The Political Engagement Activity
Student Guide

Today's lesson in U.S. government will involve an exercise where we yell and scream and then hold our breath until we get what we want.

JUST LIKE ON TV
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INTRODUCTION TO THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

What is the point?
To quote directly from the IB, 'the engagement activity provides students an opportunity to explore the central unifying theme of the course – people, power and politics – in practice and outside of the classroom. In the course of their engagement activity, students may, for example, learn about the local manifestations of a global issue, engage with primary sources and experience the dynamics and consequences of decision making on individuals and communities.'

Why is this important?
This Internal Assessment is worth 25% of your final grade SL and 20% at HL. Students taking Global Politics HL will also complete the HL extension IA that is worth a further 20%. So, given that it makes up a significant chunk of your final grade, it is worth taking this seriously.

What is the emphasis of the PEA?
Again, from the IB, 'although the emphasis of the task is on active engagement rather than primarily on research, it is expected that students make use of the key concepts, theories and ideas they are learning in the classroom and undertake further reading to inform their planning and actions, and their discussion of the political issue raised in their activities. In brief, the task aims at active and reflective engagement.'

What are the components of the PEA?
There are three components that make up the PEA – Engagement, Complementary Research and the Written Report. The written report is the element that is assessed but you will need to complete all components in order to be successful.
COMPONENT 1: ENGAGEMENT

First of all, let's consider what is meant when we talk about the process of engagement. In simple terms, it means contacting relevant individuals and organisations related to your area of study and actively participating in furthering your understanding of your chosen area of study in a way that moves beyond simply academic study based on books and websites.

So, how to go about selecting an appropriate engagement? The first step is to identify a clear political issue that can be explored through engagement. You should also have an interest in the issue you choose. The IB point out that ‘the political issue should be authentically embedded in the engagement and students’ role in the engagement should be such that they truly learn about this political issue through what they do’

Confused? Let's take an example. Imagine you choose to engage in a beach clean-up. This would be considered apolitical and any political issues are likely to be artificially or remotely connected to the activity. This is highly unlikely to help you hit the high marks bands you will be going for. So, how to make it political? Well, if you suggested organising an awareness raising campaign for beach clean-ups (including actually cleaning up a beach), then there are many political issues authentically (there's that word, again) embedded in the engagement. For example, comparison of the opportunities for and limitations of citizen activism vs. governmental responsibility.

To put it simply, you should choose an engagement that helps you gain an experiential perspective on a political issue that you are genuinely interested in.
Once you have chosen an engagement you should have your teacher sign off on it to check it is suitable. Before doing so, you should be able to answer YES to the following questions:

- Does the engagement allow me to experience the dynamics of real world politics and do so in a participatory way?
- Do the political issues focused upon affect a community or a society in which I have some stake and experience in?
- Does the engagement involve contact with others who are also interested, or have a stake in, the political issue?

**BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIAS, YOUR ENGAGEMENT MAY NOT CONSIST OF ONLY INTERVIEWING ONE PERSON**

Some examples:
Hopefully, by now, you are a little less confused. Here are some examples of the kinds of engagements and political issues embedded in them that are likely to lend themselves well to meaningful and successful engagement activities in global politics. Remember, these are only examples and you should choose your own topics, taking into account the unique context of UWC Costa Rica and/or your home culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>Political Issue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Note: Each engagement consists of ALL of the activities described)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attendance at the full meeting of a city council, followed by interviews with two of its female councillors</td>
<td>How does the nature of democracy impact upon representation of women in politics?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Campaigning with a city councillor in support of a female candidate running for the national parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attendance at a conference to hear a speech by a female member of parliament opposed to quotas for women in politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Participation in a group discussion with a female government minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Preparation and performance of street theatre on the theme of women's rights in country A for NGO B</td>
<td>How legitimate and effective are the strategies employed by NGOs in improving women's rights in country A compared to the legitimacy and effectiveness of an outside military intervention?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interviews with women from country A involved in NGO B's work</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Three week stay and work at a 'voluntarism' school in country C</td>
<td>What are the impacts of 'voluntarism' on the local and national development of country C?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interviews with the school's representatives and other local stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussions with students and parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in a Q&amp;A session at the international criminal courts D and E</td>
<td>What are the strengths and weaknesses of international law, when applied to personal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of a trial against a war criminal at court D</td>
<td>How do processes of global politics influence where the products we need in daily life come from and how are they made?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation and participation in a mock war crime trial in the role of prosecutor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigation into the value chain of select three products in a local store: a locally sourced vegetable, a nationally sourced drink and an internationally sourced toy, including interviews with the store purchasing manager, the local farmer selling the vegetable, the drink company and an NGO working with consumer awareness issues</td>
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</table>
COMPONENT 2: COMPLEMENTARY RESEARCH

Complementary research is one of the required elements for success in the PEA IA. According to the IB, 'the role of research in the engagement activity is to complement what students learn through their engagement, including their own evolving beliefs and perspectives.'

You may find it useful to think about the research by asking the question 'in addition to the experiential learning you gain and on which you critically reflect, what else do you need to know and understand to be able to write a good, evaluative analysis of their selected political issue?'

Points to consider when planning and carrying out complementary research:

- Very often, background information on actors, organisations, events etc is required in order to understand the context in which the engagement takes place.
- Additional reading enables you to establish links between your chosen activities, political issue and the key concepts, theories and ideas studied so far in the course.
- The perspectives you gain through your engagement are partial and limited. Research is therefore required to establish which other perspectives on the political issue and organisation(s) with which you have been engaging are possible, as well as what the strengths and weaknesses of the various perspectives are.
- Complementary research may be based on primary or secondary material, although the emphasis is likely to be on secondary sources, as any primary research is likely to be part of the engagement itself.
- During your experiential learning (the engagement), you may collect items such as photos, responses to questionnaires and extracts from interviews. It is expected that you will include in-text citations or references and a bibliography, all of which must be structured in recognised academic format.

Remember, the main focus of the task is on active engagement rather than the type extensive research you conduct for, say, your extended essay. The role of the research is to enhance your understanding of the political issue raised by your engagement and to help you answer questions that emerge as a result of your planning actions and discussion.
COMPONENT 3: THE WRITTEN REPORT

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THE WRITTEN REPORT IS THE PIECE YOU WILL ACTUALLY SUBMIT AND THAT WILL BE ASSESSED

As with many other larger writing projects (such as your EE), it is useful to formulate a question, tightly linked to the political issue, which you will then attempt to answer through your experiences and reading. Obviously, you are able to refine this question throughout the engagement activity process.

Your report must be no more than 2,000 words in length (but anything substantially below this is unlikely to meet the criteria for success).

Some points to consider:

• Your report must identify a political issue that you decided to explore through the engagement and it must explain the reasons why you wanted to get engaged with this specific engagement and issue.

• If your engagement is large and multifaceted – perhaps it consists of several activities or you carried out several roles over the course of the engagement? – then you must focus your report on aspects of the engagement that are most relevant for your treatment of the political issue.

• You should be careful that your report does not simply describe, at length, what you did during your engagement. Instead, the key aspect about the engagement in the report should be what it taught you about your selected political issue.

• You must synthesise your insights and evaluate the political issue from multiple perspectives.

Structure and Wordcount:
The IB do not require you to follow a set format or required structure for your report. However, it is important that you note the following from the Global Politics Subject Guide – ‘it is expected that the report is a structured piece of well-presented writing’.

As mentioned above, the word count is 2,000 words. However, the following are not included in the word count:

• Acknowledgements
• Contents page
• Tables of statistical data
• Diagrams or figures
• Equations, formulae and calculations
• Citations (must, if used, be in the main body of the work) – you should note that a citation is a shorthand method of making a reference in the body of the report, which is then linked to the full reference in the bibliography
• References (if used, these must be in the footnotes/endnotes) – you should note that footnotes/endnotes may be used for references only. Definitions of terms and quotations, if used, must be in the body of the work and ARE included in the word count
• Bibliography
• Appendices
ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

This section is taken directly from the IB Subject Guide for Global Politics and applies to ALL students involved in a Political Engagement Activity.

Students must adhere to the following global politics course ethical guidelines when undertaking their engagement activity. They must show tact and sensitivity, respect confidentiality and acknowledge all sources used:

- Students and teachers must exercise judgment on which engagements may be suitable. This will vary from one location to another. Under no conditions must the safety of the student or any other participants in the activities be compromised.
- Any data collected must be kept in a confidential and responsible manner and not divulged to any other person.
- Any activity that involves deception, involuntary participation or invasion of privacy, including the inappropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT), email and the internet, must be avoided.
- Young children should not be used as participants. Interviews involving children need the written consent of parents/guardians and students must ensure parents are fully informed about the nature of the activity. Where an activity is conducted with children in a school, the consent of teachers must also be obtained.
- Students must avoid conducting research with any adult who is not in a fit state of mind and cannot respond freely and independently.
- Any activity which creates stress, pain or discomfort for participants must not be permitted.
- Participants and interviewees must be debriefed and given the right to withdraw their own personal data and responses. Anonymity for each participant must be guaranteed, except for interviewees in an elected or appointed government role or formal non-state actor role.
- Acknowledging that some interviewees may not be in a position to or may not choose to respond to questions freely and independently, students should, when suspecting this to be the case, complement their primary research with other opinions.
- Using relatives as a source in the engagement activity is not advisable, but if students should choose to do so, this must be declared.
- Teachers and students should exercise sensitivity to local and international cultures.
- Students must not falsify or make up data.

STUDENTS FOUND TO HAVE CARRIED OUT UNETHICAL WORK WILL BE AWARDED NO MARKS FOR THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY COMPONENT OF THE COURSE.

"The biggest risk in this study is just reading the consent form!"
THE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR THE PEA WRITTEN REPORT

This is the assessment criteria that your teacher will use to mark the written report so it is important that you familiarise yourself with it. If you do not understand anything then talk to your teacher to clarify any misunderstanding. You will be assessed according to four different criteria. The questions in red are the questions the person reading your report will be trying to answer and the level descriptors will guide them in allocating marks accordingly.

CRITERION A: IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUE AND JUSTIFICATION (4 MARKS)
- Is the political issue explored through the engagement identified?
- Is there a clear explanation of why this particular engagement and political issue are of interest to the student?
- Is there a clear link between the engagement and political issue on one hand and course content on the other hand?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>Level descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The work does not meet a standard described by the descriptors below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>The political issue raised by the engagement is implied but not explicitly identified. There is some limited explanation of why the student chose this engagement. There is some limited explanation of why the student chose this engagement. There is some link between the engagement and course content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>The political issue explored through the engagement is clearly and explicitly identified. There is a clear explanation of why this engagement and political issue are of interest to the student. There is a clear link between the engagement and political issue on one hand and course content on the other hand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CRITERION B: EXPLANATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT (4 MARKS)
- Is the description of the engagement and of what the student actually did clear and relevant for their chosen political issue?
- Is there a clear explanation of the ways in which the student’s experiences informed his or her understanding of the political issue?

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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The work does not meet a standard described by the descriptors below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>There is a description of the engagement and of what the student actually did. There is some limited explanation of what the student learned about global politics from undertaking the engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>The description of the engagement and of what the student actually did is clear and relevant for their chosen political issue. There is a clear explanation of the ways in which the student’s experiences informed his or her understanding of the political issue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CRITERION C: ANALYSIS OF ISSUE (6 MARKS)

- To what extent does the student analyse the political issue?
- To what extent does the student justify his or her main points?

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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The work does not meet a standard described by the descriptors below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>There is some attempt at analysis of the political issue but the response is largely descriptive. Few of the main points are justified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>There is some critical analysis of the political issue but this analysis lacks depth. The response is more descriptive than analytical. Some of the main points are justified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>The political issue is explored in depth, using the key concepts of the course where relevant, and the response contains clear critical analysis. All, or nearly all, of the main points are justified</td>
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CRITERION D: SYNTHESIS AND EVALUATION (6 MARKS)

- To what extent does the student synthesise his or her experiences and research in the discussion of the political issue?
- To what extent does the student show evidence of evaluation, underpinned by his or her experiences and adequate research, to allow multiple perspectives on the political issue?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The work does not meet a standard described by the descriptors below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>There are limited links between ideas. There are no conclusions, or the conclusions are not relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>There are some links between the student’s experiences and more theoretical perspectives on the political issue. Conclusions are stated but are not entirely consistent with the evidence presented. Multiple perspectives are acknowledged where relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>The student’s experiences and more theoretical perspectives are synthesised so that an integrated and rich treatment of the political issues ensues. Conclusions are clearly stated, balanced and consistent with the evidence presented. There is evidence of evaluation of the political issue from multiple perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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PROPOSAL FORM: IB GLOBAL POLITICS POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

PROPOSED POLITICAL ISSUE:

PROPOSED RESEARCH QUESTION:

HOW DO YOU PROPOSE TO ENGAGE WITH THE ISSUE:

WHAT COMPLEMENTARY RESEARCH RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?:

DOES THE ENGAGEMENT ALLOW ME TO EXPERIENCE THE DYNAMICS OF REAL
WORLD POLITICS AND DO SO IN A PARTICIPATORY WAY?

DO THE POLITICAL ISSUES FOCUSED UPON AFFECT A COMMUNITY OR A SOCIETY IN
WHICH I HAVE SOME STAKE AND EXPERIENCE IN?

DOES THE ENGAGEMENT INVOLVE CONTACT WITH OTHERS WHO ARE ALSO
INTERESTED, OR HAVE A STAKE IN, THE POLITICAL ISSUE?
As you can see, the process of completing the Political Engagement Activity is not necessarily linear. It is likely that you will have to, for example, go back to conduct more complementary research as you write your write in order to support your analysis of the learning gained from the engagement activity.