In my experience as an Indian-American, racial discrimination, as a concept and reality, plays a continual role in shaping my vision for a better United States (U.S.). Many people like to describe the ethnic culture of the U.S. as a melting pot – an amalgamation of identities and beliefs, with each cultural flavor adding to a thoroughly blended society. From my perspective, the culture of the U.S. looks akin to the food pyramid – each culture must have involvement for a complete pyramid, but clear divisions exist between each group, and certain groups have greater focus. Given this perspective, and my experience as a political operative in campaigns, I seek to advance the political engagement of South Asian Americans to allow us equitable representation in electable office. This writeup will explain my process this past semester as I attempt to accomplish that goal.

Initially, I intended on developing a community organization to centralize the inherent power of the South Asian-American bloc. South Asians, specifically Indians, are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the U.S. and they've traditionally had access to monetary success. Their influence in U.S. society holds great potential, though they've seen underrepresentation in open office. Multiple factors play into their underrepresentation, including racial discrimination, though I believe a lack of communal centralization plays the largest role. Anecdotally, I understand that Indian-Americans do not have much engagement with the political process. The people in my Indian community may express their civic duty of voting, though they do not engage in canvassing, candidate recruiting, campaign donations, etc. Therefore, I thought to initiate a community organization designed to centralize and politically galvanize the South Asian base.

First, I thought about the mission of this organization, and how it would carry out the mission. The mission came easy – to advance the political engagement and representation of the South Asian-American population in the United States. To carry out said mission, I had five major goals: 1) Develop initial materials including a master contact list, introductory information and a basic website. 2) Distribute relevant information on a regular basis to educate and energize supporters. 3) Research and endorse political candidates that represent the values I want the organization to have. 4) Pool resources into a political action committee (PAC) to support candidates. 5) Develop relationships with other organizations that support marginalized populations and share resources.

The mission and theoretical "how to" of the mission came easily enough, though the execution stifled me. I could develop introductory materials relevant to the South Asian population, I could reach out to South Asian groups to try to obtain supporters and I could try getting them to donate, but who am I doing all this for? Engaging personally with a candidate was vital for my personal motivations, though I could not find a viable candidate in working-distance from me. If I couldn't direct my energies into a tangible outcome, I didn't see the point of my organizing. In addition to these concerns, I held an ethical question of "is it proper for me to represent any community identifying with South

Asia?" I am Indian-American, so could I ethically represent the values/concerns on non-Indian Americans? Could I even properly represent the concerns of Indian-Americans?

Stepping back, I consulted with my advisor, Greg Eirich, on how to move forward. His consultation made me ponder what I am trying to accomplish. I want greater political participation for the South Asian-American population, though everything I understand about their political engagement comes, largely, from anecdotal experience. Therefore, I sought to understand the reality of South Asian-American political engagement through data-oriented means. I, first, wanted to know how many South Asian politicians existed in the U.S. Surprisingly, yet unsurprisingly, I could not locate a dataset of South Asian politicians. Given that, I made my own. To develop the dataset, I had to compile a list from numerous secondary sources. These sources include: Wikipedia, Indian American Impact Fund (IAIF), South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), numerous articles and blogs. Most of the information I found only included a name. I compiled the names and researched information on: office, district, state of residence, state of office, party affiliation, term-length, profession, gender, and incumbency status. I ultimately found 146 unique politicians who held 188 offices. Some politicians held different offices throughout their political career. I also included unsuccessful candidates for office, as their decision to run marks significance for South Asian political participation efforts. Below are summary tables of various features.

States		
State	Count of Politicians	Percentile
California	28	19%
New Jersey	27	18%
Texas	14	10%
Washington	11	8%
Maryland	7	5%
Other	59	40%
Grand Total	146	100%
29 Different States		

Above is a summary table of states that have produced the most South-Asian politicians. California has produced the most with 28 politicians, then New Jersey with 27, Texas with 14, Washington with 11 and Maryland with 7. Across the U.S., South Asian politicians have come from 29 states. Three of five of the aforementioned states have the highest population of Indians. The states include California, New Jersey and Texas. I'm interested in finding out why Indians have coalesced where they have. With California, it's possible they chose to move there because of the abundance of cities with technology jobs, a popular field for Indian immigrants. In New Jersey, it's possible the abundance of affordable housing near New York City brought them there. If many of the Indians in Texas work as an engineer, it could be due to the abundance of oil engineering jobs.

Ethnicity		
Country	Count of Politicians	Percentile
Bangladeshi	4	3%
Indian	122	84%
Indian/Pakistani	2	1%
Nepalese	3	2%
Pakistani	15	10%
Grand Total	146	100%

Above is a summary table of the ethnic breakup of South Asian politicians. South Asian countries include: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. Of those seven, four are represented in U.S. office. Indian politicians have the vast majority, with 122 politicians, then Pakistani with 15, Bangladesh with 4, Nepal with 3 and Indian/Pakistani mix with 2. Given the immense population of India, it makes sense that there are significantly more Indian politicians than every other South Asian ethnicity. When looking at the geographic breakdown of the Nepal and Bangladesh, I initially thought the politicians would come from the same state. For example, I thought that a Nepalese politician in Virginia would help support other Nepalese candidates there. However, every Nepalese and Bangladeshi politician come from a different state. Note that I put more effort in finding Indian politicians as I built the dataset, which partially explains why there are significantly more Indian politicians in my data. Additional effort towards other South Asian politicians will continue.

Sex		
Sex	Count of Politicians	Percentile
Female	56	38%
Male	90	62%
Grand Total	146	100%

Above is a summary table of gender breakup of South Asian politicians. I found 90 male politicians and 56 female. Unsurprisingly, male South Asian politicians hold more offices than female, by 24%. It seems that regardless of race, sex/gender discrimination may exist among voters, candidate recruiters, or financiers of South Asian politicians.

Professions		
Profession	Count of Politicians	Percentile
Attorney	43	29%
Business	29	20%
Engineer	12	8%
Other	62	42%
Grand Total	146	100%
min 30 Different Professions		

Above is a summary table of most common professions among South Asian politicians. The plurality of politicians are attorneys, with 43. Then business with 29, engineer with 12, and the rest with 62 various professions. These "other" professions include: education, government, medicine, and more. Overall, South Asian politicians come from a minimum for 30 different professions. It's interesting, and makes sense, that the most common profession is in law, considering that many federal-level non-South Asian politicians also hail from law. This indicates that voters may look for a similar professional background regardless of South Asian-ness. Or, that attorneys have certain characteristics increasing their electability.

Offices Held		
Office	Count of Politicians	Percentile
City/Town Council	30	21%
Mayor	22	15%
State House of Rep.	21	14%
School Board	19	13%
State Senate	10	7%
Other	44	30%
Grand Total	146	100%
21 Different Offices Held		

Above is a summary table of the most common offices held by South Asian politicians. The most common is city/town council, with 30. Then Mayor with 22, state house of representatives with 21, school board with 19, state senate with 10, and 44 in various other positions. These include county commissioner, federal department positions, U.S. Congress and others. Overall, South Asian politicians have held 21 different types of offices. It seems like the plurality of positions are in local politics, as shown by the number of city/town councilors and mayors. That may be due to the abundance of those positions, as every city/town has them. It could also be due to the

South Asian politicians having to rely on their local community that knows them well. Assuming racial discrimination plays a role in electability, a South Asian candidate may feel as if they cannot win a higher-level position due to non-local votes making conscious or subconscious judgements.

To translate this research into a tangible outcome, I hope to partner with an established organization that promotes South Asian candidates. The benefits of working with an established organization include: an existing support base, access to funding, professionals who have worked within South Asian-American politics and access to a larger network. One such organization is the Indian-American Impact Fund. Their missions is to: 1) Build a nationwide network of Indian American leaders in policy, politics, and government; 2) Recruit, train, and elect Indian American candidates at all levels; and 3) Align and leverage political giving by Indian American donors. I recently spoke with Arvin Alaigh, the communications director of Impact. After explaining the QMSS program, and what I am currently learning, Arvin seems interested in using my background to aid in the fundraising effort of Impact. Hopefully, through their increased fundraising they can provide the necessary resources for an Indian-American's campaign success.

Ultimately, through an understanding of the current state of South Asian-American politics and the necessary motivations to galvanize the population, I hope to increase the political participation of South Asians in the U.S. My current level of engagement with this goal has taught me numerous skills including: how to compile my own dataset, how to manipulate and expand on the data I had access to in order to gain insight on some nuances and how to leverage my experience and learning for outreach to established organizations.