

Civic Discourse Research Project Reclaiming Democracy, Fall 2011

Why This Assignment?

To better understand how our civic leaders discuss education matters in light of our learning about democracy, you will need to attend or watch 2 hours of a local school board meeting. At least two members of your color group needs to complete this assignment for the meetings to be held tentatively on: Tuesday, 9/13; Thursday, 9/29; Tuesday 10/11; Thursday, 10/27; and Tuesday, November 8.

How Do I Find out When and Where the Meetings Are?

The Guilford County Board of Education generally holds its regular meetings on the second Tuesday and fourth Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m. in the boardroom at 712 N. Eugene Street, Greensboro, N.C. Since some meeting days are changed after the schedule has been established, be sure to confirm the meeting you want to attend by calling (370-8100) or checking the web site: <http://www1.gcsnc.com/boe/schedule.htm>. These meetings are also broadcast live on GCS Cable Channel 2 with replays aired the next day at 1 and 7 p.m and the following Saturday at 1 p.m. You can also watch the meeting on the board's web site at <http://www1.gcsnc.com/boe/agenda2011.htm>.

You need to attend or watch the meeting from 6:00 p.m. to at least 8:00 p.m.

How Can I Best Prepare Myself for this Assignment?

That's such a good question! If you are the first in your group to see a school board meeting this semester, we encourage you to read the minutes of the previous board meeting. After that, you should read what your classmates wrote from the meeting before the one you attend. Check the school board website and view the agenda in advance. Scan past meeting minutes or even look at some videos of past meeting to orient yourself with the people on the board. You can even do a newspaper search for recent school board news.

What Should I Pay Attention To? What If I Don't Understand What They're Talking About?

As you watch the school board proceedings, make note of the content they are discussing as well as how the topics are being presented and listened to. You may want to focus on the board members themselves, guest speakers at the meeting, and/or citizens presenting brief (no more than 3 minutes) comments at the beginning of the meetings.

Knowing that you are a new conversation partner in this endeavor, some of the information may seem "foreign" to you. Don't worry--continue to pay attention, ask questions, and consult past board meetings (online resources are available for this) until you can speak with greater ease and confidence about what you witnessed.

Finally, How Do I Put All That I Learn into a Paper to Turn In?

Once you've completed the steps above, write a 4 page paper that:

1. Communicates the key ideas presented in the portion of the meeting you watched. Be sure to provide the necessary context. For instance, if the discussion was about whether to approve new building expenditures, do some research to find out if there has been previous debate about this topic, what's been completed already, etc. Note this portion of your paper should be *no longer than 500 words*.

2. Provide an analysis of the experience by making meaningful connections between the meeting content and the underlying democratic values demonstrated or not (in word or deed). To do this, you will need to address TWO concepts from at least TWO different readings assigned to date (citing the texts and if using a quotation, including the page number as well). This portion of your paper should be *at least* 500 words.
3. Include *at least* one piece of outside research in your analysis. This might include a newspaper article (*News & Record, Yes Weekly!, Carolina Peacemaker* for instance), a past board meeting review, an interview, etc.
4. Include at the end of your paper a list of references in APA or MLA format (the two texts and additional research).

NOTES:

- Be sure to indicate early in your paper the date of the meeting you are analyzing.
- When you refer to people, do so by using their properly spelled names and roles/function. If you are unsure of who someone is, his/her role, and/or exact name, be sure to ask questions (during or after the meeting) until you are certain.

Can You Provide Me with An Example of How To Make Meaningful Connections?

Everyone will see and interpret things differently so we are not looking for one right answer. What's important is to think about what we've read and how what you see in action comports with those readings.

For example, if you had read Richard Rorty's book, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999), you would have surmised that Rorty believes the purpose of K-12 education is for students to get "socialized" into the history, politics, cultural and moral standards of society as it is—in other words, to make students literate (p. 116). He says further that the purpose of college education is "individuation" to help students question, doubt, imagine, and challenge what they have learned and in so doing, realize they can reshape themselves and their ideas (p. 118).

Then, if you were analyzing a college class you've been in, instead of a school board meeting, you might point to specific teaching incidents that appear to advance Rorty's goals for higher education. You might comment and provide concrete examples of how college teachers help students to doubt and imagine (or not and what they do instead), or how they actually do the remedial work of "socialization" that Rorty says should have happened in K-12 to provide the basics of literacy. This might cause you to consider your position on if college teachers should slow down for some even if that risks losing deeper learning for others. In this conception of education, you might consider what responsibilities students have as they enter a K-12 or college classroom.

When Is My Paper Due?

Your assignment is DUE to your small group faculty member within 4 school days after the meeting you attend (Tuesday meetings are due the following Monday by email; Thursday meetings are due the following Wednesday before class). You will share your paper, briefly, with your small group on the class day closest to your paper due date.

Once your faculty member has commented on your paper, you will need to make corrections, if necessary, to it and post online for the other group members to view later as needed.

See next page for sign ups and due dates for this project.

