

Original Work Assessment

Sometimes I joke with my friends that as much as I love ISM, I don't really know what it is. One of the greatest things about the program is just how abstract it can be because the variety of fields being studied allows all kinds of similarly motivated students to pursue their individual passions. Still, with assignments like Original Work I'm reminded just how open-ended the class can be, and this year was no exception. One problem I ran into early on was focusing the project. Local government as my topic this year has already been incredibly broad through the interview and research phases, so I had trouble coming up with one niche of local government that would be interesting and yet approachable enough that I could do it for Original Work. That was one of the biggest struggles I encountered: finding a topic to study.

Another issue I didn't anticipate at all when I began researching was just how deep I would get into the topic of local control. Every article I read seemed to have a link to another case, bill, or side on the matter, so it felt at times like I was being overwhelmed by information. As a whole, I think this is one of the most in-depth assignments I've completed in that I feel like if someone asked me about local control in Texas, I could really speak to it. Sure, there is still so much for me to learn, but my extensive research has led to a proficiency on the subject that I'm so proud to have reached.

Some real-world applications that I think will come out of my project include increasing the accessibility of this information. Sometimes underlying trends like local control have a tendency to be covered up by wedge issues and news headlines, even though some of the cases are highly consequential in the lives of everyday Texans. Hopefully with my synthesis research paper I was able to communicate some of this importance and make more involved topics and situations straightforward enough that I can speak to them intelligently but in an understandable way. That's another reason I'm so happy that I chose to write a synthesis-based research paper instead of just a research paper because I think getting some of my own opinions and ideas made it a realistic approach to local control, not just a complex research paper.

Professionally and personally I've grown a lot. Already with my mentorship this year I can tell that I've become a more understanding, nuanced citizen who thinks about politics and public policy from multiple angles, not just one. Projects like this one allow me to consider a variety of factors that

have a bearing on the city and state, and give me some perspective on the inner-working of a city government. I previously had no idea that local control was such a big deal because I previously didn't even understand how city and state governments interacted much. From the basic understandings of government levels to the intricacies of things like property taxes in Texas have really broadened my awareness and I intend to keep learning from here.

Through the rest of my year in ISM, I want to pursue specific situations/cases of local control in even more depth and maybe speak to some state officials to hear their stance on the other side. I might not be able to sum up ISM in a short few words, but as I continue to learn and grow, I see the value of its vastness every day.