

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT:
GUIDELINES AND SEQUENCE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Your final research paper for CIS 171 will be on a topic of your own choosing, subject to the approval of the course professors. We expect these papers to be interdisciplinary and to focus primarily on your own original thinking and informed synthesis of information from a variety of sources and disciplines. In other words, this paper is not simply a review of the research. How to begin? Ask a question about an environmental issue that requires an interdisciplinary approach, and then answer that question for an appropriate (and identified) audience. Most importantly, choose a topic that is interesting to you! In our experience, good paper topics often result from one or more conversations, and we encourage you to converse with us both early and often.

The sequence of assignments outlined below is designed to keep you on task. Please note that the deadlines below allow you ample time to do the required work, but that we still strongly suggest that you plan well in advance of these deadlines so that if any problems arise you will still have sufficient flexibility to write a strong paper.

Your first step – which you may do anytime after you receive this handout until before you submit your Rough Idea – is to identify and secure the agreement of the Lead Professor for your paper: the professor whose own areas of expertise most closely match the topic of your paper. Two professors will serve as Lead Professor for 9 students and the third will serve as LP for 10 students. These assignments will be agreed upon on a first-come, first-served basis. The best way to solicit a Lead Professor is to give that professor a draft of your rough idea. (You will also have a Second Reader for your paper, and the professors will make those assignments.)

Tuesday, October 7

Reference Librarian makes a brief presentation in class

Susanna Boylston, Head of Library Instruction and Collection Development, will be in class to discuss library resources at your disposal and to answer any questions you may have about conducting your research.

Thursday, October 9

Rough Idea for Proposal due by 5:00 pm – email to all three professors

In this initial proposal, you will:

- state the topic of your Final Research Project in the form of a question,
- include a brief discussion of the topic,
- specify the *audience* of your paper, and
- cite a *model* of the kind of paper you hope to write. Your cited model should be roughly the same length as your final research paper (12 – 15 pages, about 3000 – 4500 words). Good sources for model essays might include (but are certainly not limited to) *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Orion*, *The Economist*, *Scientific American*, and *The New York Times Magazine*.
- Also, you will have an addendum at the end of your proposal that states that you and Professor X have agreed that she or he will serve as Lead Professor.

Be prepared to make significant changes from your original ideas, if necessary – the professors have the right to veto your initial topic, proposed audience, etc.

Please note that the professors will group each student into one of six groups based upon the initial proposals and the choice of Lead Professor. You will do substantial components of this research paper with your group-mates.

Tuesday, October 28

Revised Question, Annotated Bibliography, and Rough Outline due by the beginning of class (one for each group member)

The *Revised Question* will respond specifically to suggestions from the professors about your initial *Rough Idea for Proposal*. By this point, you will have performed an initial literature search, located some of your sources, and begun reading. Each source that you read should be included in your *Annotated Bibliography*, whose purpose is to inform the professors about the sources you have consulted on your topic and your description and evaluation of those sources. Annotations highlight the information you gleaned from each source and offer your assessment of the value of each source in your research. Include all sources, from the ones you found helpful to the less useful ones. The *Annotated Bibliography* should contain enough sources to support a research paper of 12 – 15 pages. What constitutes “enough”? You must include at least 12 sources in your *Annotated Bibliography*, and these sources should be multidisciplinary as well as interdisciplinary. Be sure to evaluate all sources carefully for validity (e.g., articles from peer-reviewed journals and books from academic presses are usually the most valid and trustworthy sources of research; Billy Bob’s Website on Global Warming probably is not). This gives you a chance to demonstrate your ability to assess the quality of what you find. An annotated bibliography provides you with a better sense of what your sources say and a better sense of how you might arrange them in your own paper. You will have a clear sense of how complete your research is, as bibliographies tend to show gaps in your research or argument very clearly. Thus, the annotated bibliography is an aid to organization and development of your ideas. As your ideas develop, prepare a *Rough Outline* of your paper.

In class this day, you will work with your group-mates to improve the quality of each other’s papers. It is probably easiest to simply rotate through each paper one at a time. Let the author spend 5 minutes summarizing progress, stumbling blocks, and future goals while the others skim the documents and then provide comments and suggestions.

Tuesday, November 4

By this date, your group should have met outside of class to achieve two goals: peer review rough drafts and draft a presentation outline.

Well before this date, you should begin writing a rough draft of your paper, based on your research and your draft outline. Each member of the group will assist another by peer reviewing that rough draft no later than this day; instructions for this activity will be forthcoming. Please send an email to your Lead Professor confirming that your paper was peer reviewed effectively.

Also, as each of you has written a rough draft and so have some idea about your paper’s direction, the group will prepare an initial draft of your group’s presentation (see the following paragraph). Your group will email a copy of that draft to your Lead Professor so s/he can prepare for discussions with your group about it.

Group Presentations during the week of December 2nd: Each group will have 35 minutes to present and discuss their research. These presentations should be interesting, informative, articulate, and professionally presented. They should not be separate, distinct presentations of each person’s Research Project, but rather an integrated discussion of common themes, issues, and concerns. *PowerPoint* is permitted but not required. The three professors will determine the presentation schedule.

Tuesday, November 18

Final Outlines Due

Email a nearly final draft of your outline to your Lead Professor.

Tuesday, November 25

Rough Drafts of Final Research Project Due

Email a polished, nearly final draft of paper to your Lead Professor.

Week of December 2nd

Group Presentations in class and during the evening

Because we have only one week to fit in six presentations, we will schedule at least one evening sessions as well. Each student must attend at least four out of six presentations.

Thursday, December 15

Final Research Paper due by 12:15 pm

Please submit two copies of the final paper, one to each professor's office or email inbox.

Grade distribution for the final research project (total = 35%):

Initial Proposal	ungraded, but failure to submit on time = an unexcused absence
Revised Question/Proposal	2%
Ann. Bib. & Outline	5%
Oral Presentation	5%
Peer Review	3%
Final Paper	20%

For each of the above assignments, the usual late penalties will apply.