

11.007 Public Policy Disputes
Essay Assignment #2
Due Session 12

During the last few weeks we have focused on how participants in policy disputes define problems, devise solutions to those problems, and try to attach solutions to problems in the policymaking process. *Write a 4 to 5-page (double spaced, 12-point type) in which you make and defend an analytic (not a normative) argument about efforts by participants in the Social Security debate define the problem and link a solution to that problem.*

In crafting your argument, think about what we've learned about how the policy process works; how advocates use symbols, numbers, and causal stories to define problems; how different kinds of solutions are developed; and how solutions are attached to problems. (Although the material we studied on policy goals is obviously relevant to this topic, it should not be the focus of this essay. You may incorporate—very briefly—relevant ideas from the first couple of weeks of class, but please focus your energies on the material we've been studying since you wrote your previous essay.)

The goal, here, is to write an analytic essay, not a normative one. That is, you are analyzing the debate over Social Security, not advocating one solution over another. Your conclusion may include speculation about what you think is likely to happen and why, or it may express your views on the debate itself, but you should refrain from making this essay an advocacy piece for one approach or another. (We can talk in class about what you actually think about Social Security reform.)

As you review your notes from the last few weeks, you should find that you have a substantial array of concepts to help you analyze the Social Security (or any other policy) debate. On the specifics of this case, I have provided you with a set of easily accessible references (see the syllabus for a list of articles and the web sites where you can find them), which you should read. There are also some articles on the MIT server that you should read. You are free to search for additional materials, particularly recent newspaper articles, but make sure you leave yourself plenty of time for crafting an argument, writing and editing.

Remember, the overarching purpose of this assignment is to write an interesting, compelling essay (aimed at intelligent peers who are not taking this course). But an important secondary purpose is to demonstrate that you have done the reading and can use the concepts we've been discussing to analyze a real policy dispute.

Finally, please review the format notes in the syllabus. And be aware that essays that come in late will be marked down. Similarly, if you are not in class the day an essay is due, and you do not have an excuse that has been cleared by me, your essay is considered late and marked down.