

Research Project Guidelines

For this project, you (alone or with your partner if doing this project in a pair) will select a controversial work-family issue (e.g., welfare reform, child care, parental leave, etc.), conduct a small research project on this issue, and write a paper based on your research. Try to select a controversy where you are unsure what position you would take. You should state this controversy as one sentence. The goal of the project is to reach a judgment on that controversy. Based on all the information you will collect, you should come down on one side of the issue. In making this judgment, you must (1) thoroughly research the literature on the controversy, (2) examine how this issue is handled in at least one other country that offers a contrast to the U.S., and (3) interview 4 individuals (if working as a pair, 8 individuals) who have strong opinions about this issue. Here are some guidelines for each of these components; as you are working on this project throughout the semester, you are encouraged to meet with me to seek additional assistance.

1. Literature Review

For information on how to locate sources for your literature review and how to examine them, see the separate *literature review handout*. A literature review for your paper should be a story about the literature, not a list describing or summarizing one piece of literature after another. You should organize the literature review into sections that present themes or identify trends. You are **not** trying to list all the material published, but to synthesize and evaluate it according to how it is related to the controversy you are addressing. Here's the suggested structure for your literature review:

- Introduce the subject of your review.
- Divide the literature under review into categories (e.g. those in support of a particular position, those against, and those offering alternative theses entirely).
- For each category, describe the findings and mention any potential problems with the studies. Make it clear how various articles or books are similar/different.
- Conclude what the combined body of evidence suggests on your issue.

Important: In your review, identify all of your sources. In the text, refer to publications by the name of the author and the year (e.g. Smith 2004). Then, in the end of your paper, list all your references using complete citations -- author, year, title, source (including page numbers for articles). If citing websites, use complete URLs.

2. International Comparison

When identifying a country that offers a contrast to the U.S., you can select any country you think fits that criterion; if you need some ideas to get you started, try Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, UK, or Canada. To find information on the ways other countries deal with the issues related to your controversy, you can search the academic literature (see the literature review handout) as well as news articles and internet sources. In your paper, make sure to clearly describe how the selected country handles the controversial issue and how that contrasts to the ways we deal with that issue in the U.S.

3. Interviews

Identify 4 individuals (if working as a pair, 8 individuals) who have strong opinions about this issue, including strategies for change. When selecting people to interview, make sure that your interviewees reflect a range of perspectives and social locations (e.g., legislators, advocates, consumers, government officials, individuals affected by this issue). Some questions you might

explore may include the following: What are their positions, and what rationale do they give for their opinions/beliefs? In what venues, if any, do they express these opinions (e.g., legislature, media)? What activities have they taken to create change (e.g., legislative, public education, individual action)? You will design a list of questions to be used to interview these individuals. You will also design a consent form (using the Consent Form handout) that they will have to sign prior to being interviewed. The interviews should last about 30-60 minutes per individual, and they should be audio-recorded and fully transcribed. Signed consent forms and interview transcripts should be submitted along with your final draft of the paper. Important: Your interviewees cannot be your immediate family members.

Your Paper

You will submit your completed research project on November 24. No late projects will be accepted. There will be two preliminary drafts of the project, as described below. All drafts and the final paper should be submitted electronically (by email, MyFiles, GoogleDocs). If you are working in a pair, I encourage you to use Google Docs to facilitate collaborative writing: <http://docs.google.com/>.

The 1st draft of the project will be due September 29, 2009. It will be worth 5% of your final grade for the course. This draft should be app. 1 page which includes:

1. Introduction (1 page.):
 - A. Clear definition of the controversial issue
 - B. Clear delineation of the sides of the controversy
 - C. Clearly identify the main antagonists and protagonists (i.e., who is making the arguments on both sides of the debate)

The 2nd draft of the project will be due October 27, 2009. It will be also worth 5% of your final grade for the course. It should be approximately 7-9 pages (without appendices) and include the following sections:

1. Introduction (1 page, see above).
2. Literature review (3-4 pages): This section should describe the prior research that has been done on the issue. Here, you need to specify:
 - A. What research has been done on the issue? Describe and cite the literature.
 - B. Do the research findings tend to come down on one side of the issue, that is, tend to support one side over the other side?
3. International Comparison (2-3 pages):
 - A. How is this issue handled in the country you selected?
 - B. How does that compare to the United States?
4. Research Methods (1 page). This section will describe your interview plan:
 - A. Specify the characteristics of individuals you plan to interview.
 - B. State how you are planning to locate and approach them.

Appendix 1: Interview Questions: An organized set of questions for your interviews.

Appendix 2: Consent form.

The final draft of the research project will be due November 24, 2009. It will be worth 25% of your total grade for the course. It should be approximately 10-15 pages (without appendices) and include the following sections:

1. Introduction (1 page max., see above).
2. Literature review (3-4 pages, see above).
3. International Comparison (2-3 pages, see above).
4. Research Methods (1 page, see above). Make sure to rewrite this section to be in past tense and adjust it if something went not according to your original plan.
5. Interview results (3-4 pages): Here you describe the findings of your interviews.
 - A. Describe *in detail* what you found. Cite respondents' own words – that makes your argument more convincing.
 - B. Specify what positions on the controversy your respondents are taking. Make a decision whether your interviewees seem to agree with each other's views or whether they differ.
 - C. Connect your interviews with the literature you reviewed.
6. Conclusion (1-2 pages):
 - A. Summarize your findings and your argument. Make sure that you clearly come down on one side of the controversy and reiterate why.
 - B. Explain what you learned from your study.

Appendix 1: Interview Questions: An organized set of questions for your interviews.

Appendix 2: Signed consent forms.

Appendix 3: Transcribed interviews.