Professor Hannigan’s Guide to choosing a Final Project topic
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CM220 requires students to choose a topic that they can write a **persuasive, academic essay** and other assignments about throughout the course. The topic you choose should focus on a unique idea for **change** in your community or workplace. There are some topics students have tried to write about and found the topics to be challenging due a variety of reasons:

- No counter-argument or opposition described in reliable sources
- Too broad of a topic (no unique focus)
- Informative and not arguable
- Common sense dictates one side of the argument over the other
- Based on personal opinion or experiences (rather than reliable research)
- Student cannot write formally or without clear biases about the topic

Developing a strong topic can be a long process, as you need to brainstorm or list several different topics and directions to take them in. If your initial topic is challenging to work with, continue brainstorming to further develop the topic or discover a new topic that would be more appropriate for this course.
Evaluating a Potential Topic

When choosing a topic, consider the questions below to help evaluate the potential success of the topic.

Click on a question to reveal more information.

- Is there reliable research available for different sides of the argument? Are there two or more sides that rational adults would argue for/against?
- Is the argument based on a logical fallacy, personal opinion, or a personal perspective?
- Can an academic essay be developed on the topic?
- Can a formal and unbiased tone be maintained when writing on this topic?

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- Evidence to support an argument is required, along with research on the opposing view. Evidence should be directly related to supporting an argument, and not just informing the reader.
- There are topics that the majority of adults just would not argue against because of the logic and ethical basis of the topic. Although the world has narrow-minded individuals who voice their opinions, it's important to use a topic that a more general adult audience can debate.
- One-sided topics often result in informative essays rather than persuasive essays.

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➢ Adults have many opinions about what is wrong with their community or workplace, but an argument needs to be based on more than personal examples or assumptions; furthermore, the argument should be tangible to a certain extent, and not need specific “faith” in order to understand/accept.

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- One of the primary assignments in CM 220 is to write an academic essay, which is formal in tone, thus avoiding slang, clichés, personal pronouns, and a conversational style of writing.
- A clear thesis statement needs to be established, along with body paragraphs that provide research to support the thesis statement.

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➤ There are some topics that students feel so passionately about that it is next to impossible to maintain a formal and unbiased tone. Although it is helpful that a student feels strongly about a topic, it should not interfere with the writing overall.

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The table below lists topics that may be difficult to develop into a persuasive research paper, yet, with some creative and critical thinking, the topics can be approached from an arguable perspective. These topics are not off-limits to students, but it will take significant work to move away from an informative approach. It is important to consider feedback and suggestions from the instructor or KUWC tutor when working with a challenging topic. You will find some of these topics addressed from a unique perspective in the Previous Students’ Topics section. There are restricted topics listed in the Restricted Topics section. Click on a topic below for more information on why it is “tricky” and suggestions for developing the topic to meet course requirements.

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Tricky Topics: Teenage Pregnancy

What makes it tricky?

Most people would agree that teenagers should be educated on preventing pregnancy (and STDs); stating that parents, schools, communities should address this issue and/or educate teenagers would be a relatively neutral approach (and may not actually influence teenagers’ decisions). A more specific action or change needs to be identified.

Questions & directions to consider:

- Who is primarily responsible for preventing teenage pregnancy?
- What is the root cause of teenagers becoming sexually active and how can this be changed?
- How can a school or organization in a community influence the actions of teenagers who engage in risky behaviors?
- Why would parents/legal guardians oppose public schools providing sex education for students?
Tricky Topics: Nutrition & Healthy Lifestyles

What makes it tricky?
Society clearly supports that children and adults should maintain healthy lifestyles (i.e., nutritious diet and daily exercise); actually changing lifestyle habits will take more than providing information about the health risks of obesity or not exercising. The consequences of unhealthy lifestyles have been in media for many years already.

Questions & directions to consider:

- What changes need to be made (and haven’t yet been made) in a school or community?
- What is the root cause of unhealthy lifestyles and who should be responsible for the change?
- What role should the government play in influencing healthy lifestyles? Should the FDA do more to influence the perception of unhealthy foods?
- Should bariatric surgery be covered by insurance (or medicare) as a necessary medical procedure?
Tricky Topics: Homelessness

What makes it tricky?
The opposing points are difficult to prove (e.g., there isn’t a problem, the homeless should remain homeless, it isn’t our problem). Also, many communities are working to address the problem, but there are more homeless than there are resources in some situations or funding is not being distributed as needed.

Questions & directions to consider:
- What more can be done in your community beyond building more shelters and food banks?
  What programs have proven successful in other communities?
- Can the root cause of homeless be addressed in a realistic manner in a particular community?
- How can mental and substance abuse issues be addressed for those who are homeless?
- What type of jobs (income) should a community provide for the homeless who can and are willing to work?
**Tricky Topics: Substance Abuse**

**What makes it tricky?**

Intervention with an adult or teenager abuse drugs or alcohol is generally approached on an individual basis in order to determine the root cause of the addiction. In other words, there isn’t just one way to motivate a person to break a habit, and “education” does not guarantee the person will actually stick with the suggested changes.

**Questions & directions to consider:**

- What more can be done in your community to provide counseling or housing for those trying to overcome specific substance abuse issues?
- What role should the justice system, government, or local schools play?
- How might parents be held accountable for the actions of their children who abuse or illegally distribute drugs or alcohol?
- What action can be taken to reduce DUI incidents?
Tricky Topics: Child Abuse

What makes it tricky?
Most adults agree that child abuse in any form should not exist in our society, especially when there is visible mental and physical trauma, which cannot be ignored by teachers, medical professionals, law enforcement, or social workers. Yet, subtler abuse that cannot always be seen by outsiders is difficult to define, identify, or prove.

Questions & directions to consider:

- At what point should children be removed from the care of a parent who has been accused of abuse and should the children be returned to a parent accused of abuse?
- How should the justice system define “abuse”? What evidence should be required?
- Should medical professionals ask all children getting a routine physical whether there are instances of abuse at home or school (even if the child is not showing signs of abuse)?
Tricky Topics: Bullying

What makes it tricky?

Describing the signs of bullying, in any form for any type of victim, is typically informative and often considered common knowledge, even if ignored by adults. Although people may say that bullying is “a part of growing up,” there isn’t usually reliable research to verify this stance, thus, no opposition is available. Also, many schools already have anti-bullying programs in place.

Questions & directions to consider:

- If an anti-bullying program at a school is not proven successful, what should be changed?
- Should legal action be taken against a child/teenager accused of bullying, even if the bullying was not physical? If a child is young, should a parent be held responsible instead?
- Should an employer be responsible for taking action against bullying in the workplace (with adults)?
- Should a school take action against student bullying that occurs off-campus?
Tricky Topics:
After School Activities

What makes it tricky?

Children and teenagers generally respond well to structured after-school activities, as compared to being home alone or hanging out in public places; opposition against the development of programs (e.g., mentoring, sports, Scouting, tutoring, etc.) are not always easy to find.

Questions & directions to consider:

- What causes the closure of community centers, such as YMCA or Boys and Girls Club, and what change is needed to stop the closures?
- What are the risks associated with specific activities? What activities are better than others?
- Do these programs reach and influence “at-risk” children and teenagers?
- Should attendance of after-school activities be required for children/teenagers who do not have adult-supervision at home?
Tricky Topics: ADHD

What makes it tricky?

Deciding whether to use medication to manage ADHD is generally dependent on the individual child; furthermore, educating people about ADHD is a general solution that may not have reliable evidence to support it as a successful solution in a community.

Questions & directions to consider:

- What influence should the government have on classroom structure, resource availability, and teachers when there are ADHD children enrolled in a public school? What program or activity should a community introduce specifically for children with ADHD?
- What repercussions should there be for parents who do not try alternative treatments prior to medicating a child?
- Should children with ADHD be given tuition vouchers for schools that specialize in working with ADHD students?

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Tricky Topics: Restraining Orders

What makes it tricky?
The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is a legal precedence, but it does not necessarily keep victims safe from abusers who choose to violate the restraining order. Changes in the community often focus on the victim rather than the abuser. Most adults agree that victims should feel protected and receive support from law enforcement (without violating any other laws).

Questions & directions to consider:

- What more can law enforcement do to influence the actions of those who ignore restraining orders?
- Should the victim be held responsible for not reporting all of the restraining order violations?
- What further changes to stalker related laws should be made? Are the consequences for stalking not harsh enough (or too harsh)? Should an accused stalker be required to wear a GPS anklet?

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The US public education system has always been flawed, and there have been many attempts to resolve the flaws (often, creating more problems). Since there are many flaws, there are many aspects that need to be addressed, so the challenge is choosing just one flaw and change.

Questions & directions to consider:

- What one action can address a specific problem in certain grade levels of the education system? Who might oppose this change?
- What changes to No Child Left Behind or Common Core should be made?
- How can technology help/hurt the education of children or teenagers?
- What has your community tried already, and why didn’t it work?
Tricky Topics: Healthcare

What makes it tricky?

While there are many arguable points about the American healthcare system, the topic can get unwieldy if trying to cover every angle.

Questions & directions to consider:

- What single aspect of the Affordable Healthcare Act should be revised?
- How does a state restrict healthcare options and what should change about the restrictions?
- What type of claim is typically not covered by medicare, but should be covered?
- What specific change is needed to prevent a certain form of fraud with medicare claims?

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Tricky Topics: Parenting

What makes it tricky?
Telling parents how to feed their children, interact with teachers, monitor their children’s use of technology, or other responsibilities most parents encounter can be informative, but creating an argument about how all parents should raise their children is not often well received. Also, this does not necessarily relate to creating change in a community.

Questions & directions to consider:
- When should the government step in (e.g., laws, social services) when a parent’s decisions lead to life-threatening consequences with a child?
- What can a school do to support parents or step in?
- How might a local hospital or clinic compel parents to make healthy choices?
- What can local businesses do to influence parenting decisions?
Tricky Topics: Racism

What makes it tricky?

Intentional and unintentional racism and biases exist in most communities and workplaces, but arguing against racism may seem like common sense (not arguable) or question personal beliefs.

Questions & directions to consider:

- What can a school do to teach acceptance and reduce racism that may be taught at home?
- How might a community inadvertently be promoting racism (and need to stop those activities)?
- How can the government address issues of racism within the justice system?
- How should a company respond to an employee who shows characteristics of racism in the workplace?
Tricky Topics: Domestic Violence

What makes it tricky?

Like child abuse, most adults agree that domestic violence should not exist in our society. While some people ignore, downplay, or blame the victim, it takes more than education in order to adequately address this issue that has been a factor in society for generations.

Questions & directions to consider:

- What further consequences should there be for those convicted of domestic violence?
- What consequences should there be for victims who choose not to report or press charges against the aggressor?
- How does gender of the aggressor impact the consequences for abuse and how should that change in your community?
- How should professional sports or companies respond to those convicted of domestic violence?
Tricky Topics: Technology Use

What makes it tricky?

Technology, whether used by adults or children, is pervasive in our society. Arguing whether adults should rely on technology on a daily basis is difficult to support, while arguing against children’s use of technology is a large topic to cover.

Questions & directions to consider:

- At what age should schools start exposing children to educational technology in classrooms? (What age is too young for technology use?)
- Should there be harsher penalties for using non-hands free cell phones while driving?
- Should your community provide free Wi-Fi access throughout the city?
- How can the community help adults gain computer and technology experience that prepares them for careers?
Restricted Topics

Please note that the following topics are not allowed for the Final Project (or the corresponding assignments) in this course:

– Abortion: Pro-life or Pro-choice
– Euthanasia of humans
– Faith based topics (i.e., the reader needs to believe in God or a god in order to accept the argument)
– Conspiracy or extremely contentious situations (e.g., who killed JFK, what instigated the war in Iraq)
– Existence of angels/demons; extra-terrestrials; supernatural entities, possessions, or abilities; time travelers; or cryptids

If you feel that your topic choice borders on one of the restricted topic choices, you can email me for further discussion: CHannigan@kaplan.edu. \textbf{Assignments that fall into the above topics will be returned to students for revision; if no revision is posted, a zero will be applied.} Ultimately, the argument for change needs to be supported with reliable and “academic” evidence that can potentially influence the actions of the readers.
Previous Students’ Topics

Here is a list of topics previously used by students. You do not need to choose one of these topics. Rather, they should serve as inspiration for a topic relevant to your own community.

- Mandating child protective services intervene in cases of comorbid obesity
- Requiring a DNA sample from those arrested (not necessarily convicted) for any violation
- Providing personal safety training for adults who file a temporary restraining order
- Limiting military family moves will allow spouses to be successful in their careers
- Requiring elementary classrooms with ADHD children to have two teachers or a teacher and a teaching assistant
- Requiring the FDA to research the effectiveness of diet supplement products prior to their release to the public
- Creation of a dedicated bike lanes in rural (non-city) roads in communities around Atlanta, GA
- Converting abandoned prison facility to homeless shelter and community center
- Changing elementary school start time from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m.
- No longer require high school seniors to participate in community service in order to graduate
- Removing all caffeinated beverage options from a high school cafeteria and vending machines
- Requiring every high school senior to be mentored by adult in the community
- Requiring an elementary school to separate special needs children for every class except for lunch and homeroom
- Requiring every residential community to identify public space for a garden or children’s park
- Local ordinance restricting use of personal drones in residential areas

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