Project 4: Evaluating Controversies

Overview and Purpose
What is a controversy? If a large majority of people agree on the circumstances of an event or the specifics of an issue, we could say that it isn’t controversial. A controversy, then, is an event or issue that is disagreed upon or perhaps not fully understood by a number of people. But, if a large number of people disagree or do not fully understand something, how can we know what to think about the event or issue?

For this project, you will investigate a controversial issue or event through careful research into popular sources (newspapers, blogs, magazines, podcasts, etc.) and construct an argument in which you answer ONE of three questions:

- What caused this event? (For example, the Parkland School Shooting)
- What really happened? (For example, the Trayvon Martin killing)
- What is currently happening? (For example, climate change)

Your readers depend on your “critic’s eye” to give a thoughtful argument about the topic you choose. They come from varied backgrounds and tend to have very different (and strong) opinions, so you will need to be as persuasive as possible in your writing. One persuasive strategy that is important in this project is trust. How can you persuade your opinionated audience to trust your conclusions when they have heard so much other information? One of the methods you will use to build trust is to draw upon good information, which necessitates evaluation of the sources you use to create your argument. Therefore, you will evaluate your sources using specific criteria: currency, relevance/reliability, authority, accuracy, and purpose/point of view (CRAP/CRAAP). With good, credible information, you can create a trustworthy argument about your topic.

Your evaluation of your sources will also weigh heavily on your argument. For example, in order to construct an argument about “What is currently happening?,” you will need to ensure that your sources are C - current and R - reliable, along with the other criteria, and you will need to make these aspects of the sources clear to your audience in order to establish the trustworthiness of your argument.

The Rhetorical Context
You write a newspaper column titled “The Critic’s Eye,” in which you take up controversial events or issues, examine popular sources to find credible information, and make an argument about the event/issue that clarifies the realities of it for your audience. Your readers expect a well-researched, objective view of the controversial topics you cover. They want to know that you have done thorough research and have selected credible sources of information that they can trust.
The Process
For this project, you will choose a topic from the list below and decide on the question you’ll answer in your paper. You’ll research your topic using popular sources: newspapers, blogs, magazines, podcasts, etc. and evaluate your sources using the CRAP/CRAAP criteria. To complete this portion of the process, you will write a proposal to your “editor”/instructor. Then, you’ll construct a persuasive argument using your sources. You’ll also develop a draft, engage in peer review, and meet one-on-one in a conference with your instructor in order to revise effectively.

Requirements
Length: 5-7 (including Works Cited page)
Format: Double-spaced, MLA format
Sources: 3 or more
Due Dates: See schedule in the syllabus
Weight: 200 Points (20% of the final grade)

The Topics
Virginia Tech Shootings
Columbine
The Murder of Matthew Shepard
Kent State
The murder of Trayvon Martin
Unite the Right Rally (Charlottesville)
Ruby Ridge
Waco
Pulse Nightclub shootings
Parkland shootings
Sandy Hook shootings
Dakota Access Pipeline Protests
Ferguson Unrest
Hurricane Katrina deaths
Jonestown Mass Murder/Suicide
Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill
Exxon Valdez Reef Collison and Oil Spill
Flint Water Crisis
Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster
Bhopal Disaster
Charleston Church Massacre
Central Park Jogger case
California wildfires of 2017
The Halloween Candy Scare of 1970
Middlebury College protest against Charles Murray
Vaping Health Crisis 2019
The death of Sandra Bland
The detention of children at the Migrant Detention Center in Clinton, Texas
Facebook and free speech policies

Criteria for Assessment
50 points - Content and Purpose: Does the project... fulfill the requirements/expectations of the assignment? maintain focus on the selected subject and purpose of the writing? fully develop the argument in a way that the intended audience expects? support conclusions with evidence?

50 points - Significance and Interest: Does the project... hold the audience’s interest and fully address the selected research question? thoroughly analyze and evaluate popular sources? synthesize credible source information rather than presenting a list of facts or summary?

40 points - Organization and Logic: Does the project... follow basic genre conventions of an argumentative essay? flow from beginning to end in a logical way that readers can follow? provide logical connections between ideas as needed? arrange source material carefully?

30 points - Style and Formatting: Does the project... adhere to MLA formatting guidelines for in-text citation and Works Cited page, thus giving credit to sources? convey an appropriate tone based on the subject? utilize coherent sentence structures? seem to be proofread?

30 points - Revision and Process: Does the project... show critical/creative thinking between drafts through significant (quality over quantity) revisions based on audience and other aspects? reveal growth in the writer (taking risks, multiple drafts, discussion, questions, etc.)?

Outcomes
These represent what we expect students will be able to do by the end of the unit.

- Students will be able to analyze a range of sources and evaluate for currency, relevance, authoritativeness, and point of view/purpose
- Students will be able to explain a range of research approaches and to assess according to rhetorical contexts
- Students will be able to construct an argument with thorough and nuanced support that acknowledges the concerns of audience and synthesizes sources appropriately
- Students will be able to develop a nuanced and thoughtful conclusion based on their evaluation of relevant sources
- Students will be able to support their conclusion with ample and appropriate evidence