

Questions for Professor Craig Rimmerman

1. What was the assignment?

The assignment was a major course research paper (18-20 typewritten and double-spaced pages in length), one where students were expected to choose a topic that was related in some meaningful way to an issue or issues growing out of this course. Students were required to pose a question at the outset, offer a thesis/argument in response to that question, and then support their thesis/arguments with evidence from relevant course related materials and from their own library research.

2. How does this assignment fit with the goals of your course?

By the end of the course, I hope that my students will have developed their own thoughtful critical voices as informed citizens, who can evaluate challenging public policy issues and the American policy process from a number of different perspectives. I also hope to inspire students to develop their reading, writing, speaking, and analytical abilities.

3. Why does Matt Hursh's essay stand out as strong writing?

Matthew has chosen a challenging topic, one that defies easy explanations or policy answers. He has written a beautifully conceived response to the abortion controversy, one where he frames his analysis so well with an insightful question at the outset and then offers a carefully crafted and rigorous thesis. In addition, he makes an array of incisive and insightful theoretical and empirical connections across the various course and his chosen research materials. I found his essay to be an inspiration and revelation, because it reveals a sophisticated, sensitive, engaged, and probing critical mind at work. Matthew does not accept easy explanations or facile answers to complicated public policy questions and problems.

Questions for Matthew Hursh

1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?

I did not formulate a formal outline for my paper, but after compiling key quotes from sources I intended on using, I began to write. First, I outlined each side of the debate's key points, as well as the weaknesses in each of their arguments. Then, I used the second half of the paper to outline my own thoughts about a policy change in abortion, how it would be implemented in practice, and the precedents it might set. At the end, I wrote my introduction and my conclusion to ensure that I had all the major points of discussion included in each of those two paragraphs, because they have such a profound impact on the reader.

2. What was the most challenging aspect of this assignment?

I had never written a paper of this length, (it had to be 18-20 pages) so I was worried that my paper might be disorganized and incoherent if I did not organize it properly. In addition, I had to formulate a question and thesis that summarized a number of different points I would make in a paper of this length. It was difficult to include everything I needed to say in one short, concise sentence. This proved to be a somewhat complicated

task because it was challenging to summarize the complexity of my argument in one or two sentences.

3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?

My opinions about the debate on abortion summarize my political theory as a whole. In reading this essay, one could find that I am fairly set on picking apart the weak points in each political movement and how it has strayed from its original intent. Therefore, it was important for me to consider all perspectives, and to try to simulate the arguments of both the pro-life and pro-choice movement equally. Throughout the entirety of this course, I tried to enable others to see each side of an issue, and to fully understand the points the opposition might make. This is currently a problem in today's political theory in my opinion, and I did my best to portray all viewpoints in class discussions and during written assignments.

4. What is the most important thing you learned from this essay?

By delving deeper into the each political movement, I truly realized the holes in each movement's mindset and in their actions. This led me in a new direction, in which I would discuss the weaknesses of the pro-life and pro-choice movements and not entirely the mindsets that are meant to be reflected by them. In doing so, I discovered how emotionally sensitive the topic of abortion is, and how the attachment of emotion can often create such a radical mindset. I learned that it is possible to take a more moderate stand on the issue and to think about how a change might look in practice rather than speaking on mere emotion.