

**PLS 136 – Spring 2017**  
**Research Paper Overview**

For this research paper you are asked to examine one aspect of your chosen state or states that is relevant to this course. The paper is worth 15 percent of your course grade and is due **April 13<sup>th</sup>**. Below I have provided several options for research topics\*. You are also welcome to develop your own research topic with my approval.

**\*You must submit your topic and five sources by March 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

**Possible Research Topics:**

1. Research the effects of federal mandates in your state. Examples include the Americans with Disabilities Act, the No Child Left Behind Act, and the Help America Vote Act. What has your state done to comply with at least two federal mandates?
2. Using a site like, [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org) – the National Conference on State Legislatures, gather information to compare your state legislature to two or three other state legislatures. Issues for comparison could be partisan composition, chamber size, term limits, salaries, and issues before the legislature during the current or most recent session.
3. Analyze a 2016 campaign/election or an upcoming 2017 election. You might look at a particular ballot initiative, a state legislative election or a gubernatorial election. Identify the candidates, key issues, results of the primary and general elections (if applicable), debates, news reports, advertising, and campaign financing.
4. Research a current program in your state that is designed to improve public schools. Has your state instituted charter schools, magnet schools, or the use of vouchers? Has the program had a demonstrable effect on school performance?

**Formatting:**

Length: The paper should be a minimum of 5 pages in length with a maximum length of 8 pages. This page requirement excludes the cover page and bibliography.

Font: The paper should use 12-point font. Any readable font is acceptable.

Bibliography and Citations: Please consult a relevant style guide (MLA, AP or Chicago-styles preferred). You **must** cite your information within the text and provide a separate bibliography that lists all works cited.

Spelling and Grammar: It is essential that you proofread your paper. Using spell check is a good first step, but this will not catch all mistakes. Your paper should be easy to read with a coherent sentence structure. Please consult the writing center for assistance if needed.

## **Sources:**

You are required to use a minimum of five sources for this paper. Appropriate sources include newspaper and journal articles, books, and web sites of leading state and local governance organizations. Wikipedia and articles on the web sites of news stations do not count as appropriate sources. Please ask me if you are unsure about a source.

Suggested web sites include:

- Governing Magazine - [www.governing.com](http://www.governing.com)
- National Conference of State Legislatures - [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org); [www.stateline.org](http://www.stateline.org)
- Pew Center on the States – [www.pewstates.org](http://www.pewstates.org)
- U.S. Census Bureau – [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
- State Election Boards (websites will vary for each state)
- National Education Association – [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)
- National Governor’s Association – [www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org)
- [www.stateside.com](http://www.stateside.com)
- Campaign Finance – [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)
- Virginia Public Access Project – [www.vpap.org](http://www.vpap.org)