EDUC 362:
The Michigan Student Caucus
Winter 2016

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Office Hours: announced on the MSC site, and by appointment

Project website: http://www.michiganstudentcaucus.org
Overview

The Michigan Student Caucus (MSC) is the currently offered project for EDUC 362. Online participation in the MSC makes up the core of this course. (Required tasks and expectations are outlined later on in this syllabus.)

The Michigan Student Caucus is an organization representing the interests of students, K-12 through postsecondary, in Michigan. It is not affiliated with any political party.

The Michigan Student Caucus began its existence in 2001 as the Michigan Youth Caucus, a program developed in partnership with the Michigan Civics Institute, The University of Michigan, and The Michigan House of Representatives Special Commission on Civic Engagement. This program was originally developed by and for students to give young people a say in Michigan affairs. In its current guise, the MSC strives to represent the interests of students of all ages.

Under the leadership of former Michigan State Representative Doug Hart, the program thrived for two years, during which time thousands of students around the state actively took a part in shaping policy. Resolutions were written and voted upon using a (then) state-of-the-art website developed by students in the Instructional Project Design course at The University of Michigan; testimony was given in front of legislators in Lansing and real legislation made it onto the books as a result of the MYC's efforts.

In fall 2005, the project was revived as the MSC. With the help of numerous state and local politicians, not to mention the University, our goal is once again to have the voices of young people heard in state government.

Because the work of the MSC comes out of the issues that are raised and discussed, much of the coursework, including your reading and writing tasks, will depend on the collective interests and actions of the MSC community. In other words, success in this course depends on you taking an ongoing, proactive role in the MSC.

Big Questions

The MSC is, in one sense, an open-ended project, and so the issues that come up and the experiences that occur are, in large part, dependent on the ideas and interests of the
participants. There are some broad questions, though, that underlie the project as a whole. For example:

- What are the most important issues facing young people and students of all ages, today and in the future?
- How is it possible to effect change at a local and state level?
- How do particular electronic tools help – or hinder – decision-making in a group?
- What can a person learn through participation in a project like this, and what are its benefits and limitations as an educational experience? [2]

Through the tasks outlined below, you will address these questions both explicitly and implicitly.

**Tasks and Expectations**

1. **ONLINE REQUIREMENTS.**

   **Overall requirement for consistent contribution.**

   *At the absolute minimum, you must make numerous thoughtful postings in the various areas of the website (including substantial contributions to both discussions and proposals) at least three days a week.* Please note that this means visibly contributing online on at least three different days each week, every week of the term. It goes without saying that these posts should be well-researched, well-reasoned, and articulate, and they should add substantively to the level of civic discourse in the program. Combined with the other programmatic requirements listed below, *this is a bare minimum required for a passing grade.* Higher grades will require considerably more commitment and input on your part. In-person work with other MSC members, interest groups, and people in the community is also encouraged; to get credit for this work, documentation (such as meeting notes) must be submitted in your final portfolio. If you are not able to log on for more than a day or two, you must contact the instructors as soon as possible. [2]
Areas of online activity:

a. DOCS Discussions.

In order to deepen our thinking about the legislative process, and to hopefully generate some ideas for your proposals, we're going to have two DOCS discussion periods, in which we'll be discussing the legislative process, and resonant policy issues in our state:

DOCS Discussion Period One: January 7-24

DOCS Discussion Period Two: March 7-March 20

We'll tell you more later about the second DOCS discussion, but we want to talk in some detail about the first discussion, which starts immediately.

The first DOCS Discussion starts with our taking a look at a specific piece of recently-enacted Michigan legislation, and discussing and thinking about it together.

This spring, the Michigan legislature enacted a law that forbids local governments from passing their own minimum wage laws—the law reserves that right for the state government only.

During the first week+ of the class (January 7-17), you'll be reading the actual text of the law, and tracking it back to the original bill. In our four discussion sections (check your registration to find your section) we'll be engaging in some descriptive work, and informed speculation around questions like: *What is your understanding of what the law would actually do, and why do you think the idea for the legislation came about? What problem do you think it was trying to solve? How do you think the bill's supporters would make their case for the value of this law to Michigan's citizens? How do you think its opponents would frame their objections to it?*

During the second week (January 18-24), we'll be introducing four themes that we'll use to guide your thinking this term about your ideas for legislation. Each of the four groups will work with one of the themes, and will take a second look at the minimum wage legislation to consider questions like: Does this bill reflect the concerns and ways of thinking embedded in our group's theme, and what changes might be made to the bill so as to speak more directly to our category of concerns?

Topic Coordinators and members of the MSC faculty will facilitate these discussions, and each MSC student is expected to take an active part in the DOCS discussions, both by posting yourself, and by responding thoughtfully to the ideas of others. Your active
participation will be measured by the quality of your participation in the discussion
groups themselves, but also by evidence you’ll provide in the final portfolio articulating
how your work in the discussion groups impacted your thinking, and informed your
proposal writing and/or your participation in the public discussions and voting.

\[ b. \textbf{Proposal Authoring}. \]

You must author, or significantly co-author with no more than one partner, two
legislative proposals in two different thematic areas. Your first proposal must be
submitted by February 26th, and your second by March 25th. Your contribution to a
coa-authored proposal will be judged based on the contributions made with your
username, so be sure to post your contributions under your own name. \underline{Please note that you may wind up starting a proposal that you choose not to finish, and that's fine. Proposals you do not intend to complete should be marked with the word “WITHDRAWN” before the title, and they will not be considered for the platform or for grading purposes.}

IMPORTANT: Proposals must begin with a reference to a current Michigan law (from
“Michigan Compiled Laws”) or a bill proposed in the Michigan Legislature (“Legislative
Bills”). Current bills and laws can be found at http://www.legislature.mi.gov. You
should aim to find the bill or law that is most closely related to your own proposal.
Proposals should describe and justify a change, amendment, extension, repeal, or other
improvement to the referenced law or bill. Needless to say, your proposal should
carefully consider the rationale for the original law or bill, its effects (social, economic,
political), the perspective of its supporters, and the potential impact of your proposed
changes.

Additionally, to encourage substantive research into other communities: for a proposal
to be considered valid, its authors must consult with at least three people outside of the
MSC who have specialized knowledge or insight about the issue (including but not
limited to professionals, professors, government officials, and community leaders) and
engage them in substantive discussion regarding the proposal’s need, scope, practicality,
and likely impact on the lives of students in Michigan. These consultations must be
listed in the "consultations" section of the proposal, and they must be documented by
(a) a video or audio clip of the discussion and/or (b) a text summary of the discussion or
(c) a text transcript of part of the discussion. All documentation must be included in the
proposal or uploaded as an attachment. Note: consultations must be conversations with
real, live people, not something you read on the web! Website references should be
included, where appropriate, in the “references” section of your proposal, not in the consultations.

Because we want you to put a great deal of thought and care into your proposal, and into your rationale for proposing it, you'll need to respond to several additional points as part of a completed proposal:

- **Form a detailed problem statement**...what are the underlying issues/problems that led you to consider a legislative remedy, and how/where did you learn about these issues?
- Respond to the following question: “**What are three reasonable arguments against this proposal?**”
- **Describe your research process** — indicate who you talked to (including but not limited to consultants), what you read, what your thinking was, how it changed over time, and how your consultants changed your thinking. This description of your research process definitely could include “dead ends,” or ideas you had that didn’t ultimately bear fruit. In short, we want to know what you did and how it led to your legislation, and we also want you to give us a window into your thought process.
- **How will you pay for your proposed legislation?** Where will/could the funding for your proposal come from? Who might object to dedicating resources to your proposal (competing interests)?
- For co-authored proposals, please delineate--in detail--**who made what contributions to the process and to the finished proposal? Who took on which responsibilities in researching their ideas, drafting their legislation, etc.?**

Finally, you must review your proposal with one of the Topic Coordinators, all of whom are veterans of the MSC. The Topic Coordinator will review your proposal for its coherence, practicality, and originality, will ask you questions, and will offer you some thoughts both about the merits of your proposal and about how it might be strengthened. **There is a section on the proposal template where you’ll be asked to talk about the feedback you received in your topic coordinator review, and how it impacted the evolution of your proposal.**

**c. Discussion.**

You are expected to contribute to brainstorming discussions, critiques of proposals, and/or discussions about proposal ratings on a daily or near-daily basis. Discussion posts may be informal in tone, but they should be as specific and detailed as possible.
Good discussion posts may reference related ideas within or outside the MSC; they may offer alternative perspectives or relevant background information; they may provide specific suggestions for improving ideas, they may broaden or narrow the scope of proposal, and they may constructively point out weaknesses or inconsistencies. We will expect you to speak substantively about the topic or proposal being discussed, and to support your statements with evidence and elaboration.

Needless to say, while criticism and debate are expected and encouraged, we expect that all discussion posts be constructive and respectful in tone. Personal attacks on others will not be tolerated.

d. “The Feed”

In order to generate lots of ideas and inspirations for legislation, each MSC member will contribute at least three postings during the semester to an ongoing discussion thread (called “The Feed”) of interesting articles/videos/podcasts/tv or radio broadcasts that discuss or present issues of concerns to citizens of Michigan. You’ll be asked to make at least one such posting by the end of January, a second by the end of February, and a third by the end of March in which you briefly describe what you saw and why it was of interest. More details will be available on the MSC website.

2. OFFLINE REQUIREMENTS

While much of work in the course will be online, all students must fulfill the following offline requirements:

a. Orientation session. The mandatory orientation will take place on Thursday, September 7th from 7:00-8:30 pm in Schorling Auditorium (1202 School of Education).

b. Service activity. By February 1, you must commit to contributing at least 15 hours of service to an approved organization and begin that activity. Service activity should be scheduled in consultation with the organization. The Service Coordinators will provide a list of approved organizations. Service activity plans must be submitted before beginning the activity via a form linked to from the MSC website.

A primary purpose of your service activity is to gain firsthand knowledge and experience with issues facing communities in Michigan; you are strongly encouraged to discuss these issues and potential legislative solutions with members of the organization, and to use these discussions to shape proposals that you author. Service activities, therefore, should be chosen so as to create opportunities for meeting people and
experiencing situations outside of your regular day-to-day environment and you will be expected to write in your portfolio about how your service activity informed your work in MSC, and your thinking about that work. Activities that consist mainly of fundraising, or activities that involve minimal contact with other people (e.g., clerical work, cleaning), generally do not meet these goals and so, while they may be worthy activities in themselves, they are not appropriate for your MSC service requirement.

To initiate your service activity:

1) Contact the organization to discuss your potential service activity. Keep in mind that organizations do not have an obligation to accept your offer of service, even if the organization is listed as pre-approved. Most organizations have limited opportunities and they may be looking for volunteers with particular backgrounds and/or availability.

2) Submit your plan online via the designated form linked from the MSC website, noting service organization, activity plan, approval (if necessary) from Service Coordinator

3) As you begin your service, please carefully document your hours of activity, reflections and observations, consultations with service providers and members of the public all for inclusion in your final portfolio.

4) Those of you who’ll be working with minors will need to have a background check done here at the U of M. The process is simple, and we’ll provide you with the link at which you can request the check.

Documentation of your service activity must be included in your final portfolio (minimum: a list of each location, date, and time when you contributed service to your chosen organization).

c. Town Hall Meetings. Topic coordinators will schedule one “town hall meeting” per topic in which you will have the opportunity to talk with experts and stakeholders about your proposals and ideas related to that topic. There will also be a few more general Town Hall Meetings. You must attend and actively participate in at least two of these meetings during the semester. You should take notes and be prepared to document in your final portfolio at least one important thing you learned from each meeting attended.

Town Hall Meeting Guidelines:
• Reading & Question for the Speaker: Several days before each town hall meeting a reading for that meeting will be posted on the MSC website. You are expected to do the reading and come to the meeting with a question (inspired by the reading) written on a paper or index card that you’ll hand in before the meeting starts. Make sure that you keep a second copy of the question in case you’re asked by a faculty member or topic coordinator to pose your question to the speaker.

• Laptops Closed: Out of respect for our speakers, laptops must be closed during town hall presentations.

d. Midterm meeting. An in-person “Super Office Hours” meeting for all EDUC 362 members will be scheduled near the midpoint of the semester. This optional meeting will be an opportunity to hear feedback from the instructors on ideas and proposals raised in the Caucus, and to review requirements for the second half of the course.

e. House Commission on Civic Engagement Hearing. All proposals that are passed into the MSC platform will be presented before a special commission of the Michigan House of Representatives in Lansing at a date to be determined, near the end of the term. Topic coordinators and proposal authors will do the actual presenting, but attendance is mandatory for all MSC members. The hearing may be scheduled as late as the last study day before finals; please plan accordingly.

3. FINAL PORTFOLIO

A final portfolio must be submitted to the instructors via the MSC website (a link will be posted near the end of the term). A template document containing detailed guidelines will be provided.

WHAT’S UNIQUE ABOUT THIS CLASS?

You know that this course is conducted online and offline, both in the “classroom” of www.michiganstudentcaucus.org and in the “classroom” of our various communities. It spans your peer relations and your relationship as citizens to our local and state governments. As such, it’s important that we underline two important things related to the structure and spirit of this course that are directly connected with our evaluation of your work in Education 362:
First, it is important that you consistently demonstrate **initiative** throughout the class. The faculty will be very much present in the course, as will the topic coordinators, but because we don’t meet each week, there won’t be the same sort of implicit reminder to do your work that happens in a traditional class that meets face-to-face. If you’re going to be successful in this course, you need to take the initiative to consistently do your online work, to keep up with course readings, materials and schedule, and to make sure that you’re doing your service work and attending town hall meetings. You also need to show the initiative to seek out consultants to your proposal writing that can truly help you to see an issue from different and broader perspectives. If you are someone who needs your professor to push you to do your work, Education 362 is not the course for you.

The other big idea to keep in mind is **connections**. We expect that aspects of your work in this class (your service activity, for example, or the DOCS discussions) will influence your work in other parts of the class (your proposal writing and your participation in the online discussions, etc.) We encourage you to look for useful connections between aspects of your studies here at the university and your work and thinking in the Caucus. We want to see you actively seeking out these connections, and making them visible in your work throughout the term, **particularly** in your final portfolio.

**Finally:**

· It is your responsibility to read the announcements on the MSC site, and to check your email regularly for messages from the instructors.

· It is your responsibility to make sure that evidence of your participation and contributions to the caucus is accessible and apparent to the instructors.

**Topic Coordinators**

Experienced MSC members will take leadership roles as "Coordinators" for each topic area, as well as for service activities and the hearing. Topic Coordinators will facilitate discussion, schedule town hall meetings, help organize the MSC platform from those proposals receiving the most votes, and introduce their topic areas at the hearing in Lansing. Please give the Coordinators your utmost cooperation.
Office Hours

Office hours will be available each week through three formats: (1) face-to-face with faculty, (2) face-to-face with topic coordinators, (3) online with faculty. For all formats, dates, times, and locations will announced on the MSC website.

Grades

Grades will be based on the following:

(a) Completeness, consistency, and quality of your online and offline contributions to the MSC: 75%

(b) Final portfolio completeness and quality, including documentation of service enactment: 25%

Final grades will take into account your work over the entire semester, viewed holistically. You may email the instructors at any time between the third and tenth week of the semester for an assessment of your work to date.

Grading scale:

B+ or higher: Meets expectations for all tasks and exceeds expectations in multiple areas, including both quantity and quality of contributions to the Caucus, as judged by the instructors.

B: Meets minimum expectations for all tasks*

C: Meets some but not all expectations.

D/E: Fails to meet basic expectations.

*Failure to complete any of the required tasks at the minimum level will result in a grade of B- or lower, regardless of the quality and quantity of other work.

MSC Grading Rubric

(Note: You could probably figure this out, but “1” is best in each category.)

GENERAL CATEGORIES
**Consistency of Participation**

4 - Posting happens inconsistently throughout all or most of the term OR large portion of postings made during the final couple of weeks.

3 - Substantive postings on many days spread across the term, but there are several gaps of more than 2-3 days in which there are few or no postings.

2 - Posting happens consistently on 3 different days each week; most days have just one post.

1 - Week in and week out, there are many substantive postings across several days; most weeks have postings on 4 or 5 different days, with multiple postings on many days.

**Cogency in Writing**

4 - Often difficult to understand the main idea of postings, with frequent grammatical errors or expressive confusion.

3 - Work is often grammatically weak or expressively unclear, assertions may be shallow or not well supported.

2 - Work is generally clear and well written, but may still have a few errors. Includes assertions that are not always fully supported or developed.

1 - Written work is clear, concise, and done with evident care. Assertions are nicely crafted, well-supported, and attentive to the ideas of others.

**Care in Overall Approach**

4 - Work seems perfunctory, without critical reflection or investigation of alternate perspectives. Little evidence that ideas were developed and revised over time.

3 - Inconsistent exploration of ideas and perspectives, and infrequent demonstration of inventive thinking. Multiple alternatives are raised, but not carefully considered.

2 - Student often explores multiple solutions through research, innovative thinking sometimes develops during project. Alternate perspectives are given serious consideration.

1 - Consistently displays willingness to try multiple solutions and ask thought-provoking questions, leading to deeper, more distinctive results. Student fully explores alternative ideas, and proposed solutions are clearly developed through several iterations. Multiple perspectives are raised, analyzed, and clearly incorporated into the student’s thinking. Decisions are well-considered and fully explained, and take into account a wide range of information, perspectives, and outside sources. The interests of students of all ages across Michigan are taken into consideration consistently throughout.

**SPECIFIC CATEGORIES**

**Discussion and Comment Postings**

4 - Postings are cursory, superficial, or vague.

3 - Postings make relevant points, but lacking adequate support for assertions.

2 - Postings are relevant, and assertions are supported by evidence or references.
Postings are relevant and well-supported, AND they respond to others in ways that raise important questions or add different perspectives. Many posts are part of back-and-forth conversations that develop over time.

**Proposal content**

4-Created proposal is undeveloped, failing to define and address an issue, or having many weak or missing elements.

3-Created proposal is inconsistent in its development, failing to fully define and address an issue, or it having some weak or missing elements.

2-Created proposal identifies and addresses a fairly well-defined problem, showing some originality and evidence of research, with perhaps a couple of underdeveloped elements. The solution is specific and detailed, clearly stating how the solution will be implemented and funded.

1-Created proposal is thorough and well-researched, making an original contribution that includes identifying and addressing a compelling problem of particular interest to students in Michigan. It is clear that students of different ages, in different geographic locations in Michigan, and with different personal backgrounds have been considered when choosing the problem and solution.

**Proposal Consultants**

4-Little evident care or thought put into the selection of consultants, or consultations described sketchily, or consultants lack expertise in the topic.

3-Some of the consultants have limited expertise in the topic, or respond only in a general way; consultations may be described without much detail.

2-Three solid consultations that show thought if not great creativity. The student may not have located a consultant who could provide an alternative perspective, with the consultations perhaps described reasonably well but not in great detail.

1-Consultants chosen thoughtfully so as to add depth to the proposal, and to provide alternative points of view. Consultants have specialized knowledge that allows them to assess the pros and cons of the proposal in a specific and expert way. Consultations described in full detail.

**Final Portfolio**

4-Cursory or incomplete summary of activity throughout the semester.

3-Complete summary of activity throughout the semester, but with little attention to how the student’s thinking developed over time.

2-Complete summary of activity throughout the semester, showing reflective analysis of one’s own learning and growth of understanding over time. Examples of work are chosen to demonstrate the student’s understanding and growth.

1-Insightful and complete synthesis of the semester’s work, showing deep understanding of the issues the student engaged with, and making cogent connections among online work, service activity, town hall meetings, and the hearing. Student shows an understanding of her or his own learning, and how it developed through experiences in the MSC. Portfolio shows evidence that the interests of students across Michigan framed the work throughout the semester.
Schedule

Unless otherwise noted, MSC activity is ongoing, and you are expected to make substantial contributions on a minimum of 3 days each week. Town Hall Meetings will also be scheduled as the semester goes on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 7</td>
<td>Mandatory Orientation from 7:00-8:30 pm in Schorling Auditorium, 1202 School of Education; MSC activity begins immediately after orientation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 7-24</td>
<td>First round of “DOCS” discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 1</td>
<td>Service activity plans must be submitted and approved, and service activity must begin by this date.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 26</td>
<td>Your first completed proposal must be submitted and published by this date.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 7-20</td>
<td>Second round of “DOCS” discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 25</td>
<td>Your second completed proposal must be submitted and published by this date.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late March/Early April</td>
<td>Voting (rating) of proposals and related discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-April</td>
<td>House Commission hearing (exact date TBA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 15 (tent.)</td>
<td>Final summary/portfolio due by midnight</td>
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Conditions and disclaimers

SYLLABUS DISCLAIMER: This syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be announced on the MSC website; all students are responsible for monitoring course announcements.
GOOD CONDUCT: Participants are encouraged to take strong positions and debate issues passionately. However, any activity that is intended to prevent other members from participating, or that is intended to damage the technical infrastructure of the MSC, is strictly prohibited. In addition, participants must adhere to the policies of the computing environment from which they are accessing the MSC. Violators will be suspended from the course, and additional disciplinary action may be taken as necessary.

PLAGIARISM POLICY: As a participant in a public forum, you are expected to refer to ideas and statements from both inside and outside the MSC. Such references are expected to be respectful and appropriate, and they must give clear, specific attribution to the original source. It is assumed that anything posted under your name is your own work, unless explicitly attributed to someone else. Outright plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and possible additional disciplinary action.