

**Group Exercise**  
**Congressional Hearing on Immigration Policy**

150 points, 31 Mar 06

**Assignment:**

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security is holding a hearing entitled "Immigration Policy to Secure the Northern and Southern Borders," and has invited four persons to testify: (1) the Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs; (2) the Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection with the Department of Homeland Security; (3) a member of an interest group that favors strict control of illegal immigration through improved physical security along the border, increased interior enforcement, increased penalties and deportations of illegal immigrants, and no temporary worker programs or amnesty programs; (4) a member of an interest group that favors control of the physical border coupled with a temporary worker program, controls over the preventive detention and deportation of non-US persons in violation of their visas, among other policies.

We will divide class into four groups of four to five students each. We will determine the groups on 9 Mar 06. Each group will collectively represent one of the witnesses above. The remaining students will serve as Democratic or Republican members of the Committee. Professor Margaret Stock, Assistant Professor in the Department of Law and an expert on immigration law, will chair the committee.

We will hold the hearing in class on 31 Mar 06. The Chairman will call the hearing to order promptly at the beginning of class. Each group should select one spokesperson to give a 90-second (firm time limit) opening statement, however all members of the group (not just the spokesperson) must participate during the hearing. The Chair will then open the hearing for Committee members to question the witnesses.

**Administrative Requirements:**

Each group will email a written statement for the record, not longer than 4 pages single-spaced, to the Committee (the instructor, any other faculty members, and students serving as Committee members) not later than 1500 on 29 Mar 06. You should follow the format of testimony assigned as readings in this course, or may download written testimony from the internet as a guide to format.

We will conduct an "after action review" of the hearing at the start of class on 4 April 06.

## **Handling Questions and Answers in a Congressional Hearing:**

- Show openness and enthusiasm for the chance to answer questions and express your views.
- Anticipate the most obvious and difficult questions and prepare careful answers in advance.
- If possible, refer to your questioner by name or by title (e.g., Madam Secretary, Mr. Chairman, Senator Doe).
- Listen actively with nonverbal cues (nods, smiles, frowns, etc. )
- Pause before answering.
- Be brief, direct, and concerned.
- Always answer honestly.
- Try to restate your key points within your response. While being responsive to the question, make a smooth transition to the main message you want to get across.
- Use concrete examples and brief anecdotes in your answer.
- Don't bluff if you don't know (but keep to a minimum).
- If the answer to a question is classified, or would invade someone's privacy, it's OK to say so. Then bridge to one of your messages.
- Ask for clarification when necessary (but keep to a minimum).
- Protect the record. If a questioner asks you a question based on false data, be sure to protect and, if necessary, correct the record.
- Interrupt rarely and always tactfully.
- Avoid engaging too long with one person.
- Avoid making more than three points at a time.
- Show respect for hostile opposition, but respond with cordial confidence.
- Don't argue, though there are times when a questioner is confrontational and you must "step up" to the situation to maintain control.
- End on a high note, maintaining control.

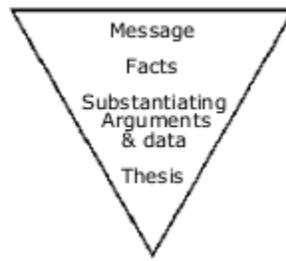
## Preparing for a Congressional Hearing or Media Interview:

(The following excerpts are drawn from the US Air Force's media training program.)

Your success is directly tied to the quality of your preparation, your ability to articulate your messages, and the level of control you exercise during the hearing or interview. Don't think that a hearing or interview is a conversation and that you can "wing it. " View it instead as an opportunity for you to make a well-developed presentation reflecting research, preparation, and enthusiasm.

*Messages.* You should never enter a hearing room or do an interview unless you know exactly what you want to say and how you want to say it. You should anticipate the issues and questions and be equipped with short, memorable, positive and relevant messages with which to respond.

Use the "inverted pyramid" to structure your answers:



*Tools.* Here are some basic techniques you can use to get your messages across:

*Bridging* is smoothly transitioning from the question asked to your messages. A direct question deserves a direct answer. But then, after briefly touching upon the answer, bridge to your messages and your agenda.

*Hooking* is taking advantage of opportunities to help focus on what you want to talk about. The idea is to entice the questioner into your agenda.

*Flagging* is simply a way to underscore, verbally and nonverbally, what's important within your answers. You can use voice inflection, a hand gesture, eye contact, body language or a phrase like, "What is really critical to know about this issue. . . ." to ensure the questioner and audience have a clear understanding of what you think is important.

*Personal credibility* is never forgetting that you are the expert - that's why the committee has invited you to testify, or the media has come to you for an interview. Use your personal knowledge and experience to avoid speaking in the abstract. If you can say "I've talked to the men and women manning our southwest border . . ." or "I have personal experience within my family with the difficulty of legally immigrating to the United States" ... do it. Critics will never be shy about their credentials - neither should you.