English 1B Fall 2015 **Research Topics & Thesis Questions**

**Winnowing of topics:**

Below I have focused on the topics that seem to me the most promising, based on my more than 20 years’ experience teaching college composition.

I salute the ambition of whoever suggested tackling the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, but honestly, I don’t think it is worthwhile to take on something *that* complex in a class like this. Ditto the current threat from ISIS.

Gun control is one of those timeless topics that lead to clichéd arguments, but I will allow it if you can convince me you have new information that could add something productive to the usual tail-chasing, red/state-blue-state barking matches. Obviously, the recent school shooting makes it timely yet again.

These arenot, by any means, the only topics I’ll approve, but it is meant to get you started**.**

**Thesis Questions Drawn from topics given in class**

* Should undocumented immigrants be allowed to vote? (specify which jurisdiction—local, state, or national elections) relevant link: <http://dailycaller.com/2015/01/26/professor-america-should-let-illegal-aliens-vote/>
* Is technology taking damaging our society? (specify a particular kind of technology, and what dangers/drawbacks it presents)
* Should working hours from 8 to 6? (Proposed in Sweden, but discuss in terms of US)
* How should people mental illness be prosecuted? (specify jurisdiction and which mental illness. Tie to a particular case.)
* When should children be prosecuted as adults? (specify jurisdiction and which mental illness. Tie to a particular case, e.g. the recent child slaying in Santa Cruz, maybe?) Relevant link: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/29/us/california-missing-girl-murder-charge/>
* Should we do more with **hydropower**? (specify who “we” is, tie to a particular locale, or tie to a particular funding proposal) Here is an article with a global scope to get started <http://www.dw.com/en/hydropower-continues-to-stir-controversy/a-5133184>
* How can we fight **modern slavery** as it exists in the Bay Area? (It’s already illegal, so the most useful approach here is to pick a local angle and address someone who can actually do something about it.) Here is one rather broad op-ed piece to start with: <http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/editorials/article/Human-trafficking-a-blight-in-progressive-Bay-Area-5517754.php>
* Is an increase in **mechanization/robot workers** a good thing for our society? (best to specify a particular kind of machine doing a particular kind of work) Two op-ed pieces to start with: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/opinion/sunday/the-machines-are-coming.html> and <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/11/opinion/chinas-troubling-robot-revolution.html>
* What can we do about **environmental racism**? (best to specify a particular locale, a particular project that is being opposed on these grounds, or a particular solution someone is proposing) Some relevant links: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/23/black-lives-matter-air-pollution> and <http://www.greenforall.org/> and <http://sfbayview.com/2015/07/bayview-hunters-point-environmental-justice-response-task-force-to-kick-off-july-22/>
* What are some **sustainable methods of transportation** we could be promoting? (specify who “we” is and how a specific solution should be supported) relevant links: <http://www.bayareacouncil.org/category/housing-and-sustainable-development/> and <http://www.sustainablecampus.cornell.edu/blogs/news?tags=Transportation>
* What can schools do to protect their students from **gun violence**? (Try hard to avoid the clichés and ideological thought-traps inherent in the usual gun control debate!)
* Is it time for some sort of **income tax reform** in the US? (Another issue in the current presidential debate: <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2015/02/02/tax-reform-is-the-cry-until-details-are-offered/> and <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/02/05-us-corporate-tax-reform-obamas-good-ideas-dont-add-up-pozen>

**Objectives of the assignment**:As defined by the gen ed committee, this assignment is supposed to exercise the following skills:

* Locate and evaluate sources, through library research, and integrate research through appropriate citation and quotation. (GELO 1)
* Present effective arguments that use a full range of legitimate rhetorical and logical strategies to articulate and explain their positions on complex issues in dialogue with other points of view.(GELO 2)
* Effectively locate, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize evidence in a comprehensive way in support of one’s ideas.(GELO 3)
* Effectively distinguish and convey inductive and deductive patterns as appropriate, sequencing arguments and evidence logically to draw valid conclusions and articulate related outcomes (implications and consequences).(GELO 5)

**Best Approach**:

“Easy” topics very seldom lead to good papers. To achieve as many of these goals as possible, try to really stretch yourself, going beyond the obvious things everyone says.

The best projects will be those tied to ***specific,*** **real-world problems** and addressed to a **relevant and specific real-world audience** in an **appropriate forum**. You should try to offer a creative but plausible solution that this audience could be persuaded to accept. **Think globally**: below I’ve emphasized local and recent topics, because your ethos will be easiest to support in your own backyard, but remember that great ideas come from everywhere, so I would strongly encourage you to search for solutions from abroad that can be applied here, or vice versa. **Kairos:** Remember to look for a reason your audience should care about this now. Much can be tied to the presidential race, for instance.

**Cheating:** Sorry, but this has to be said. Obviously you need to avoid plagiarism, but “double-dipping,” using a paper you are writing or have written for another class is also cheating and will be penalized like plagiarism.