If any week’s topic has interested you, or if one of the upcoming weeks looks interesting, then you should consider that week for the general issue area you intend to study. Then, read (if we haven’t covered the topic) or re-read (if we’ve already covered it) the week’s readings and narrow your issue down to some interesting and important aspects of the topic. For example, you might decide that state political culture interests you and you could go read Gray and Hanson chapter 1 and the Elazar’s *American Federalism: A View From the States* selection. After reading it, you might decide that Elazar’s three different state cultures would make a good issue to discuss (we will further develop this later in the course).

For February 23, choose your topic and write a brief statement about it to bring to class. The brief statement should include (1) your topic; (2) a statement of what you think is the most interesting question or aspect of this issue or topic; (3) a sentence each about two to four other aspects of the issue or topic that you consider interesting or important; (4) a sentence summarizing your current knowledge of the topic (i.e. be as general or specific as you want); and (5) a sentence or two summarizing what the course readings say about the topic. The entire statement should be less than a single typed page. On Feb 23 (or as soon as possible), we will discuss the issues and the next step in writing the summaries. Be sure to bring a clean copy of your brief statement to hand in.

**More information: Final Summary Paper Due April 29**

The final summary will be 5-7 pages, double spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font with 1” margins. Through the rest of the semester, with work outside of class, this assignment will require you to write a summary about one state politics issue. You will gather and summarize, mostly from course materials, and discuss information related to the most interesting aspects of the topic. Remember, this is not a full research paper, although you can get outside materials if you want, and you will rely mostly upon readings on the syllabus or referenced in those readings.