The Major Research Essay

This semester you will be working on a project related to one of your interests, either a personal one or a professional or aspirational one. This means you need to come up with a general field or subject area that interests YOU. It can be broad (like medicine), or specific (like neurobiology). But it at least needs to be something you’re interested in.

Once you’re come up with a topic, you need to identify a problem within the subject area or general field that interests you. For example, if you chose medicine, you could choose the problem of over-medicating patients in elder care facilities. This problem needs to be both researchable and solvable, at least in theory.

How to come up with a problem:

- Give your topic a bit more thought, beyond just that you like it. What is it about the topic that interests you specifically, and what kinds of issues might be inherent in the topic itself?
- Do some light research. Read through a few websites or articles devoted to your topic, and see what others have to say about any issues or problems that might be evident to people in the field.
- Talk to someone in the field. Maybe it’s interesting to you because you know someone who is in that particular field or who does daily work in that subject area. Having a brief conversation with them might be enough to get you over the issue of what problem to choose from that area.

Note: Do not choose some “headline topic” just because it’s in the news lately and you think it will make for an easy essay. All issues are important, but if you’re not invested in it your paper won’t be as reflective, and is likely to be less focused. Also, do not avoid topics because they might be “too personal.” There is no such thing when it comes to what you can research.

Once you’ve come up with a general subject area and a problem within that subject area, you need to identify an audience. Ask yourself these two questions:

- Who would care about this problem enough to do something about it?
- Who actually could do something about it?

For example: for the aforementioned overmedication issue, your audience is probably the state board for medicine. They would care, and they have the authority to do something about the issue.
Next, you need to determine who you are in the process. For the purposes of this essay you are not a student writing a paper for a professor. You are a professional in the field you’ve determined, and you are writing a report about the problem and possible solutions. You understand that this report will be read by people in authority and you want to do your absolute best on it to get relief for the people being affected most by the problem you’ve identified.

In our ongoing practice scenario, you would be someone like a health care worker, an elder care counselor, or perhaps a nurse working in this elder care facility.

Here’s a summary of how this maps out:

1. Choose a general field or subject area that interests you.
2. Identify a specific problem within the general field or subject area you have chosen.
3. Identify an audience for your report.
4. Determine who you are in this scenario, as the report writer.

Note: None of this role playing (creating an audience, determining an alternate role for you besides student writing essay) will appear in the research paper itself. This is all about creating a frame of mind, a different way of thinking and approaching the research process.

I want this to be interesting to you so you are invested in it as a topic, and as solid research. I don’t want you to be overwhelmed by any step of the process. To that end, we will be spending time working through the issues that may come up during every step of the process.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Library instruction in the research process, how to use databases, etc.
- Class sessions where we role play using groups.
- Drafting of both a formal proposal and the report itself.
- Outlining for clarity and format.

As always, you need to utilize the resources available to you for this project. This includes writing tutors and librarians, who are here to assist you as always. This also includes me, so don’t leave me out of the process. I want to know where you are every step of the way so I can help you get to where you need to be with this project.

DUE: 10/23-10/24.