

PolicyWonk

Your assignment: Become 1) an expert on the ongoing conflicts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) and 2) a policy wonk regarding US responses to genocide.

Q: What the heck is a policy wonk?

A: From policywonk.com:

PolicyWonks are kinda hard to explain. However, you know one when you hear one. Above all else, PolicyWonks are smart...really smart. And they like to talk and listen, but mostly to debate. They're the ones who seem to enjoy pontificating endlessly on subjects that most people are more than happy to know that someone else cares about. PolicyWonks often ruin a perfectly good party or football game with a discussion of the trade deficit, agricultural subsidies, or welfare reform. And once they get going, they have an annoying habit of throwing around arguments, statistics and examples that leave the uninitiated feeling, well...dumb.

A PolicyWonk is related to the Science Nerd, but is more practical ... to the Technology Nerd, but understands people ... to the Math Nerd but can string together a complete sentence ... PolicyWonks, then, are not always the most well-liked people. But they are respected. Sometimes even feared.

Occasionally, the PolicyWonk will see his/her ideas materialize in a policy, a regulation, a budget, or some other policy vehicle. But the ultimate in PolicyWonk birthing is...“The Initiative”—a complex combination of some or all of the above. The Initiative is almost always accompanied by a fantastic acronym, often conceived of by the PolicyWonk to bestow honor and respect upon it (e.g. the US A-TEAM, the “United States Alliance for Technology and Engineering for Advanced Manufacturing”).

“The Initiative” is cause for unbridled celebration and joy...at least until such time that a Politician or Spinmeister can glom onto and bastardize the work, turning it into something nearly unrecognizable. And then we start again...resolutely...cynically...optimistically. Some even hope for the coming of the Serious Politician...the one spoken of in hushed terms...the one who will shove aside the Spinmeister...the one who will elevate the PolicyWonk to his/her proper place of love, respect and authority.

Such is the lot of the PolicyWonk. Rarely appreciated by the People in Power (the PiPs). But when all else has failed, the PiPs discover that Policy Wonks are necessary... even useful...at times.

And while we wait, we think...we argue...we debate...we research...we analyze...we write...we edit...and then we think some more...waiting...gestating the next big Initiative...

Q: OK. So, basically I have to become a nerd about US government policy options?.

A: Yes. That pretty much sums it up. Oh, and in our play scenario **you work for the US Department of State.**

Q: Alright, then. What do I have to do?

A: **Prepare a digital presentation for President Obama about the pros or cons of a specific US foreign policy option regarding a hypothetical genocide unfolding in the Democratic Republic of Congo.**

Q: Oh, that's all?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: So how do I do that?

A: Here's how:

- 1) Do some **research**. We've covered the tragic history of Congo from the time of Leopold II's murderous regime to the fall of Joseph Mobutu in 1997. Now, get caught up to speed on what the country has been up to since then. It isn't pretty. In fact, bad people have been doing horrible, horrible things. Figure out who the key players are and what the major turn of events have been since then. Now, frankly, I have a general sense of the mess but I don't know all the details; I'm still informing myself of this and will be learning alongside you. Let's see what we uncover.
- 2) **Take what you learn about events in DR Congo since 1997 and synthesize (blend) it with your assigned US foreign policy position.** Tell Mr. Obama either a) what we should do about it and why or b) why we this action proposal is a bad idea. Support your argument with evidence.

Q: Huh, evidence? Support? What ...?

A: (I know, it's still pretty early in the morning but roll with me on this.) As you research, **back up your generalized statements by making reference to how this applies to specific recent events in DR Congo. Reference at least five different online news articles from the past years.** Pick good news sources - bbc.co.uk/news, reuters.com, ap.com, nytimes.com, guardian.co.uk, washingtonpost.com, etc. Don't feel limited to these suggestions. Just evaluate your source to make sure that it is legit and trustworthy. If you're not sure, either ask me or assume it isn't trustworthy. **Each time you reference an article do an in-slide citation in MLA format hyperlinked to the source.**

Q: Yeah, I have no idea what you just said.

A: I'll just come around to each group and explain it to you one-on-one if you don't get it. Continuing on At the end of your presentation, inform us of at least three positive humanitarian relief efforts currently at work in DR Congo trying to make life better. Take a look the good work the International Red Cross, Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders, Peace Corps, the UN or other agencies are doing. Again, create a MLA reference with a link to the source for each of these examples.

Q: I think I may be getting it. But how do I present all this?

A: Pick an online digital presentation tool that allows multiple editors to work synchronously (at the same time.) This could be as simple as a Google Doc slideshow, or for more flair, a Prezi. I am also fine with any other Web 2.0 tools that you want to use for this project. Just make it informative, make it snazzy, and have fun with it (as much as you can considering the topic) so long as you are working, learning, evaluating information, bouncing ideas off of your teammates and sharing the workload, and creating a good product with a team effort. You have creative license.

Q: You lost me at Google Doc and/or Prezi and/or Web 2.0.

A: Again, I'll just come around to each group and explain it to you one-on-one if you don't get it.

Q: I still don't understand what we're supposed to be doing.

A: Yeah, I know ... this whole thing sounds a little nebulous (unclear). Well, that's because it is a bit ambiguous. Why? Well, 1) this is the first time I've done this project and 2) that's the nature of "21st century learning" for you. Welcome to the cutting edge of education. Now, go forth and research, understand, and create something. Get wonky!

In summation,

- 1) Prepare a digital presentation for President Obama about the pros or cons of a specific US foreign policy option regarding a hypothetical genocide unfolding in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- 2) Support your argument with evidence.
- 3) Also provide information on at least three positive humanitarian relief efforts currently at work in DR Congo.
- 4) Present your findings and proposal using online digital presentation tool.
- 5) Cite all sources.