Freshman Seminar: Formulating an Immigration Policy

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Contents

1 Overview

Immigration has always been a highly controversial and political topic. This year illegal immigration in particular has become a focal point,[1] and most aspects of legal immigration continue to be under heavy debate.

In this seminar, you students will formulate your own ideal immigration policies, based on what you consider to be the national interests—economic, social, humanitarian and so on. Hopefully you will reach consensus, but if not, separate policies will be fine too.

It is important to note that in this course *the students supply their own power*. As this is a seminar course, we will not use the traditional lecture format. Instead, each class meeting will consist of discussion. I will give you the questions for discussion, and will provide guidance to you in researching the answers, but the answers come from you. You will be working in groups. In short, our pattern will be:

1. I give your group some questions to research.

2. You research them, with guidance from me, and report back the next class meeting.

3. The class as a whole discusses your findings, leading to other questions.

4. Go to step 2.

2 Prerequisites

There are no course prerequisites. However, it is assumed that the students are: willing to participate in class discussions; willing to respect the points of view of others; and willing to use computers extensively in the course—**e-mail, word processing, Web access will be crucial**.

3 Aspects of Immigration Policy

The main portions of legal immigration policy are:

- **Family-related Immigration:** An American (in most cases a citizen, whether native or naturalized) may sponsor for immigration the American's spouse, adult sibling, minor son or daughter, parent, etc. The spouse and minor children of the person who is sponsored also derive immigrant status.

- **Employment-related immigration:** An American employer can sponsor for immigration a foreign national whom the employer wishes to hire. The employer is supposed to show that no qualified American is available for the job. Also, a foreign national of outstanding talent may apply on his/her own for immigrant status.

- **Humanitarianism-related immigration:** This category consists of refugees and political asylees.

- **Miscellaneous:** There are many other aspects of the laws on legal immigration, among them: The Diversity Lottery is literally a program under which foreign nationals may "win" immigrant status;

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[1] I will not be using this term for long. See below.

Congress may, and often does, pass *private action* bills which grant immigrant status to certain individuals; a foreign national may acquire immigrant status by making a sizable investment in the U.S.; etc.

Also, there are many types of *nonimmigrant visas*, which allow foreign nationals to stay in the U.S., possibly for extended periods of time. Foreign students studying at U.S. schools, for instance, usually hold F-1 visas. Many skilled workers, such as engineers, are brought to the U.S. temporarily under the H-1B work visa program. Etc. Though these are called "nonimmigrant" visas, many of these foreign nationals ultimately acquire immigrant status through marriage, employment, etc.

- **Illegal immigration:** This too involves "policy," e.g. in terms of giving amnesty to some or all of those here illegally.

4   How Our Work on These Aspects Will Be Distributed

We will work in groups, with each group assigned to work on one of the following:

- Family immigration policy: What is the history of current policy? What kinds of family members should be sponsorable? Is the actual day-to-day operation of this policy living up to its "family values" goals? Is *chain migration* an important issue? What percentage of our yearly mix of legal immigrants should be in this category? Should there be additional qualifications? What should be the responsibilities of the sponsors?

- Employment-based immigration policy: What is the history of current policy? Under what conditions should employers be allowed to sponsor workers for immigration, or for temporary work visas? Should Americans be given hiring priority? How can we assure that the immigrant/foreign workers are paid fair wages? What percentage of our yearly mix of legal immigrants should be in this category?

- Refugees and asylees: What is the history of current policy? Is the U.S. doing its share relative to other developed countries? Is the actual day-to-day operation of this policy living up to its humanitarian goals? What should those goals be, and how should applicants be assessed against them? What percentage of our yearly mix of legal immigrants should be in this category?

- Illegal immigration: What are the real economic impacts of illegal immigration? Who are the winners and losers, and to what degree? Where are they from, and why do they come here? What is their typical level of education, facility in English, etc.? How many are single? How many of them have spouses or children here, and of those, how many are here legally? Should there be rolling amnesties, earned amnesties, no amnesties, or what?

- Costs and benefits of immigration: This is not directly a "policy" question, but an accurate, meaningful understanding of the costs and benefits is crucial to good design of immigration policy itself. Does immigration bring a net fiscal benefit or drain to the nation? What are the impacts on education, welfare, public health, transportation, the environment and so on? Is there a net positive or negative impact on the economy, say as measured in terms of per capita GDP (either overall or, say, of natives and earlier immigrants)? What about less obvious economic measures, such as real estate prices and international trade? What about the intangible benefits—the enrichment of our language, food, music, spiritual sense, even our sense of humor? How are all these to be weighed? Above all, how much new immigration per year, legal and illegal, is desirable/manageable? Even the freeway onramps have

traffic signals to regulate the inflow to a freeway; what is the right amount of inflow per year for immigration?

Student input on modifying, or adding to, this list is welcome.

We will assign groups in the second meeting of class. Some groups may be larger than others, and I will try to accommodate everyone's first choice as much as possible, but I anticipate that many, likely most, people will not get their first choice. Please accept this without regret; remember, you will have plenty of chance to discuss ALL topics in class, and in your final paper.

5 Group Operation

Remember, YOU are doing the research. I'll provide you with lots of guidance, but it won't work unless all the members of your group work cohesively, productively and respectfully with each other, and with everyone in a group doing his share.

If you have any concerns about how the group is working, let me know as soon as the problem appears.

When your group presents its findings in class, be sure that everyone in the group does part of the presentation. (The presentation is informal; no need for slides, etc.)

In order to even out the workload, on occasion I may ask students in one group to help research a particular question assigned to another group.

6 Workload and Grading

This is a one-unit course. According to the so-called Carnegie Rule, which is the usual standard in colleges and universities nationwide, the workload of a course should be about two hours per week for each hour spent in class. So, in our course you should average about two hours per week of outside work. Note that this is an average over the ten weeks of the quarter, and there will be week-to-week variation.

The basis for your course grade will be:

- Written work, 80%:

  First, there will be a paper on your group's preliminary findings, 40%, due around the sixth week (I'll announce it in plenty of time). This paper will be about a page or two in length. This is a group paper, one per group, but with the writing shared by all.

  The final paper, worth 40%, will be on your ideal immigration policy, bringing together all the aspects we've looked at. This will be five or six pages long. It will be individual, with each student submitting his/her own paper.

  Your grade on the writing will reflect quality of research, argumentation and exposition. Note that that last point means that you are supposed to do a good professional job, with good writing and proper grammar, and with references.[2]

  In your final papers, you are expected to take into account the findings of the various groups. Hopefully there will be consensus in the class, but if not you are fully welcome to disagree. If you do,

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[2]Reference style can be any standard one.

though, explain what it is on which you are disagreeing, and why you believe your policy is better; do NOT simply ignore what others have found.

PAPERS MUST BE SUBMITTED VIA E-MAIL TO ME, IN PDF FORMAT, at matloffcs.ucdavis.edu

- Class participation, 20%: All I will ask for in this is continuing evidence, through the student's comments in class, that the student has been fully participating in the group work, and giving serious thought to the issues being discussed in class.

7 Class Discussions

I am looking forward to lively discussions in class, the livelier the better. The vigorous exchange of ideas is what a university education is (or should be) all about. However, this must be done in an atmosphere of full respect for others.

8 A Word on Terminology

Some people object to the term *illegal immigration*, or at least to *illegal immigrant*. The common alternative, *undocumented*, is misleading, though. So, we will use the term *unauthorized immigration* instead.

Another loaded word is *American*. Sadly, some ignorant U.S. natives use the term to mean "white." Obviously some of them are bigoted, but I have heard so-called "respectable" people use the term that way too, to my great distress. For example, I once heard the famous historian Doris Kearns Goodwin make such a statement! Twice! And she is a putative liberal! I found it very depressing to watch her.

It is also common, for instance, for Asian immigrants to use the term in this way, i.e. using "American" to mean "white." Again, that is wrong and counterproductive.

I am sure that no one in our course would take the term *American* to be synonmyous with white. However, it is also important to understand to keep in mind that *American* means not only natives but also naturalized U.S. citizens, and that in addition in many senses U.S. permanent residents (green card holders) are legally considered Americans too.

9 Consultation

I'll be giving you a lot of guidance on how to research your group's questions.

Since we will be meeting only once a week, e-mail contact is crucial. **PLEASE CHECK YOUR E-MAIL EVERY DAY.**

If you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact me. It is a great way for us to get to know each other. My office hours will be Mondays and Fridays, 1-2 p.m., in 3053 Kemper Hall, 752-1953. Also, I am available via e-mail virtually "24/7."

10   Who I Am

If you would like to know something about me, especially my connections to the immigration issue, you can read my bio at `http://heather.cs.ucdavis.edu/matloff.html`.

11   This Should Be Enjoyable and Enlightening for Us All

I'm really looking forward to working with you. I believe you will find that the course expands your analytical powers, develops your research abilities, and gives you the real critical thinking strengths that college study is supposed to develops. Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy the ride; I know I will.