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Independent Study and Mentorship

Spiece 4A

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Searching for Answers - A Look into the Texas Congress

Research Assessment 1

Subject:

State Public Policy

Works Cited:

“State Legislator: Job Description, Duties and Requirements.” *Study.com*,
study.com/articles/State_Legislator_Job_Description_Duties_and_Requirements.html.

Texas House of Representatives. “Texas House of Representatives.” *Frequently Asked Questions*, www.house.state.tx.us/resources/frequently-asked-questions/.

Assessment:

Before I delved into the specifics of Texas Congress' functions, I understood only fundamental ideas of the lives of those tasked with drafting legislation; this background information has largely come from past experience with simulations of government (such as from Model United Nations), but has never primarily focused on the intricacies present in the circumstances surrounding a legislator's election. Understanding more about these operations and the life of a state representative is an aspiration I hope to achieve to broaden my knowledge on how their legislature affects citizens' daily lives. Thus, from the articles below, I am able to grasp the compensation and the responsibilities given to state legislators in an attempt to relate public policy at the state level to my future career path.

Similar to my past knowledge of the actions of legislators in session, I was able to understand more of how state representatives build themselves up towards their elected office. Firstly, I discovered that there are no post-secondary educational requirements to run for office, but that the majority of elected officials will actually take the time to obtain at least a bachelor's degree. I feel that this information furthers my interest in working with a mentor that understands not only the legislative processes at the state level, but also another field of work that can be related to public policy. Secondly, I've learned that many legislators have background in a related field prior to election, and usually are more experienced before running for office. I feel that these two ideas are critical areas of study as I continue my journey through ISM; as I continue to learn more about the effects of public policy and the processes required for its

implementation, I hope to understand more concerning *favorable background education* for drafting bills and what *steps representatives have taken in the private sector* prior to election.

With that, I have also learned from the articles below of the lifestyle elected officials live as they balance drafting legislation during regular sessions and working in their prior job position. After learning more about the structure of governmental meetings and the schedule at which legislation is introduced, I hope to be able to further explore trends in the qualifications of past representatives and what *previous job fields* can lead to a more persuasive campaign for office. Not only that, but I also aim to understand the *responsibilities of representatives beyond simply crafting legislature*, but rather how they interact to create committees or with executive branch officials in remaking Texas law.

Similar to my general idea of duties as an elected official both in and out of session, I have learned a summary of duties for various offices open for election at the district and state level, and how each representative has followed their path to where they are today. From ISM, I hope to delve deeper to understand the exact *responsibilities of various offices* and how their actions affect public policy, as well as *other opportunities in related fields* to impact Texas law for the better. Finally, another area of study I hope to uncover more information about is the path towards *future growth past state legislation* - I am intrigued to find out how Texas Senators like John Cornyn and Ted Cruz have expressed interest or contacted others to be able to influence American policy at the national level.

After analyzing this overarching summary on the background of state representatives, I feel more empowered than ever to advance my knowledge of public service and elected office. From learning what I already understand and what requires further exploration, I have created a

passion for my future that will propel me into reforming public policy for as many as possible. I hope to be able to reciprocate this information to others and promote greater civic participation in every citizen.

State Legislator: Job Description, Duties and Requirements

State legislators do not require any formal education. Learn about the job duties, citizenship and age requirements to see if this is the right career for you.

State legislators are **elected** to serve as lawmakers and members of a legislative body. Most legislators possess a bachelor's degree, although **no formal education is required**. They do have to meet their state's age and residency requirements.

Essential Information

A state legislator is an elected official who works for a lawmaking body in his or her state. The breadth of a legislator's duties **varies by state**, and for most of these professionals, legislating is a part-time job. While there are no official education requirements, **age and residency requirements for becoming a legislator differ by state**.

Required Education	Although no formal education is required, many legislators have 4-year degrees
Other Requirements	Must be elected into the position; age and citizenship requirements vary by state
Projected Job Growth (2014-2024)*	-1% (decline) for all legislators
Median Salary (2015)*	\$20,500 for all legislators

Source: *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Job Description of State Legislators

State legislators serve 2- to 4-year terms in their states' house of representatives or senate, creating and ratifying state laws and regulations. Their work closely mirrors that of legislators in the U.S.

Senate and House, only on a smaller, state level. State legislators **debate, vote on bills** and work in committees.

In many states, being a legislator is **not a full-time job**. According to the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), **16.4% of state legislators were working full-time** as of 2007 (www.ncsl.org). In states where legislators did not work full-time, they received minimal compensation, and many had an additional occupation, most commonly as an attorney or a business owner, according to NCSL data. Some state legislators were retired. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, job growth for legislators is projected to decline by 1% from 2014-2024.

Salary Information

Salaries for state legislators vary widely by the activity of the legislator and his or her state legislative body. Legislators working full-time in the highly active bodies of California and New York, for example, made base annual salaries of \$100,113 and \$79,500 per year, respectively, as of 2016, according to NCSL data. The NCSL indicated that legislators working part-time and in the least active bodies received much less compensation; legislators in Mississippi, for instance, earned a minimum of \$10,000 per year in 2016. The BLS reported in 2015 that the median annual income for all legislators was \$20,500.

State Legislator Duties

When their legislative body is in session, **state legislators create and process bills that will become state law if approved**. They also form issue-related committees and subcommittees and debate and read bills and amendments on the legislative floor.

Education and Career Requirements for State Legislators

Because it is an elected position, there are no guidelines for becoming a state legislator beyond age, citizenship and residency requirements, which vary by state. According to NCSL data from 2015, the majority of state legislators were 50-66 years old, but some, about 5%, were millennials (between 18 and 34 years old).

The NCSL also reports that state legislators can come from a variety of backgrounds, including small business owners, attorneys, and educators. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics adds that many would-be legislators seek local support by taking part in volunteer and community service work (www.bls.gov).

The responsibilities of state legislators varies by state; **they may process bills that will become state law, form issue-related committees, and debate bills on the legislative floor.** Many legislators possess at least a bachelor's degree. Legislators in some states earn far more than the \$20,500 median salary reported as of 2015; California legislators earned a base annual salary of \$100,113 in 2015.

What does the Texas House of Representatives do?

The Texas House of Representatives is composed of 150 members, each elected for a two-year term. A member of the house must be a citizen of the United States, must be a qualified elector of the state, and must be at least 21 years old. He or she must have been a resident of the state for two years immediately preceding election, and for one year immediately preceding election must have been a resident of the district from which he or she was chosen.

The house of representatives elects one of its own members as presiding officer--the speaker of the house. The house creates and enforces its own rules and judges the qualifications of its members.

The house of representatives, together with the state senate, constitute the Texas Legislature. The duties of the legislature include consideration of proposed laws and resolutions, consideration of proposed constitutional amendments for submission to the voters, and appropriation of all funds for the operation of state government. All bills for raising revenue considered by the legislature must originate in the house of representatives. The house alone can bring impeachment charges against a statewide officer, which charges must be tried by the senate.

What is the legislative process?

In Texas, as in the Congress and most other states, the lawmaking process involves four major stages: introduction, committee action, floor action, and

enrollment. In a bicameral legislature like Texas', with both a house and a senate, the first three stages must occur in each of the houses consecutively. After the house in which the bill is introduced completes action on the measure, the bill is sent to the second house, where **the process is repeated through the three stages.** The fourth stage, enrollment, occurs in the originating house after both houses have agreed on the final form of the proposal. See [How a Bill Becomes a Law](#).

What does the speaker of the house do?

The speaker is the presiding officer of the house of representatives. The Texas Constitution requires the house of representatives, **each time a new legislature convenes, to choose one of its own members to serve as speaker.**

As presiding officer, the speaker maintains order during floor debate, recognizing legislators who wish to speak and ruling on procedural matters.

The constitution also requires the speaker to sign all bills and joint resolutions passed by the legislature. As a member of the house of representatives, the speaker may vote on all questions before the house.

The other duties and responsibilities of the speaker are determined by the members of the house in the House Rules of Procedure, which are adopted by a majority vote of the members at the beginning of each regular session of the legislature. The members give the speaker the authority to appoint the membership of each standing committee, subject to rules on seniority, and to designate the chair and vice chair for each committee. Under the rules, the

speaker is responsible for referring all proposed legislation to committee, subject to the committee jurisdictions set forth in the rules. The rules also allow the speaker to appoint conference committees, to create select committees, and to direct committees to conduct interim studies when the legislature is not in session.

How often does the legislature meet?

The Legislature of the State of Texas, operating under the biennial system, convenes its regular sessions at noon on the second Tuesday in January of odd-numbered years. The maximum duration of a regular session is 140 days. The governor is given authority under the state constitution to convene the legislature at other times during the biennium. Such sessions are known as called or special sessions and are reserved for legislation that the governor deems critically important in the conduct of state affairs. Called sessions are limited to a period of 30 days, during which the legislature is permitted to pass laws only on subjects submitted by the governor in calling for the session.