

## PAPER #3 - ASSIGNMENT

### Policy Polemic

#### The Task:

For this paper, I want you to take a position on a current, controversial issue in technology and/or media. Back it up with research and solid arguments. I will give you several ideas; choose one of mine or pick your own (subject to my approval). Your goal is to write a cogent essay, *backed up with arguments and evidence*, that addresses questions like these:

- What exactly is the issue, and why is it controversial? For whom?
- What is the point of view that you are taking? (This should not be elusive!)
- What are the arguments on both sides of the issue?
- What makes the arguments on your "side" of the issue more compelling/persuasive?

The point is not to directly answer all these questions one-by-one. Please do not turn in a series of "answers." Write a thematic essay that incorporates answers to these questions.

This essay does require outside research in order to explain the issue you have selected, and to develop and support your arguments. It is also appropriate to draw upon concepts developed in course readings. As always, cite any sources that you use appropriately when you refer to or draw upon them (with footnotes using the *Chicago Manual of Style*).

→ *Don't hesitate to ask questions of clarification about any aspect of the assignment.*

#### Some Particulars:

- Length: ~2000 words for the text itself (excluding footnotes or appendices)
- Format: Follow instructions on page 3 of the course syllabus.
- Dates:
  - Topic approval deadline for paper is Friday, March 30.
  - In-class presentations on April 17 and 19 (specific assignments to come)
  - Paper due Friday, April 20 at 4:00 pm.
- Grade weight: 35% of course grade.
- Evaluation: See the evaluation form I will use, attached to this assignment

#### Approval of Your Topic:

You are required to obtain my approval for your paper topic no later than Friday, March 30. Please obtain that approval by sending me an email message proposing your topic in a few sentences. Tell me two things: (a) the issue you will discuss, and (b) the position you will take. The more specific you can be, the better. I will reply by email with my approval (or with a request for clarification). See next page for some topic suggestions.

March 30 is the date by which approval is necessary. You are more than welcome (encouraged, in fact) to float a topic/position proposal by me earlier than that; I will reply promptly.

### In-Class Presentation:

Each student will present his or her argument to the seminar on either April 17 or April 19. You will have about five minutes to tell us about your topic and to explain the argument you are making in the paper, and then you will field questions from the rest of us. You can use notes for this informal presentation, but it is not acceptable to read your remarks from a prepared text.

### Tiresome Advice:

Have one last look at the section of the course syllabus (p. 3) titled "*Criteria for Evaluating Written Work in this Course.*"

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### Some Possible Topics

Here is my list of sample subjects you can tackle for this assignment. Develop a paper from one of these, or propose something not on my list. Either way, I need to know your topic and thesis by March 30.

**Important:** The topics I am listing below are really just descriptive topic areas or broad questions; they do not specify argumentative positions. The assignment calls for you to take and defend a position.

To use the first one as an example, it would not be appropriate to write a paper that merely describes how the Internet is affecting political campaigns. Your task is to develop an argumentative thesis related to the topic you choose. So, again using the first one to construct an example, your paper might argue that expanding use of the Internet by political candidates is harming (or improving) the quality of our democracy.

- How the Internet is changing political campaigns in the U.S.
- The effects of the Internet and other digital media on higher education
- The state of journalism given expanding media options: better or worse?
- Should the government (or anyone else) act more decisively to regulate SPAM?
- File sharing and music downloading (this can be approached from several angles)
- Taxation of commerce on the Internet
- Should cable companies be required to sell "a la carte" access to cable channels?
- Should government do more to regulate or curtail media consolidation?
- Are blogs a positive development for journalism? And/or for politics?
- How are digital media and technology affecting elementary school education?
- The "digital divide" -- differential access to digital media by race/class/etc.
- The effects of wireless communication on the design of cities/communities
- Should search engines participate in censoring results in non-democratic countries?
- How much free speech online is a good thing? How much is too much?
- How do digital media and networked technology help or hinder social movements?
- Should public libraries be forced to "filter" Internet use on public-use computers?
- What is government's proper role in regulating or censoring online obscenity?
- Is the Internet good for organized religion?
- and many other possible topics too numerous to mention...

**SOC 115F PAPER #3 EVALUATION**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

	<i>trivial</i>	<i>light</i>	<i>okay</i>	<i>solid</i>	<i>exceptional</i>
Thesis is clear and well stated	●	●	●	●	●
Quality of arguments presented in support of your thesis	●	●	●	●	●
Depth of research and evidence; good evidence appropriately used	●	●	●	●	●
Counterarguments: Raises and addresses arguments on other side	●	●	●	●	●
Overall judgment: is it persuasive?	●	●	●	●	●
Structure of paper: clear, logical, effective	●	●	●	●	●
Quality of writing/grammar/syntax: eloquent, free of errors	●	●	●	●	●
Paper format: clean, appropriate?	<i>yes</i>	<i>mostly</i>	<i>insufficient</i>		
Sources: used and cited properly?	<i>yes</i>	<i>mostly</i>	<i>insufficient</i>		

**Grade:**    A    A-    B+    B    B-    C+    C    C-    D    F