Extra Credit Assignment

If you wish to improve your grade, you MAY complete THREE of the following participation and analysis activities. If you complete three activities and turn in three essays by the last day of lecture, December 15, and your essays are of high quality, you will receive up to 2 extra credit points on your final grade, which may mean the difference between a C+ and a B-, an A- and an A, or some such grade jump.

In your two-page essays, answer the specific questions in the assignment, and also make sure to briefly discuss how you felt about participating in the political process in the way that you chose to participate, what difference such participation might make, and whether you will likely engage in such behavior again.

1. Watch two movies (or a movie and two episodes of a tv show like The West Wing) and discuss what images of the presidency are portrayed. To what standards do these movies encourage us to hold our presidents? How is the president’s relationship to the public portrayed? Is the movie/show realistic? In what ways? If you had never had this class, and only watched movies like this, what would you believe about the presidency that is different than what you believe about the presidency now?

2. Research a public policy issue that is important to you. Write a letter or email to your member of Congress or US Senator urging them to take a specific action on the issue. Remember that your member will take your letter more seriously if there is something they can actually do about it—there is a specific bill to be voted on in their house of Congress in the near future, an amendment to cosign, a bill to sponsor, etc. Make a photocopy of your letter and the envelope that you address and stamp, and turn that in to me with your essay. (Or Cc me on your email, or copy your text from the online form that you use to send your remarks). When you write your two-page reflective essay, be sure to discuss any responsive behavior or written response from the member that you receive.

3. Find a newspaper article that you have a particularly strong response to and write a letter to the editor about it. You may email your letter in accordance with the newspaper’s submission policy, and if you do so, please ‘cc’ me on the email. When you write your two-page reflective essay, make sure that you describe the initial article, what made you respond strongly to it, whether your letter was accepted, and if not, whether any other similar letters were printed in subsequent days.

4. Attend a public meeting of a local city council, city or county board, school board, or political party. Public meetings are usually announced in local newspapers and on the organization’s website. In your reflective essay, make sure you describe what the board talked about, who besides board members attended
the meeting, and what you learned about local government through your observation.

5. Join a group that registers voters, and work to register voters for 5 hours. Local and campus political parties and some nonpartisan groups may begin voter registration drives that you can participate in here on campus. When you write your reflective essay, make sure that you talk about any training you received to register voters, the responses people gave to you when you asked them if they were registered, and any other interesting stories.

6. Volunteer for a political campaign, and work for at least five hours making phone calls, stuffing envelopes, or doing whatever else they ask you to do. In your reflective essay, make sure to discuss how effective you feel your efforts are, and how it feels to be part of a campaign team. Is this the kind of activity you would do again?

7. Attend a campus event that deals with American politics. Go to the unet.sandiego.edu website and look on the right side at the bottom for the link “Liberal Arts Beyond the Classroom: Integrated Learning Initiative.” Following that link will lead you to a list of campus talks and events, some of which will be related to politics. Choose an event that seems substantively related to the class. RSVP if asked to. If you have a question about whether an event qualifies, please ask me! I will also announce these talks in class. Attend the talk or event, and then write your reflective essay about how the substance of the discussion there relates to what we have talked about in this class. You may also want to discuss whether attending this kind of a meeting helps build social capital or makes you feel that you may participate in politics in other ways.