



FIFTH ANNUAL UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC POLICY COMPETITION  
**U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE**

Official Rulebook for the 2018 Competition



Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy  
**STUDENT FORUM**

**The Baker Institute Student Forum's  
Undergraduate Public Policy Competition**

**Official Rulebook for the 2018 Competition:  
U.S. Foreign Policy in the Western Hemisphere**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This document will serve as the official rulebook for the 2018 Baker Institute Student Forum (BISF) Undergraduate Public Policy Competition: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Western Hemisphere, to be held at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy on April 7, 2018. The document will serve as the official rulebook for the competition. The BISF has made every effort to make this rulebook as comprehensive and readable as possible. Please consult this document for any questions you might have prior to contacting the BISF directly. Please note, the BISF maintains the right to amend these rules as deemed appropriate prior to the competition but will only do so if absolutely necessary or judged to be in the best interest of the participants. If any questions remain that are not clearly answered in this document, please contact the BISF at [bisf@rice.edu](mailto:bisf@rice.edu), the Policy Competition Chair Madison Grimes at [mpg3@rice.edu](mailto:mpg3@rice.edu), or the President David Ratnoff at [dor2@rice.edu](mailto:dor2@rice.edu). Additional details of the policy conference will be revealed to the selected finalists upon their notification of selection.

Please note, the BISF is a separate, though affiliated, organization from the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy. Under no circumstances should entrants directly contact the Baker Institute. The BISF can be reached by email at [bisf@rice.edu](mailto:bisf@rice.edu) or at the President's email, [dor2@rice.edu](mailto:dor2@rice.edu). The members of the BISF will respond as timely as possible but we ask for your patience.

## II. ELIGIBILITY

The BISF Public Policy Competition is open to submissions from entrants meeting the following eligibility requirements:

- a. At least 18 years of age at the time of the policy conference
- b. Enrolled, either part-time or full-time, as an undergraduate student during the 2017–2018 Academic Year at Rice University

Additional Circumstances:

- c. Students enrolled in their final year of undergraduate study in the 2017-2018 academic year are considered eligible but should be able to attend the policy conference on April 7, 2018, if selected as a finalist.
- d. International students currently attending Rice University are considered eligible.
- e. Students who have entered the competition previously may submit again, but they must present a paper that is substantially different from the paper they submitted previously. Entries from previous competitors should both address a problem and provide a proposal that are different than those which they presented previously. The BISF reserves the right to disqualify papers that are too similar to previous entries submitted by that competitor.

Team Structure:

- f. Interested participants may submit individually or in teams of two or three.
- g. Only one team member needs to submit the proposal, but all members' identification information should be included.
- h. All team members should meet eligibility criteria and be available to participate in the conference if selected as a finalist team.

Throughout this document, any stipulation applied to participants or finalists is intended to apply to all members of a team submission.

### III. SUBMITTING ENTRIES

**All entries must be submitted by 11:59 P.M. (central standard time) on January 26, 2018.**

Entries may be submitted by emailing [bisf@rice.edu](mailto:bisf@rice.edu) with the following stipulations:

- The paper must be attached as a .doc or .pdf file
- The paper file should be titled:  
[BISF Policy Proposal – Last name First name]
- The paper should meet all formatting requirements described in Section VI.
- The email subject title should be labeled:  
[Policy Competition Submission Last name First name]
- The email should be sent from the entrant's personal email address and will serve as the sole means of communication between the BISF and the entrant
- The email body must contain the entrant's full legal name.
  - This information is strictly for identification purposes and will not be shared. This information will be withheld from the Review Committee at the time of paper evaluation.

#### IV. POLICY PAPER OVERVIEW

**What should submissions address?** Entrants must select from one of the following five prompts:

1. Latin America is an interesting region for foreign policy in the 21st century because its countries are resource rich and middle income. In fact, due to a recent economic boom, the middle class in Latin America and the Caribbean has nearly doubled in the last decade, according to the Pew Research Center. However, since colonial independence, the region has been socially and politically complicated, especially with regards to its relationship with the United States. In your proposal, identify the strategic value of Latin America and/or the Caribbean for the United States, particularly as other powers pursue their own interests, and propose policies that would advance U.S. strategic goals.
2. Starting in the late 1980s, Latin America was the number one source of newly arrived immigrants to the United States. Despite being surpassed by Asia in 2013, Latin Americans still make up the largest immigrant population within the U.S., and Canada and the Caribbean are significant sources of immigrants as well. Knowing this, address a problem with the current immigration system and propose a change that will better contribute to U.S. foreign policy interests.
3. In 2011, President Barack Obama declared his intention to refocus U.S. foreign policy in a “pivot to Asia.” This “pivot” included a push for new economic and trade policies in Asia, most notably the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Following President Donald Trump’s decision to formally withdraw from the TPP and no longer focus on trade and investment in Asia, Latin America and the broader western hemisphere present an alternate region for U.S. economic leadership. In your proposal, do one or more of the following:

- a. Propose a change to current U.S. trade policies in the western hemisphere.
  - b. Propose a policy that will encourage U.S. investment in Latin America.
  - c. Identify and describe a type of trade agreement that will support U.S. interests in either Latin America or the western hemisphere.
4. According to the World Justice Program's 2016 Rule of Law Index, many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean score poorly on the eight primary rule of law factors (constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, open government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and criminal justice), with Venezuela ranked 113 out of 113. This problem manifests itself as corruption, organized crime, impunity, and high levels of violence in many of these countries. In response to this problem, propose a policy that the United States can implement to promote and support one specific aspect of the development of strong institutions, adequate rule of law, and democratic practices in the western hemisphere.
5. Choose a specific U.S. policy that is currently in place with regards to a specific country/region in the Western Hemisphere, identify problems with this policy, and recommend a new course of action (reject the policy, change the policy, or adopt a new policy).

**Regardless of the prompt chosen, all papers should contain the following content:**

- They should address U.S. national level policy, rather than local or state policy. Papers may discuss domestic implications or context, but the bulk of the paper should focus on national level international policy.
- They should address laws or public regulations.
- They should be written in a formal style, but assume minimal prior knowledge of the reader.
- They should utilize data and academic literature to support arguments made within the paper.

- If the course of action requires a cost, the writer should explain where funds will come from (within the state or national budget, a new tax, etc.).
- They should only contain analysis directly relevant to the policy being proposed.
- They should have a narrow focus and scope, relating to a specific law or regulation or a specific set of laws and regulations that are interconnected.
- They should take the form of a policy proposal, and thus include, at minimum:
  - a brief abstract
  - relevant background information about the subtopic being addressed
  - a statement of current policy and why it is inadequate (if against)/why it is beneficial (if for retaining the policy)
  - a statement of at least two policy options available for addressing this inadequacy (if against)/at least two proposed changes to this policy; with a brief summary of the benefits and drawbacks presented by each option
  - a recommendation for a specific course of action
  - an explanation of why this policy is the preferable alternative, reinforced by evidence and strong argumentation that addresses possible counterarguments
  - a bibliography

Entrants should utilize available data and academic literature to support arguments made within the paper. For a more detailed overview of evaluation, see Section V below.

## V. PAPER EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Weight	Category	Criteria
10%	Background	<p>Does the writer effectively provide background information relevant to the topic at hand?</p> <p>Does the writer describe the relevant status quo for the topic at hand?</p> <p>Does the writer clearly identify plausible, significant inadequacies of the status quo <u>or</u> identify plausible, significant benefits of the status quo?</p>
20%	Proposal	<p>Does the writer describe at least two strong courses of action to resolve the aforementioned inadequacies <u>or</u> two strong proposals to change or eliminate the policies that help maintain the status quo?</p> <p>Does the writer convincingly describe the pros and cons of each alternative?</p> <p>Does the writer clearly and precisely convey what course of action is best?</p> <p>Is the course of action specific and detailed?</p> <p>If the course of action is a change in policy, is it significantly different from the status quo?</p> <p>Is the policy proposal directly relevant to the chosen prompt, or, if free choice, is the policy proposal directly relevant to the policy addressed?</p>
30%	Justification	<p>Does the writer effectively and convincingly argue why the policy proposal will correct the problem presented, or why maintaining the status quo is better policy than accepting a proposed alternative?</p> <p>Does the writer identify and discuss major advantages and disadvantages to adopting the policy proposed?</p> <p>Does the writer effectively address counterarguments?</p> <p>Does the writer identify costs of implementing this policy, and address how these costs will be funded?</p>
15%	Feasibility and Specificity	<p>Does the paper address a specific policy or set of policies that can be reasonably analyzed in a paper of this length?</p> <p>Is the proposal realistic and is its implementation conceivable?</p> <p>Is this policy cost-effective?</p>
25%	Evidence	<p>Does the writer present relevant data to illustrate claims?</p> <p>Does the writer effectively use academic literature to support arguments?</p> <p>Are there many unsupported claims?</p> <p>Are there unnecessary, irrelevant, or inaccurate citations?</p> <p>Are there obvious gaps in research relevant to the policy?</p> <p>How informed does the writer appear to be on the subject matter chosen?</p>

## VI. PAPER FORMATTING

- a. All papers should be formatted according to the following criteria:
  - 3,000 – 6,000 words in length, excluding citations. Any paper exceeding the word limit will be subject to disqualification.
  - Times New Roman, 12 pt font
  - Double-spaced
  - Page number centered in footer
  - Standard 1 inch margins on all sides of page
  - Consistent formatting for subsection titles (Letters, numerals, etc.)
- b. Page 1: Cover Page displaying entrant's
  - Name
  - University Attended, Expected Year of Graduation
  - Title of Policy Paper
- c. Page 2:
  - Title of Policy Paper
  - Abstract (250 – 350 words)
- d. Page 3 – : Body of Paper
- e. Last Pages: Bibliography
- f. Citations: APA, Chicago/Turabian, MLA, and Harvard Styles will be accepted.
- g. Footnotes: Times New Roman, 10 pt font, single-spaced

Please do not include any headings or footings beyond the requested page number. Do not include any personal information (name, university, etc. ) on any page beyond the cover sheet. An example paper is included in Appendix B.

Failure to adhere to the formatting described above may result in point deductions from the Review Committee's evaluation score.

## VII. PAPER EVALUATION PROCEDURE

1. **All entries must be received by January 26, 2018.**
2. All entries received will be assigned an identification number and stripped of their personal identification information. Cover Pages will not be printed.
3. The Review Committee will read and score anonymous papers according to the criteria established in Section IV. Members of the Review Committee will have been trained in how papers are to be graded and will report their evaluations to the BISF.
4. Six to ten entrants will be selected as finalists based on the paper evaluation scores. All finalists are invited to participate in a formal conference at the Baker Institute.
5. Finalists will be notified no later than March 2, 2018, of their selection to participate in the 2018 Policy Conference. Those who are not selected as finalists will be notified.
6. Students will have until March 9, 2017, to notify the BISF of their intent to participate in the competition. The BISF maintains the right to replace finalists who decline with alternates at its discretion pending circumstances at the time of occurrence.

## VIII. RESPONSIBILITIES OF FINALISTS PRIOR TO CONFERENCE

After accepting their invitations to participate in the policy conference, finalists will be asked to prepare a PowerPoint to accompany a 20-minute presentation of their proposal to be presented to a panel of judges. This style of the PowerPoint is left to the discretion of the finalists but should be kept strictly professional. PowerPoints should be finalized and emailed to [bisf@rice.edu](mailto:bisf@rice.edu) by March 31, 2018. The BISF will try to accommodate changes made after this deadline prior to the first judging panel, but does not guarantee PowerPoints submitted after this deadline will be accessible for the presentation. The BISF is not responsible for providing computer access to any finalists.

## IX. CONFERENCE COMPETITION PROCEDURE

1. Each finalist will be assigned a time slot on the afternoon of April 7, 2018 to present their policy proposal to a panel of judges from the Houston community.
2. Each finalist will have a maximum of 20 minutes to present their proposal using PowerPoint as a visual aid. This will be followed by 10 minutes for judges to ask questions.
3. All panel judges will be required to state any familiarity with finalists prior to the presentation. Those with stated relationships will be excused for the round.
- 4. Each finalist's final score will be weighed 50% paper 50% presentation.**
5. In the case of a tie final score for two or more finalists, the judges from the presentations will convene to rank the tying finalists. No two finalists will tie for a final placement or prize.
6. Cash prizes will be given as detailed in Section XI.
7. At the award ceremony, the top 3 placing finalists will be recognized. Each will be given 5 minutes to inform the audience of their proposal.

## X. OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION EVALUATION

Weight	Category	Criteria
25%	Depth of Knowledge	Does the speaker demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter being analyzed? Does the speaker demonstrate an understanding of the literature on the subject matter? Does the speaker effectively respond to questions proposed by the judges following the presentation?
25%	Completeness of Presentation	Does the speaker discuss the most important relevant aspects of the policy area being analyzed? Does the speaker effectively explain his or her proposal?
25%	Originality and Relevance	Is the speaker's proposal original or unique in some way? Does the proposal directly address a specific policy or related set of policies relevant to one of the prompts? Is the presentation focused on background, research, and analysis relevant to the policy area or proposal?
25%	Presentation	How effective is the speaker? Does the speaker maintain professional demeanor? Does the visual aid provide appropriate and useful visual support for the presentation? (Graphs, Plots, etc.)

Final score to determine competition winner = 0.50\*Paper Evaluation + 0.50\*Presentation

## XI. PRIZES

- a. 1<sup>st</sup> Place: \$1,000
- b. 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: \$750
- c. 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: \$500
- d. All finalists will have their Abstracts published in *The Rice Journal of Public Policy*, Rice University's James A. Baker III Institute Undergraduate Public Policy Journal.
- e. In the case of a tie, the paper evaluation score will serve as the tie-breaker. Only one finalist will receive each prize.

## APPENDIX A. TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT DATES

November 1	Open Submission Window
January 26	Close Submission Window at 11:59 PM Central Standard Time
March 2	Deadline finalists notified of selection
March 9	Deadline for selected finalists to Confirm Attendance
March 31	Deadline for submitting PowerPoints for presentation
April 6	Registration
April 7	BISF Undergraduate Public Policy Competition: US Foreign Policy in the Western Hemisphere

APPENDIX B. EXAMPLE OF PAPER FORMATTING

First Name Last Name

University Attended, Year of Graduation

Paper Title

## Paper Title

### Abstract:

This is where a participant should write the abstract. The abstract should be 250 – 350 words in length. It should state the policy area to be analyzed and the proposal being made. The abstract should function as a complete thesis that guides the reader in what follows in the paper. The Abstract should be separated from the body of the paper itself by a page break. This page will function as the cover page during paper evaluations by the Review Committee.

## I. Introduction

Papers may format subsection headings as desired. There is no standard format proposed in this rulebook, however participants should be consistent in whatever format is chosen.

## II. Section Heading

The paper should be written in 12 point Times New Roman Font, Double spaced, and use 1 inch margins. The entire paper should be between 3,000 and 6,000 words in total, excluding citations.<sup>1</sup> The Bibliography should begin on a separate page from the last paragraph of the paper's body text.

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes may be used at the discretion of the writer but are generally discouraged, with the exception of citation styles utilizing partial citations in footnotes throughout the essay. Participants may use APA, Chicago/Turabian, MLA, or Harvard Citation formats.

## Bibliography

Consult a formal guide on citations such as the Chicago Manual of Style for details regarding proper formatting of references.

## APPENDIX C. TENTATIVE CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

### April 6, 2017

4:00 – 5:30 PM	Event TBD
5:30 – 6:00 PM	Registration for participants
6:00 – 7:30 PM	Opening dinner for participants, transportation will be provided
7:30 PM	Close for Evening

### April 7, 2017

8:00 – 9:00 AM	Check-in at the Baker Institute, Breakfast provided
9:00 AM – 1:00 PM	Presentations by finalists
1:00 – 2:00 PM	Lunch provided in the Grand Hall, Keynote Speaker
2:00 – 2:30 PM	Awards presentation, closing by David Ratnoff, President of the BISF