Paper 1 – Issue Proposal
English 1302: Rhetoric and Composition II

The Rhetorical Situation

In order for argument to occur, there must first be an “issue,” which simply means an unsettled question that matters to a community. This semester you’ll be conducting research on an issue that you select, and since you’ll be reading and writing extensively on this issue throughout the term, it’s essential that you choose one that truly interests you. As you consider potential issues, you may want to do some background reading to ensure that you are truly interested in the issue and that you can find enough sources to support sustained research. Please note: all the major assignments in this course build on one another, so once you select an issue, you may not change it.

For this paper, you will take stock of what you already know about the issue you select, organize and develop your thoughts, and sketch a plan for your research. Your audience will be your classmates and me.

Invention (i.e., discovering what you’re going to say in this paper)

1. You must first make sure the issue you’ve selected is arguable. Apply the “Twelve Tests of an Arguable Issue” on p. 28 of First-Year Writing. If you cannot answer “yes” to all twelve questions, change or modify your issue until you can.

2. Your classmates and I will want to know more about the issue and your relationship to it, so brainstorm/freewrite/draft answers to the following questions:
   - How would you introduce this issue to an audience who knows nothing about it?
   - What do you know about the issue already?
   - How did you acquire your knowledge about the issue?
   - Why do you find this issue compelling?

3. Your classmates and I will also be interested in what you don’t know (or are at least unsure about) regarding the issue. Brainstorm/freewrite/draft answers to the following questions:
   - What are the main questions you want to pursue/answer over the course of the semester? (Obviously these questions may change as you learn/think more about the issue.)
   - How would you answer these questions right now and why? (Your answers may change significantly as you research the issue.)
   - What more do you need to learn about the issue, and where might you go to find more information?

4. Finally, your classmates and I will be curious to know what audiences you have in mind as you look ahead to future assignments. Brainstorm/freewrite/draft answers to the following questions:
- What audiences would be interested in your ideas on the issue?
- What types of scholars, stakeholders, decisions makers, and pundits are interested in/affected by the issue?
- What sorts of people are likely to be your opponents? Your allies?

**Arrangement (i.e., organizing what you’re going to say in this paper)**

You’ll want to organize your paper in the manner you think will prove most effective with your classmates and me, but here are some general guidelines:

- Heed the lesson of Ch. 1 in *They Say/I Say*: “To give your writing the most important thing of all—namely, a point—a writer needs to indicate clearly not only his or her thesis, but also what larger conversation that thesis is responding to” (18). In this case, the conversation you’re responding to is the one surrounding the issue you’ve selected. Indicate at the beginning of your paper that you’re writing in response to that conversation, then state a thesis that previews what you’ll be discussing in your paper and why it is appropriate for a semester of sustained research.

- Also mind the lesson of Ch. 7 in *They Say/I Say*: “Regardless of how interesting a topic may be to you as a writer, readers always need to know what is at stake in a text and why they should care. . . . Rather than assume that audiences will know why their claims matter, all writers need to answer the ‘so what?’ and ‘who cares?’ questions up front” (88-89). Don’t assume that your classmates and I will understand why your issue matters—make us understand by explaining why your issue is important and why we should care about it.

- However you arrange the body of your paper, make sure you answer fully and in detail all the questions in the Invention section of this prompt.

**Style (i.e., choosing the appropriate language for your paper)**

One reason I’m asking you to write to your classmates and me is to break you of the habit of writing all your papers to some vague, generalized audience and/or attempting to make all your papers approximate some objective ideal. If you approach this paper in that way, your style will be ineffective because it won’t be tailored to your specific audience. When reading your paper, it should be obvious to your classmates and me that you’re writing to us specifically.

Heed the lesson of Ch. 9 in *They Say/I Say* and mix standard written English with “the kinds of expressions and turns of phrase that you use every day when conversing with family and friends” (115). The more important lesson of that chapter is “that your judgments about the appropriate language for the situation should always take into account your likely audience and your purpose in writing” (121). Since you’re writing to your classmates and me, you should write in an informal style that is distinctly your own, but do make sure you’re communicating clearly.
All readers appreciate coherent, unified paragraphs, so your paragraphs should include a topic sentence that clearly states the main idea of the paragraph and supporting sentences that cluster around the main idea without detours.

Proofread carefully; avoid errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics. Use The Scott, Foresman Writer for questions you have regarding style.

Other Requirements

Your paper should be 3-5 pages—anything shorter or longer will be considered a failure to adhere to one of the assignment’s basic requirements. It should be double-spaced, typed in Times New Roman font, with 12-point character size and one-inch margins all the way around.

Your first submission is due at the beginning of class on __________, and you should think of it as a final draft—something that is ready for your classmates and me to read. If your first submission does not meet every requirement of this assignment sheet, I will return it to you and count it as late. Both your first and final submissions must be turned in on time—you will be docked a full letter grade for each day either is late.

Peer reviews are due _________.

Final drafts are due _________.

Evaluation Criteria

Final Draft:

- Includes a snappy title that catches the reader’s attention and indicates the topic and argument.
- Identifies an arguable/contestable issue appropriate to the assignment.
- Indicates that the essay responds to the conversation about that issue.
- Includes a contestable, specific, detailed claim about why the issue is appropriate for a semester of sustained research.
- Provides well-developed reasons about your relationship to the issue (what you know, what you don’t know, what audiences you are considering, and how you will find the information you need) that support the claim.
- Answers the “so what” and “who cares” question by explaining why the research topic is significant and to whom.
- Supports reasons with thoughtful, well-developed examples anecdotes, ideas, and questions.
- Comes across as a credible writer, and appeals to the values and emotions of the audience.
- Develops a seamless, coherent, and well-organized argument.
- Sentences are lively, engaging, and relatively error free.
- If outside sources are used, they are used effectively and integrated smoothly to help substantiate or support points.
- If outside sources are used, there is proper attribution to each source cited via in-text parenthetical citation and a correctly formatted Works Cited page.
• Essay is 4 pages in MLA Style (Works Cited necessary if outside sources are used) in 12pt. Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins.

Writing Process:
• Submitted complete drafts on time. Drafting process shows evidence of revision of content and style.
• Provided adequate help to peers during peer review.
Sample Issue Proposal

Working Hard Is Hardly Working: Challenges Facing Working Families in the U.S.

For as long as I can remember, I have felt frustrated by the lack of institutional support for working women and families. In my high school Government and Economics classes I would get furious when we talked about the gender wage gap that means that women still earn only 83 cents for every dollar a man earns; the lack of a federal law guaranteeing women paid maternity leave; and the lack of affordable quality daycare for working families. As an adult I have an even more personal stake in issues facing working families because I have a full-time job and two young sons, a combination that creates situations that are comical and heartbreaking: I comfort a crying mother at my sons’ daycare as she drops off her ten-week old infant on her first day back to work; I arrive at my own job 15 minutes late covered in spit-up; I see my oldest son playing with his collection of Happy Meal toys and feel ashamed because they reveal how many meals I’m not cooking; I nurse my youngest son to sleep at night while answering work emails. Conversations with other daycare mothers reveal that we’re all stretched thin financially and emotionally as we struggle to do our best by our children, partners, employers—and ourselves. And the conversation isn’t limited to daycare moms—high profile feminists like Michelle Obama argue that working families need stronger support from government and businesses in order for families and businesses to thrive. This semester I plan to research the lack of institutional support provided to U.S. women and families and the resulting lack of work/life balance, financial security, and family stability. I also want to examine the negative impacts on businesses that result from employees’ struggles. This topic justifies a semester of sustained research because I have a personal investment and a passionate interest in it; because there’s an
ongoing conversation about the issue in the U.S.; because there are a lot of interesting ways I could enter the conversation.

The issue of support for working families is one that I have always had an interest in; I have always wondered why women make the choices they do and how they manage to survive (and hopefully thrive) within the personal/professional/financial constraints they face. I will certainly draw on my own experience when developing my essays because it relates directly to the arguments I want to make. I have already read a fair amount about this issue, and there are a lot of articles/data I can draw on: I love Arlie Hochschild’s *The Second Shift* about the particular burdens facing working mothers, and I can look in JSTOR for articles that cite her; there’s a Harvard study comparing U.S. maternity/paternity leave benefits to those in other countries; there was a *New York Times Magazine* article a few years ago about highly educated women leaving their professions after having children; *Ms.* magazine always has articles about this topic; I can look at websites of organizations like NOW; I can see what Michelle Obama has said about this and related issues.

I obviously have a lot of strong ideas about the challenges facing working families, but there are also a lot of questions I have to answer before I’ll be able to focus my topic. Here are a few: What minimum legal/financial support/safety nets do state and federal governments provide for working families (Family and Medical Leave Act, CHIP, etc.)? Where are the Catch-22s in the system (e.g., women on welfare lose money for groceries after they make a certain amount of money even though amount isn’t enough to live on)? Which employers in the Metroplex/Texas/US provide more than minimum assistance/protections for working families? What kinds of benefits are they providing (subsidized childcare, paid maternity/paternity leave)? What are the benefits to employers of providing those extra “perks”? Which elected
officials/public figures argue for more support for working families? What kinds of arguments are they making? What protections/benefits do working families have in other industrialized countries? What kind of arguments can I make to create common ground and convince business people, legislators, etc. that better support of working families benefits everyone? Answering these questions will help me figure out what specific issue I want to tackle and within the overall umbrella of “lack of institutional support for women who work outside the home.”

I know that lots of people feel very strongly about this issue: feminist scholars have written a lot about “the second shift” and lack of support for working women and families; Michelle Obama has taken up this issue; state and local lawmakers make decisions all the time that directly and indirectly affect working families, as do CEOs and other decision-makers in large and small businesses around the country. I think there are several possibilities in terms of audiences: if I want to propose changes in Texas law, my audience could be my legislators in the Texas House and Senate; if I want to organize moms or families to work for change, I could write to readers of local mommy blogs like the one sponsored by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram; I could also make arguments to my own employer for benefits that I don’t currently receive, although that seems rhetorically very tricky. My allies are feminist lawmakers and businesspeople who understand and sympathize with the challenges faced by working families. It may also be that conservatives who believe in the importance of family values could be allies. I think most lawmakers and businesspeople will oppose this issue because it can be seen as expensive and as doing for others what they should be doing for themselves. The hardest question for me is how to appeal to business folks/legislators who make the short-term financial bottom line the most important aspect of their business models. My initial idea is that I would appeal to the idea that providing financial and legal safety nets for working families is an
important part of “family values.” I will also argue that support for working families may seem expensive but benefits employers’ bottom line in the long term.

Since it can be hard to get people to sympathize with the idea of work/life/school balance and/or support for working families, I might start by describing poignant anecdotes about challenges faced by working parents. For example, I know of women who leave their small children asleep in the car outside their workplace late at night because they don’t have childcare and are scared to leave their kids at home. It’s a dramatic example that illustrates the struggles that working parents face. Depending on my audience, leading with such an emotional appeal might backfire. If I’m writing to businesspeople, it might be better to start with a logos appeal—maybe I can find data about how better support of working families benefits the bottom line.

I am excited about learning more about this topic and writing a sustained argument about it. I have felt passionately about the topic for a long time, which makes sense given that I’m living it every day and watching women around me—including the First Lady—struggle with the same issues I face. I think writing about this topic will help me make sense of the challenges I face in my own life while at the same time allowing me to argue publicly for change. You better believe that my Researched Position Paper is going to be “for real”!—I’m definitely going send it to my chosen audience.