Final Essay: Researching an Argument

Instructions:
For your final essay, you will research and participate in a debate on a current issue facing our country. Here's a way to think about this last assignment: imagine that you are at a party and you see a group of people in a corner having what seems to be a rather heated discussion. As you listen to the conversation, you start to get a sense of what everyone is talking about, what are the different points being expressed, and what has already been said. Only after listening to the conversation for a while, do you feel ready to venture an opinion. This scenario is essentially what you are going to do for this last essay. When you research a topic, you are basically trying to master an on-going conversation – to understand its vocabulary, the stakes involved, the various opinions driving it.

You'll first need to pick a topic for this paper. Below are some strongly suggested topics to consider:

Environmental:
- The construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline
- Prohibiting offshore oil drilling
- Opening ANWR up to exploratory oil drilling

Freedom of Speech:
- Banning of Wikileaks
- Supreme Court Ruling on Snyder v. the Westboro Baptist Church

Education:
- Paying truant students to attend school
- Performance-based pay for teachers

National Security:
- the use of X-Ray machines by FAA agents to screen airline passengers
- the passing of Arizona’s illegal immigration law

If none of these options seem appealing, you may choose a different topic. However, it must be a topic that is currently being argued and must be narrowly focused. If you do decide to research a different topic, I must approve it before you begin researching.

Speaking of researching, over the next three classes we'll discuss how to use the internet effectively to begin researching, what databases are available to you as JCCC students, and how to document your research. Now, since this is such a short paper, you will be limited to just four credible sources. (We'll go over what constitutes a credible source in class.)

Now once you have done some research, you will come up with an argument for your own position. Remember that arguing is more than just stating a position and listing some evidence for it; you need to identify and address the opposing views. One other piece of advice: don't overly rely on your sources for your argument. Your words are always more important than someone else's. Your research is there to support or further bolster your argument!

Schedule:
Working Draft: 12/1
Final Draft: due in my mailbox on campus between 12/5-12/9

Documentation Style: MLA
Wikipedia: What's It Good For?

Overview:
According to its website, Wikipedia adheres to five principles, or “pillars,” when creating entries. One of these “pillars” concerns the neutrality of the information on topics. Here’s how Wikipedia describes this “pillar”:

We strive for articles that document and explain the major points of view in a balanced and impartial manner. We avoid advocacy and we characterize information and issues rather than debate them. In some areas there may be just one well-recognized point of view; in other areas we describe multiple points of view, presenting each accurately and in context, and not presenting any point of view as "the truth" or "the best view."

As we discussed in class, maintaining a neutral or unbiased point of view is not always easy, or even possible. So the goal for your next essay is to evaluate a Wikipedia entry for neutrality and accuracy.

So how to begin...

Your first step will be to analyze the Wikipedia entry on your topic. After you have carefully read the entry, you should briefly summarize what you have learned about the topic from Wikipedia. (While not going into too much detail, you will want to be as thorough as possible.) Once you have done this, you should see if there was any bias in how the entry was presented. I suggest checking out the “Talk” section on the entry. Finally, you will check up on the sources where the information for the entry is coming from. That is, do you find them to be credible sources? Are the sources themselves presenting a biased point of view?

Next you will need to do some independent research of your own on the topic. In other words, find between 3 and 5 sources on the topic that were not cited in the Wikipedia entry. What information did you learn about the topic that was not mentioned in the Wikipedia entry?

Now you are ready to begin writing. In your essay, you should compare and contrast the information that was presented in Wikipedia with the information that you gathered from your non-Wikipedia sources. Also, you should discuss how your impression of the topic changed from what you read on Wikipedia to what you discovered on your own. Your essay should conclude with an evaluation of the Wikipedia entry: did you find the entry to be biased in some way; how did the exclusion of certain information affect the entry; does the entry need to be changed; and if so, in what way(s)?

Parameters
Sources: Wikipedia entry and 3 non-Wikipedia sources
3 Research Logs
Length: 5-6pp
Documentation Style: MLA

Schedule
2/7: Library Visit
2/12: Research Logs Due
3/5: Final Draft due

Topics:
- 2012 Benghazi Attack
- Citizen United v. Federal Election Commission
- Keystone XL Pipeline
- Full Body Scanners in US airports
- Protect IP Act
- School Vouchers
Wikipedia Essay Research Log

Type of Source (*Easy Writer*, 2214-216pp):

______________________________

Works-Cited Entry (MLA):

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

In-Text Citation:

______________________________

What new information did you learn from this source? How does this information relate to the overview of the topic presented in the Wikipedia entry?

______________________________

After reading this source, how does your opinion change about the topic from what you read on Wikipedia? That is, do you now believe the Wikipedia entry to be objective, presenting a neutral point of view? Or do you see the entry as omitting some key pieces of information and so suggesting a bias on the topic?
Writing Assignment: Writing a Letter of Impact
Human Development

This research-based writing assignment requires the student to procure at least two (2) empirical journal articles supporting your position concerning an issue of importance in human development. These articles, found in a professional social science or medical journal should present an empirical study on a topic in developmental psychology that will relate to the students’ future goals. (health care, education, social work, parenting, aging, etc.) Some journals to consider for this assignment are American Psychologist, Child Development, Developmental Psychology, Early Childhood Research Quarterly, International Journal of Aging and Human Development, Journal of Adolescence, Journal of Adult Development, Journal of Aging Studies, Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, and Developmental Science. These journals can be accessed through the school library’s social science databases. This can be done in person at the library or online; librarians are happy to assist you in finding an acceptable journal.

Bring in a copy of the articles to the professor for approval.

Citing this research, write a formal business letter to a policy maker about the issue of concern. The policy maker can be at any governmental or institutional level: local, regional, state or national. The intent of the letter is to inform the policy maker of your concern and request that they take a specific course of action. The foundation of your letter will be these two sources, but other sources may also be included. The required research articles must be based on empirical research—an experimental study conducted by the authors of the journal article. The information included in the findings of these articles provide the basis for your letter and guides the action that you are suggesting to the policy maker.

This letter should be in the following format:

* APA format for citations and References page.
* Double-space, with reasonable font (10-12) and margins (1”)
* 2-3 pages.
* Formal business letter format, including addressee’s name, title, and address in the heading and appropriately signed by the author.
* The photocopy of the articles, the attached scoring rubric and the typewritten letter free of spelling and grammatical errors should be submitted in a light-weight pocket folder no later than ____________

Objectives:
1. Research a social or public policy issue of interest to human development.
2. Evaluate empirical work that applies to the issue.
3. Effectively and persuasively communicate your views to a public policymaker.
4. Identify which policy maker is appropriate for contact.
5. Convey the information in a business letter to the policymaker.
Writing Assignment
Human Development

____ (30 pts) Two empirical acceptable research articles, pre-approved by instructor used correctly as references

____ (15 pts) APA style used for References page and citations within the letter.

____ (20 pts) Business letter style, appropriate language structure, free from spelling, grammar, punctuation errors, 2-3 pages in length.

____ (10 pts) Appropriate policy-maker identified and purpose of letter or action explicitly identified.

____ (25 pts) Overall quality of the paper.

____ / 100 points possible
English 121

Request for a Library Tour

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to request a tour of library databases for my students enrolled in English 121. Our classes meet M, W, and F, from 9-10, 10-11, and 11-12 (three sections of English 121)

For this assignment, the last of our series, we are learning to write formal research-based reports. The assignment is for each student to draft a business proposal, in which s/he will recommend investing funds into selected stocks or mutual funds. To do this paper well, they will have to work in groups to gather information about companies that are doing well, have good stock returns, and have good growth outlooks. I will then put them into Investment Clubs in class, so they can pool their information and ideas. Once they have gathered their information and completed their sharing, they need to draft their investment proposals for me to grade.

I am teaching them the A,B,C’s of stock-market investment. It would be helpful if Librarians could show them some databases that would help them to identify commercial news about companies and stocks.

Thank you for your help!