Critical Reading and Writing

Position Paper Project

Introduction
Continuing the effort of coming to terms with education and of cultivating rhetorical skills, this project asks students to take a position with respect to university models and then to persuasively articulate that position in a professional, well-designed, and research-based position paper.

Prompt
Negotiating with think tank members, select one model for a university education from the menu of models presented in the white paper. Students should choose a different model from the one researched for the white paper. If there are not enough models to go around, then students may need to “double up.” Persuasively advocate for this model in a 1200-1400 word position paper written for a specific audience with an identifiable set of needs, values, and expectations. This position paper should include approximately ten sources that meet the needs, values, and expertise of the document’s primary audience. Position papers within a think tank should share a common design theme, terminology, focus, audience, and context.

What Are Position Papers?
Position papers are written arguments: writing advocating for a specific action or attitude. Position papers, however, differ in both context and use from other forms or persuasive writing (e.g., editorials, opinion columns, marketing documents). Position papers are formal and research-based documents generally produced by organizations within or for organizations. Typically, position papers acknowledge (more thoroughly that other forms of written argument) counter-arguments; it is a document that implicitly recognizes other positions. As such, position papers outline rather than fully articulate an argument, and they are generally more thoroughly read than white papers. Consequently, position papers often lead to larger documents or series of documents (e.g., legislation, policy statements). Position papers concisely articulate the following:
- History and contemporary context of the position advocated
- Basic components of the position advocated
- Crucial evidence supporting the position advocated
- Rebuttals of possible counter arguments

The Importance of Audience and Context
Audience is one of the most important considerations of this project. Being able to construct a document for a specific audience is the key to successful and ethical rhetorical action. Recalling Jim Corder’s “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” it is important to forefront the narrative of the other. The first step to doing so is identifying the needs, values, and expectations of any audience you are addressing. For the position paper, students will be addressing the audiences (primary, secondary, tertiary, and gatekeeping) they defined for the white paper. Understanding the context a document will enter is also a crucial consideration. For the position paper, students will likewise be addressing the contexts (economic, political, and ethical) they defined for the white paper.

Position Paper Grading Criteria
- Position is clearly stated and situated
- Style is persuasive and in sync with the needs, values, and expectations of the various, corresponding audiences
- Document accounts for primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences
- Words, graphics, and illustrations all compliment one another
- Graphics and illustrations are consistently numbered and labeled, and are provided with captions and/or descriptions
- Headings are succinct and create multiple access points for readers
- Design features produce unique and additional access points for readers
- Overall design follows design principles discussed in class, makes document easy to understand and scan, and creates a persuasive professional impression
- Definitions and descriptions of university models are correct, concise, and appropriate for the audiences
- Each section of the document has a clear introduction, body, and conclusion
- Sources are documented thoroughly, consistently, and unobtrusively (using MLA)

Document Specifications
In general, position papers should contain a cover page, a brief abstract, an introduction, a main body (containing background/context, key elements of position), a conclusion, and list of works cited. The specifications of the document should reflect those of the white paper.