



# Guide to Study Groups

IOP Residential Fellows Program, Spring 2018

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# What is a study group?

## Study groups are a foundational component of the IOP Residential Fellows program.

Each Resident Fellow is charged with leading an eight-week “study group,” a discussion group or salon of sorts that convenes students, staff and faculty, and Cambridge community members around a central topic of the semester.

Study groups are not full courses or classes in that they have no homework, no attendance requirement, and do not provide course credit. They are optional events offered to the entire Harvard and Cambridge community. Each study group is 75 minutes long.

The Fellow’s role in the study group is that of facilitator. The study group will have a central theme for the semester, usually relating specifically to the Fellow’s past experience. For instance, a journalist could host a study group called “Political Journalism Since the 2016 Election.” Each particular week of the eight-week study group bears a sub-theme of the central topic. For instance, using the same example, one week of the journalist Fellow’s study group could investigate “The White House Press Corps in the Age of Trump,” and another could focus on “The 24/7 News Cycle and the Rush to Break News.”

For each study group, the Fellow typically prepares a 10-20 minute introduction to the week’s sub-theme. This introduction can include anything from relevant media clips, a PowerPoint lecture-style presentation, a case study, or any other way of framing the discussion. For the rest of the study group, the Fellow will moderate a discussion and Q&A session amongst the study group attendees. Study groups are quite casual, and telling relevant stories and sharing tangential commentary is encouraged and appreciated.

In addition, four of the eight study groups should incorporate a visit from a guest. The IOP covers travel and accommodations for study group guests, and the Fellow is given license to select and invite their own guests according to their sub-themes of specific weeks’ study groups. In study group sessions that include a guest, a portion of the study group is spent interviewing or moderating a discussion with the guest (for perhaps 20-30 minutes) before moving into open discussion and Q&A.

The best study groups are those that are interactive and discussion-based rather than lecture-style. Back and forth between Fellows and their guests or between Fellows and students is encouraged and appreciated.



# What makes a good study group proposal?

## Topic is related to the Fellow's experience

Fellows are most comfortable conducting study groups that are related to their career experience, and those are usually the best study groups. Enriching the discussion with stories and practical examples of the issue at hand achieves the central goal of connecting students with political *practitioners*.

## Topic is relevant to current events

Study groups that discuss solely historical events and rarely stray into the current political landscape are usually not favorites amongst students. Students often come to study groups to hear an analysis of the study group topic in light of what happened *that week* in the news, and thus topics should be contemporary and offer fresh analysis to the modern themes of politics.

## Proposes great guests

As you might imagine, it can be difficult to host a discussion group for eight weeks in a row on a central topic. Study group guests are vital in livening up the discussion, providing new insights that are different from those of the Fellow, and allowing students to learn from ever more political practitioners. The best study group proposals offer specific guest suggestions tied to specific sub-themes for certain weeks' study groups, rather than a general list of guests that could hypothetically be invited throughout the semester.

## Weekly outlines are specific, but not *too* specific

This study group proposal is meant to be a flexible outline, not a concrete document that the Fellow is bound to execute if they are selected for the program. Great study group proposals offer a description for each week's study group in 2-4 sentences, with an additional line for guests for that group. Outlines must be broad enough to allow for new and relevant current events that could alter the topic of discussion, but specific enough that readers are able to understand the gist of what will occur each week.



# Study Group Proposal Template

## <OVERALL STUDY GROUP TITLE>

3-5 sentence description of the overall topic and why the Fellow has the expertise to speak to that topic.

### Week 1: <Sub-Theme 1>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.

### Week 2: <Sub-Theme 2>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.

### Week 3: <Sub-Theme 3>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.

GUEST: <potential guest>

### Week 4: <Sub-Theme 4>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.

GUEST: <potential guest>

### Week 5: <Sub-Theme 5>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.

GUEST: <potential guest>

### Week 6: <Sub-Theme 6>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.

GUEST: <potential guest>

### Week 7: <Sub-Theme 7>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.

### Week 8: <Sub-Theme 8>

2-4 sentence description of the sub-theme and why it ties into the overall study group topic.



# Study Group Proposal Example

## ARE WE STILL IN THIS TOGETHER? THE DEATH OF PARTIES AND THE RISE OF TRIBALISM IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Is the two-party system as we've known it dead? Join this discussion led by Scott Jennings, founding partner of RunSwitch Public Relations, former Special Assistant to President George W. Bush, campaign advisor to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, CNN Political Commentator, and columnist for the Louisville *Courier-Journal* and CNN. Having worked in partisan politics for years, Jennings views political parties as relics of a bygone era, propped up mostly by ballot access laws and rendered impotent by the rise of Super PACs.

### Week 1: The History of Political Parties and Their Role in American Politics

George Washington warned in his farewell address that political parties may become “potent engines by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people.” How has the wild-west campaign finance system gripped our politics, and how do we understand modern political parties in their historical contexts?

### Week 2: Dude, Where's My Party?

In a country where the same group of people can vote for Bernie Sanders in a primary and Donald Trump in a general election, there is something amiss between the people and their party choices. Are the American people more moderate than our parties suggest? Is this unique to our democracy?

### Week 3: Can a Third Party Rise in 2020's Presidential Campaign?

How would a third-party candidacy be organized for success? Join Scott Jennings and veteran political pollster Neil Newhouse for a table-top exercise in plotting a third-party candidacy. Do the conditions exist, and what is a realistic plan for success?

GUEST: Neil Newhouse

### Week 4: America's Urban/Rural Divide: Are We Still In This Together?

The 2016 election produced a loud roar from non-urban America, changing the electoral map and injecting a dose of conservative values into a nation that some thought had permanently tacked left. Scott Jennings, Dave Wasserman of the *Cook Political Report*, and Harvard Professor Ryan Enos will discuss what citizens in “fly-over country” are thinking and feeling in the age of Trump.

GUESTS: Dave Wasserman and Prof. Ryan Enos



## **Week 5: Tribalism's Sirens: How Cable TV Works**

Americans go to their respective corners for news and information. What should we make of information fragmentation, and who decides which voices are heard on CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC?

## **Week 6: Where Do You Get Your News?**

Some have called 2016 “the Facebook election,” and now the company is under the microscope for its role in spreading “fake news” and its responsibilities as a global distributor of political information. At the same time, distrust in the traditional news media has hit an all-time high. Join Scott Jennings and Joel Kaplan, Vice President of Global Public Policy at Facebook, as we explore the rapidly changing information distribution environment.  
GUEST: Joel Kaplan

## **Week 7: Battle for the US Senate 2018: Will the Establishment Republican Party Survive?**

Former presidential advisor Steve Bannon is conducting an “all-out war” on establishment Republican politicians, producing primary opponents for several US Senate incumbents. Can the establishment GOP survive this onslaught? Join Scott Jennings and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell for a discussion on the Senate midterm battle.  
GUEST: Senator Mitch McConnell

## **Week 8: State and Local Political Landscape in 2018**

While the battle for US Congress will dominate national political coverage, there are thousands of gubernatorial, state legislative, mayoral, and other local offices on the ballot this year. What is the role of parties in these races versus national (presidential) campaigns?

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Scott proposed an excellent study group because: the topic was highly related to his personal experience as a political operative; the topic was highly relevant to current events and a current national conversation; he proposed relevant and interesting guests for four study groups (and clearly delineated them in the proposal); and each week was described briefly but thoroughly.

# Interested?

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