English 101 -- Social Problem Analysis Research Project Notes and Guidelines

For this paper, students will select a social problem about which they would like to learn more. Specifically, students will use the databases (Points of View and Opposing Viewpoints) in the JSCC Library Portal under Course Weblinks to research the CAUSES of a social problem of their choosing.

CAUSES offer an explanation as to WHY a phenomenon occurs. In exploring the causes for your chosen social problem, you will research a minimum of THREE reasons why your particular social problem is one that affects many people. You may include up to FOUR different reasons why your social problem is a serious dilemma here in the United States.

Students may NOT write about 1) Abortion 2) Politics 3) Religion 4) Homosexuality (ANY angle or issue that covers the ENTIRE LGTBQ spectrum) or 5) Racism/Bigotry.

I am eliminating these topics from consideration because over the course of my 22 years as a teacher in the physical and virtual college classrooms, I have unfortunately found that students tend to get “bogged down” in their *personal feelings* regarding these very specific subjects. I have literally had to ban these topics because I have witnessed extremely public—and electronic—displays of disrespect that people have shown one another.

We are, of course, each entitled to our personal feelings regarding any subject. However, there are times when these feelings may make it much harder to conduct objective, multi-sided, academic research. Additionally, it would be unfair of me as a professor to ask or expect you to keep those feelings contained for the sole purpose of writing one research essay.

If you choose one of these forbidden topics, you will receive a zero on your initial topic selection statement for this unit, and you will be asked to submit another topic for me to approve. Thank you all for your understanding and cooperation.

If you have any questions about how to select a topic, please let me know, and I will do my absolute best to help you in any way that I can do so reasonably.

Acceptable topics include divorce, drug use (and abuse), child abuse, debt, teenage pregnancy, problems in education, illegal immigration, homelessness, addiction, poverty, human trafficking, hunger, the negative effects of social media, and violence (includes physical and cyber-bullying, domestic violence, gang violence, and similar angles).
You are NOT limited to those specific topics as long as you do not select one of the topics that is forbidden. You are MORE than welcome to check the databases (particularly Opposing Viewpoints) for more topic ideas if necessary.

To make the development of the argument a bit easier and (perhaps!) more sensible to you, please consider the following sets of questions as they pertain to cause and effect:

You may find that not ALL of these questions apply to the social problem that you have selected. That is fine. Feel free to focus on those questions here that you feel represent your chosen topic most closely. To ensure that you cover your bases, I would consider selecting a minimum of THREE questions in this group that fit your subject matter to assist you in generating ideas for research.

1) What events or behaviors led to the phenomenon that is the social problem?
2) What social conditions or prevailing attitudes led (or COULD lead) to the phenomenon?
3) What economic conditions led (or COULD lead) to the phenomenon?
4) What psychological need or state of mind may have led (or COULD lead) to the phenomenon?
5) What are all of the possible reasons that someone would carry out this behavior?
6) How prevalent is this behavior among different groups of people? For example, are people of a certain economic class, gender, race or educational background more or less likely to be affected by this issue? If so, why is this the case?

Now, consider some other possible aspects that might broaden your understanding of your chosen topic: You may find that not ALL of these questions apply to the social problem that you have selected. That is fine. Feel free to focus on those questions here that you feel represent your chosen topic most closely. To ensure that you cover your bases, I would consider selecting a minimum of THREE questions in this group that fit your subject matter to assist you in generating ideas for research.

1) What are the effects of this phenomenon? Are there any less obvious effects that others may not consider as carefully as they should?
2) Who does this social problem affect?
3) How does this social problem affect these individuals? Note that the ANSWERS to these last two questions aren’t necessarily simple or straightforward.
4) Why does this social problem affect them? Clearly, there might be more than one reason or one manner in which the social problem affects people.
5) How does your position or understanding relate to the popular perspectives on this topic? In other words, how are your beliefs on this topic SIMILAR to what popular culture views are on this topic?
6) How might your selected social problem affect people indirectly? For example, teen pregnancy doesn’t just affect the expectant mother; it often affects her immediate family members as well.

7) Is there anything that can be done DIRECTLY by people to avoid this problem on a personal level? If so, what is it? If not, why not?

To approach your research most effectively from multiple possible angles, consider the following directives (suggestions) and questions. You may find that not ALL of these questions apply to the social problem that you have selected. That is fine. Feel free to focus on those questions here that you feel represent your chosen topic most closely. To ensure that you cover your bases, I would consider selecting a minimum of THREE questions in this group that fit your subject matter to assist you in generating ideas for research.

1) Advocate that several factors equally (or relatively equally) cause the phenomenon.
2) Advocate against an apparent cause or a widely held belief in favor of a less obvious cause or a more complicated cause. For example, a widely discussed belief regarding teen pregnancy is that it is caused by unprotected sex, but a lesser known or discussed cause of teen pregnancy is rape.
3) How can I illustrate the connection (relationship) between the causes and effects (what happens as a result) of a particular problem?
4) How can I structure my essay so that it’s most appealing and understandable to the widest group of people possible?
5) What motives or preconceptions might people have for DISAGREEING with me?
6) Who would support an opposing viewpoint to mine? Why?
7) What could be the legitimate causes for taking another position on this particular topic?
8) How does my argument extend beyond the usual perceptions of conventional thinking? In other words, how is my opinion DIFFERENT from what most others may think regarding my topic?
9) What ideas or details about my argument might make the reader curious?
10) What might be a (or SOME) realistic solutions that I can propose to the reader in my essay (specifically, the conclusion of my essay?)

Please check the “Research Project II Materials” module here on Blackboard for additional items to consider as you begin to work on this second major project. These include a sample topic selection statement, a sample essay, and other items that are chosen specifically to assist students in completing this project successfully. Due dates for various assignments in this unit (the topic selection statement, the preliminary draft and the final draft) can be found under the Assignments link here on Blackboard.