HONR269i
To the Moon and Back: The Apollo Program
Discussion Questions
Session 6: The Mode Decision

For the last two weeks we have focused mostly on politics; this week we are focusing on what is arguably the most important technical decision in the Apollo program. But are technical decisions really different from political decisions? Here are three questions to help you explore aspects of that question:

1. At the time they selected Lunar Orbit Rendezvous, NASA estimated that choice would save 8 months. However, it took them more than a year after Kennedy's Apollo decision to make that choice. Would making the choice more quickly have resulted in an even earlier lunar landing? Why or why not?

2. Assuming for the moment that it would have been useful to make the mode decision earlier, what was it that prevented that decision from being made more quickly?

3. We considered "bureaucratic politics" as one perspective that could help us to understand the process by which the decision to a Moon landing was made. Try using a bureaucratic politics perspective to explain the process by which the mode decision was made.   Does that perspective offer important insights that a "rational actor" perspective would miss?