HUMW 011-09
Critical Reading and Writing
White Paper Project

Introduction
Working to build a set of practical, rhetorical skills necessary for work in the world, and attempting to come to terms with the modern university, students in groups of four or five will research and present four models for university education (e.g., liberal arts, comprehensive, Jesuit, land-grant, etc). This project will result in one primary document: a White Paper prepared for a specific audience (with a well-defined set of needs, values, and expectations) interested in building a university, as well as several supporting documents (a project proposal and an assessment document). In researching, designing, composing, and revising the White Paper, students should keep in mind their primary and secondary audiences as well as any tertiary or gatekeeping audiences. When composing the document, students should pay close attention to:

- rhetorical moves made in composing the document
- definitions and descriptions
- the use of images, graphics, and other design features such as typeface, fonts, headings, margin comments, and sidebars

Additionally, students should consider the political, economic, and ethical contexts of their documents.

What Are White Papers?
White Papers (sometimes called “Green Papers” or “consultation documents”) are documents produced for decision-makers; that is, they work to structure (frame) decision-making through communication. They rarely tell an audience what decision to make; rather, their focus is on creating a framework within which decision-makers can make decisions. White Papers provide tailored research, allow for different readings and readers, and account for each audience’s unique context, values, needs, and expectations. They are not research papers. Their style, as well, contributes to decision-making. Word choice, sentence structure, and visual appearance all create an impression of the authors, their credibility and trustworthiness. Style also impacts the mood and mindset of the reader, which contribute significantly in decision-making. This project asks students, in groups, to prepare a White Paper that allows a specific decision-maker to decide among competing university models.

Deliverables
One: Project Proposal
Each group will deliver a 250-word proposal for its project. Proposals should cover the basics of the project (models to be covered; potential sources of research; primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences; and document design). The proposal should also suggest a division of labor: who will be responsible for what? The goal of this proposal is to interest the instructor in the project and persuade him that the project is feasible, valuable, and in concert with the goals of the project and the course.

Two: White Paper
Groups will design and compose a professional quality white paper (1600 – 1800 words) that lays out four well-researched and viable university models for a specific audience with an identifiable set of needs, values, and expectations. The document should structure the decision-making process by framing the issue of a university education and providing options without advocating for any one model.

Three: Collaborative Project Evaluation Form
Group members are asked to complete the Collaborative Project Evaluation Form to assess their collaborative experiences, the effectiveness of the group, and the contributions of individual group members. Evaluations are private, and should be emailed to the instructor at the conclusion of the project.

The Importance of Audience
Audience is one of the most important considerations and components of this project. Being able to construct a document for and around 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 (with love, if possible) the narrative of the other. The first step to doing so is identifying the needs, values, and expectations of any audience you are addressing.

Primary Audience
Here are the readers to whom you address your white paper. They are the decision makers: the information you provide will allow them to make a decision or otherwise act. Possible primary audiences for this White Paper:

- a local politician seeking to raise the profile and improve the economic conditions of her congressional district
- a local benefactor seeking to promote the advancement of the sciences
Secondary Audience
This group of readers advises the primary audience. They are typically subject matter experts brought in to assist in the decision making process. Corresponding secondary audiences could be:
- a past or present university president or provost
- a researcher in the area of pedagogy

Tertiary Audience
These are readers who either have an interest in the issue or who will be impacted by the decision. Members of this audience can also be called stakeholders. There are many possible tertiary audiences for any one document:
- potential students
- other educational institutions
- local resident/constituents/taxpayers
- local businesses
- neighboring high schools

Gatekeeping Audience
Readers who will review the document before it is published or otherwise released are gatekeepers. Typically, this includes accountants and lawyers who will review documents for any potential problems. This audience can also include editors. For this project, there are several gatekeepers:
- group members
- the instructor
- teaching assistant
- writing center tutors

The Importance of Context
Understanding the context a document will enter – the context of the audience – is an additionally important consideration. Here are three ways of distinguishing the unique contexts of particular audiences.

Political Context
The “political context” describes politics in the familiar sense: what local, national, or global political circumstances or constraints affect the audience? It also defines the various relationships the audience is a part of. Who are they responsible for and to?

Economic Context
This context consists of the various financial circumstances of the audience. What can they afford? What are the limits and abilities of the primary audience with respect to spending?

Ethical Context
The “ethical context” consists of the values that influence and motivate the various audiences of a document.

White Paper Grading Criteria
- Style is plain and persuasive when and where appropriate and is in sync with the expectations, needs, and values of the various, corresponding audiences
- Document (in all aspects) 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 such as sidebars, margin comments, and pullouts 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
- Descriptions of university models allow for easy comparison across common elements (i.e., oranges to oranges)
- Purpose and intent are clearly stated and defined, as is the issue or problem
- Each section of the document has a clear introduction, developed body, and a concise conclusion
- Specific information and sources are documented thoroughly, consistently, and unobtrusively (using MLA)

Document Specifications
The look of this document will be defined by the group members in response to the needs and expectations of the audience and the demands of the context. The selection of typefaces, images, color schemes, and other design elements should be driven by the desire to create a consistent and professional look that works to draw in the audience and make them confident decision makers. Thus, the specifications of the document will vary from group to group.