Multi-Modal Unit Plan: Arguing about Causes of Socio-cultural Phenomenon
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First-year composition students often have conceptions of why they think large scale phenomena occur in the world, but often the arguments they use to support these opinions are derived from media, friends, family, or others as blanket generalizations that aren’t necessarily supported by facts. In this unit students will be asked to analyze their understanding of a social-cultural phenomenon or trend and to support it through two important devices, argument and evidence. To do this students will create a video that explains through imagery, text, and audio what they think the causes of their chosen phenomenon or trend are. Moreover, they will explain which one of these causes is the most contributing cause, creating debate between the causes they choose to present.

This unit will take place over five weeks and involves several key steps to help students succeed. As with an alphabetic essay there were be pre-writing, drafting, and revision. The pre-writing begins with coming up with a topic idea and finding causes to investigate. The first week of the class is devoted to this task while at the same time students have opportunities to explore the primary video editor for the assignment. That pre-writing will continue and be formalized into a planning guide that students will create in class either of their own design or by using a planning template provided. Mid-way through the unit, students will submit their planning guide for approval before moving on to composing. Revising/modifying the guide may be necessary as students continue, but it’s important for the instructor to see that each student has a plan to start with that identifies both the topic and the causes this project will deal with. The two weeks following that approval will be devoted to composing in class. Students have the opportunity to work alone, in groups, and one-on-one with the instructor.

Included with this document is a timeline of the unit, assuming a Tuesday/Thursday class schedule with hour and fifteen minute classes. An assignment instructions sheet and an in-class video analysis are provided as well.
Timeline

T: Tuesday, TH: Thursday, HW: Homework

Week 1

T: Introduce assignment, Small-Group Activity Miss Representation Trailer, plan topics

HW: pre-planning research for a topic

TH: Discuss planning guide, Youtube video editing tutorial, Class sample topic

HW: work on planning guide

Week 2

T: ITS tool demonstration (video cameras, recorders)

HW: research/complete planning guide

TH: Revise planning guide, submit draft of planning proposal (receive feedback by next week)

HW: begin composing

Week 3

T: video composing/one-on-one advising

TH: video composing/one-on-one advising

Week 4

T: video composing/one-on-one advising

TH: video composing/one-on-one advising

Week 5

T: 1st batch of video presentations

TH: 2nd batch of video presentations.
Speculating about Causes Video Assignment
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Trends & Phenomena

Our arguments so far have been focused on concrete solutions; this next task will have you wondering about why a trend or phenomenon exists and/or is changing (A trend is any phenomenon that’s changing. A phenomenon is any fact or situation that does not have a clear cause).

What to Talk About?

What’s most important is to pick a topic you know something about and to pick something that is debatable. Obesity for instance is a trend that’s on the rise in the US, but arguing why people gain weight isn’t (often) arguable. What you want to speculate about is why the trend is on the rise. We know people gain weight because of poor diet and exercise, but why is obesity getting worse across the nation? If you argue for something that’s common knowledge, your argument won’t work. And remember you must develop at least 3 causes, compare them, and explain which is the most likely cause.

Presentation Method

For this project you’ll be developing a video that incorporates clips acquired from creative commons and/or video you’ve made yourself that explains your position. To create your video you can use IMovie, Windows Movie Maker, or another editor of your choice. If you are unfamiliar with video editing, I recommend using the YouTube video editor as we are going to work with that in class, and because it’s web-based everyone should have access to it.

Tips

Audience: Your audience must be someone other than your instructor or classmates. Consider how the imagery, text, sounds you use will impact your audience.

Thesis: Your argument needs to identify a phenomenon or trend and three possible causes. Your video should explain each and might do so by incorporating a voice recording or video of yourself or by including text that explains your argument.

Opinion: Your thoughts matter. Include them in this project, but remember that unsupported arguments carry no weight. Instead present supported opinions. Stick to what you can logically defend. If you can’t find a video that supports your argument, include some text that explains your point.

Length: Be concise. No video should be longer than 5 minutes.
Small Group Activity: Film Trailer

Miss Representation: http://missrepresentation.org/

How do you argue for the causes of socio-cultural phenomena? There might be direct causes, but often they are complex issues with many possible causes. There often is a clear answer. That makes it debatable.

This trailer makes an argument present in the film Miss Representation.

As you watch the trailer, consider what argument this film might be making. You have to do some guess work here because this is only a trailer, but do you best to come up with a thesis statement that might reflect the argument of this film trailer. Also include some of the supporting points that the trailer presents. What about the other side? Is it represented? Are their concerns addressed? Lastly, what do you think? Is this argument convincing or not?

Trailer Argument:

Supporting Points:

Counterargument:

Are you convinced by this argument? Why or why not?