Getting Started with the Course

**Due date:** Tuesday, April 9, 3:00pm.

**CSC 366** always has a course-long project structured around database modeling for an outside customer, who wants a prototype database-supported application. This year, our customer is CalMatters\(^1\), a California-based independent investigative journalism non-profit, concentrated on California affairs, specifically on California politics and legislative activities.

In 2023, CalMatters, together with Cal Poly’s Institute for Advanced Technologies and Public Policy (IATPP), received funding to resurrect the Digital Democracy project, a Cal Poly initiative to bring transparency to the California legislative activities. The early version of the project\(^2\) was in development from 2014 (we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the project this quarter) and through 2018, after which we ran out of funding to support it and left it dormant for four years.

The Digital Democracy project produces annotated transcripts of state legislative committee and floor hearings, that are available to the public in video form. The annotated transcripts allow for searching inside videos. The transcripts are annotated with the names (and identities) of the speakers, and each transcript is broken into its constituent parts (discussions of individual bills). This work is supported by the Digital Democracy Database (DDDB), a large database developed as part of the project to store all the necessary data and support application development on top of the Digital Democracy platform.

The DDDB ingests data from a variety of outside sources. These sources include LegInfo - the State of California legislative activities database, that allows us to track the bills, obtain their text, and understand when and where they are discussed and how they are voted on by the legislators. The sources also include the California Secretary of State Database (**which is the primary object of interest for us for the CSC 366 project**), which stores a variety of filings that individuals and entities engaged in California politics must submit. The SoS Database contains information about Lobbyists registered with the State of California, their places of employment, and the lobbying activities they are engaged in. It also contains information about financial filings of the Legislators. There are several additional sources of some of the data the DDDB stores (OpenStates API for additional campaign contributions data, for example).

In Spring 2024 (right as we speak), CalMatters is launching DigitalDemocracy V.2.0 portal, [http://digitaldemocracy.calmatters.org](http://digitaldemocracy.calmatters.org). The portal allows the visitors to review the legislative activities in the California Legislature. At the heart of the portal are directories of Bills, committee and floor hearings on the bills, people testifying in the hearings, and the organizations that take positions on the bills.

**Tracking Lobbying Activities**

One of the challenges for us this quarter is to understand how registered Lobbyists work to represent their clients in the state legislature. Some of this can be glimpsed from the Secretary of State database (and we will be doing it later). But a lot of it is visible from within the Digital Democracy portal. For this assignment, you will spend some time (I expect you would need anywhere between 45 minutes and 2 hours, but I doubt it would take longer), investigating how lobbying works in the official legislative proceedings.

Working with the CalMatters Digital Democracy portal, complete the following tasks and record the results in a succinct report:

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\(^1\) [http://calmatters.org](http://calmatters.org)

\(^2\) [http://digitaldemocracy.org](http://digitaldemocracy.org) - now possibly defunct.
1. Find a Registered Lobbyist who gave some substantive testimony during the 2023-2024 California Legislative session ("substantive" means spoke on more than one occasion, for a decent amount of time - both of these can be viewed in the portal). **Hint:** there is a directory of individuals on the portal, and you can filter them by the role they play in the legislative process.

2. With the Lobbyist you selected, listen to their testimony in the hearings (for context, you might listen/read transcript for a bit more of the discussions in which the Lobbyist participated). Determine:
   - If the Lobbyist mentioned any organizations they were representing (and if they did - which ones)
   - The position on the specific Bill that the Lobbyist advocated
   - Whether the Lobbyist simply state the position, or also provided additional arguments in favor of the position, and/or engaged in some extended discussion with the Legislators.

3. Look up the Bills (and the specific Bill versions) the Lobbyist testified about. While reading the full text of the Bill is not necessary, I encourage you to look up the short description of the Bill, and to look up Bill Analysis documents for the Bill – the Bill Analysis documents contain the written-for-general-public description of the Bill and its impact. Bill Analysis documents also include information about the support and opposition to the Bill. So:

4. In the lists of support and opposition, search of the organizations represented by the Lobbyist during the hearings. Can you find them?

5. Determine the actual place of employment for the Lobbyist. Where do they work? Who employs them? What do we know about their place of employment, based on information available on the Digital Democracy portal.

With the information you found, prepare a short (2-3 pages is probably where it is at) report, describing in detail what you were able to find about the lobbying activity of the specific Lobbyist you investigated. Your report shall be written in a story form (i.e., as a paragraph-form text in complete English sentences, not as a set of notes and bullet-point lists). You can think of the report as a short article describing the activities of the Lobbyist.

**Submission Instructions**

Submit a PDF copy of your report using the `handin` command. To remind you, to use `handin`, you need to be logged on the `unix1.csc.calpoly.edu` (or `unix2, unix3, unix4, unix5`), and need to place your file there. Submit, using the command

```
$ handin dekhtyar 366-lab00 <file>
```

**Take the Course Survey**

**Due Date:** Thursday, April 4, 3:00pm

For **CSC 366** it works better if teams are formed by the instructor. To do so, I have put together a survey, which I am asking you to take. The survey link has been shared with you on Slack, and I will also put it on the course web page.

**Please**, fill out the survey on time. If you have not filled out the survey, you will not be assigned to a team and this will make your participation in **Lab 2** difficult. **Note:** one of the questions is asking you whether you intend to stay in the course. If you are registered for the course and are considering dropping, or are planning to definitely drop - please fill out the survey anyway, and select the appropriate option. If you are dropping the course for sure, you don’t really need to fill out any other information. If you are wavering, please fill out the survey completely, as I will need to tentatively place you on a team.