**WR 39C: ARGUMENT & RESEARCH**

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**The Historical Conversations Project**

Two major projects comprise the 39C curriculum: The Historical Conversations Project (HCP) and The Advocacy Project (AP). This first one, the HCP, asks you to do four things: **(1) present and analyze a significant political/social/cultural problem**; **(2) frame this problem with motives or warrants**, which are current examples, incidents, or arguments that convince your audience that the problem you're addressing and the questions you're asking are alive and relevant right now; **(3) summarize and critically evaluate various conversations and debates** made by credible scholars and organizations about your topic; and **(4) decipher the historical contexts of the problem at hand by locating at least 2 pieces of evidence, at least one from the past and one from the present,** that tie the problem as we see it today to its past.

**I. Choosing a Topic**

Choose a topic that interests you, something that moved you. Use the assigned readings as points of departure for this first composition. You will have to conduct some of your own research. Let’s talk about what to look for and how to find it! Some of the sources listed below we have not yet read. Nevertheless, you have access to all of them.

Over the next three weeks you will work on this project, which will be submitted for a grade at the end of week 5. One of the main purposes of this first assignment is to expose you and your peers to various topics, arguments, histories, and background knowledge that will enable you engage with each other rigorously and productively over the course of the quarter. Another purpose is to begin the process of teaching you how to locate, evaluate, select, arrange, and integrate sources into a multi-modal composition. As a genre of communication—and in the case of this assignment, one that frames a problem, delivers arguments, uses evidence, and speaks to a broad audience—a multi-modal composition can be a synthesis of various rhetorical positions—visual and written for example—that work together to deepen argumentative positions and claims. Your composition's multi-modality will come from your use of these two modes together.

You may be asking yourself (and you should ask your teacher), “What is a composition and what does it mean if it’s multi-modal?” In your case, you will locate at least two pieces of evidence, one from the present that helps you define the problem you are exploring and one from the past that deciphers this problem’s historical context. And then you will use credible sources to describe for your readers how these distinct pieces of evidence work together to explain the viability of the contemporary problem.

You will need to ask a number of questions in order to understand how your key pieces of evidence speak to each to each other: How does the “artifact” from the past illustrate the evolution of the problem? What arguments do scholars make about the problem’s past and its present? What are scholars and credible people and organizations debating about the problem and its past? As you explain how and why certain historical changes tie your central pieces of evidence together, you will have to think creatively to arrange your arguments and your evidence, both your key pieces of evidence and scholarly sources, to persuade your audience that the historical foundation you have located is meaningful to our understanding of the problem in the present.

**II. Annotated Bibliography: 6-8 Sources**

**Purpose:**  An annotated bibliography, as we are using it here, is a preliminary compilation of your sources. An annotation, which is a short note or comment, gives you the opportunity to document your initial understanding of your sources. The entries in the bibliography will provide you with points of reference that you can look back to as your understanding of your sources deepens and as you wield arguments with more dexterity.

**Task:** With your topic selected, read your sources and present what you have learned about your sources in an annotation. Your annotations should include information that both summarizes a selected source for its intrinsic qualities and explains how you intend to use this piece of evidence. Writers of research-based composition often use different types of sources—fact/background sources, exhibit/primary sources, argument and theory sources—to enable them to create various perspectives on their topic and document important details. In the realm of research writing, understanding and describing the value of your sources as pieces of evidence and figuring out how they work together to support arguments are central aspects of a research project, especially in its early stages.

**Sources & Citations:**

At minimum, you should use between 6 and 8 sources.

* Locate at least 2 significant pieces of evidence, at least one from the past and one from the present, that tie the problem as we see it today to its past.
* 4-6 scholarly sources, at least 2 of which you should find yourself.
* Use the MLA system for citing your sources.

**Comments:**

-Use MLA format. Consult the [MLA Formatting and Style Guide online (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/03/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

-See pages 80-83 in *AGWR.*

**III. Statement of Prospective Claims (500- 900 Words) This will be due at the end of Week 3**

**Purpose:** Your first attempt to write about your topic and your guiding questions will most likely be difficult. This statement of prospective claims is the first formal presentation of your knowledge about the topic and your understanding of the source material. Your primary purpose is to write something that will help further your understanding of your claims. Write your prospective statement in an experimental mindset, try to position this statement as one that captures your current understanding of your sources, your arguments, and the questions you are trying to answer. In other words, write something that will guide you as you craft, revise, and sharpen your questions and arguments.

**Task:** Now that you have summarized and evaluated your sources and offered some speculative thoughts about how you intend to use them as pieces of evidence, write a short statement in which you illustrate how your sources work together to support your developing arguments.

**Comments:**

You may use the following prompts to structure a response that should be written as a short essay. Please use first-person language. You do not have to answer these questions, they are prompts to be used as you see fit.

1. State your guiding questions

                        -What are my guiding questions?

                        -How do my sources address these questions? What are their answers?

2. Describe the historical aspects of your topic and guiding questions.

                        -What cases or ideas do your sources trace back in time to substantiate their arguments about the contemporary problems and questions at hand?

                        -Can you offer reasons for why the historical aspects are important?

3. Source Integration

                        -How do my sources talk to or argue with each other?

                        -How might they fit together to support various argumentative claims?

**Additional Guidance**

**What is a “Key Piece of Evidence” for the HCP?**

**-Key Evidence (Present):** It can be a table of data, an image or a series of images or an incident. It is something that clearly articulates the cultural, political, and social problem that is the focus of your project.

**-How do you locate your evidence?**

Any social, cultural, or political problem that demands the attention of scholars, intellectuals, thinktanks and advocacy organizations will be defined by and grounded in evidence, and these pieces of evidence are what you are trying to find. What sorts of evidence do your scholarly and credible resources use to substantiate their arguments?

**-Key Evidence (Past):** Like your evidence from the present, your historical artifact(s) can be a compilation of statistics in a table or a graph, an image, an incident, ideas and arguments from primary sources, stories, and various art forms. You can use credible sources to locate your historical “artifacts,” and in selecting them think and write about how the historical evidence speaks to your central problem in the present. Try to describe how your historical pieces reside in the past, summarize how they speak to your contemporary evidence, and explain how the historical dialogue between these two pieces or bodies of evidence connects the present with the past. The historical space between them, which documents historical changes, will enable you to articulate clearly the importance of your central problem in the present.