Phil 2100: Critical Thinking
Spring 2013

Problem-Solving Project
Completed Project Due: May 8, 2013

Project Description

This project is an investigation of the relationship between applied critical thinking and issues affecting the community in which we live. First, you need to identify a problem in your community, family, city, or on campus. Once you have selected a problem you feel passionate about, you will work to creatively find and implement a solution to this problem. Your solution to the problem must involve the public in some way. In other words, you must work to solve a problem that affects others besides just yourself.

You will choose this project in consultation me. You will write a draft of the introduction for this project. At that time, I will let you know if your project is appropriate for our class. (You may certainly contact me earlier with ideas!) Don't overestimate how much work you can get done, but try to pick something interesting and challenging. And remember that I am here to help you accomplish your goals.

Pick a problem that:

▪ you would like to solve because it affects you and those around you
▪ you can solve during this class
▪ shows that you can take initiative
▪ shows that you have (or are working on your) organizational skills
▪ allows you to **get something done, to make a difference. This is NOT a research project.**

Time

This project is worth a large portion of your grade. I expect you to be working on it throughout the semester. You should expect to work about 2 hours each week on this project (about 15 hours total). You will need to pick a problem that you really want to solve, or this project will be very difficult for you.

Project Objectives

▪ Develop civic engagement and leadership skills.
▪ Take a project from start to finish: defining, planning, and carrying out social action and activities. Attain experience and skills to act on social problems.
▪ Learn more about the topic you are addressing, and be in a better position to have and defend your own views on this topic.
▪ Think about the relevance of the critical thinking theories learned in class to your own life.
▪ Use creative and critical thinking skills to solve a problem and make a difference.
▪ Engage the public in an issue that is important to you.

Ideas for Projects

Students have done a variety of things for projects. The most important thing is that you do something you feel passionate about. This is an opportunity for you to solve a real problem and do something to improve your life or the lives of those around you. Here are some successful past projects:

▪ Build a trailer for aluminum can recycling at a church.
▪ Plan a fun activity to meet neighbors and build community (for example, a Dodge ball tournament, Halloween party, community garden)

- Work with neighbors to remove invasive species of plants in your neighborhood.
- Plan a party or event to raise money for a cause you want to support. (For example, plan a pancake breakfast and charge friends $3 each. You could donate the money raised to Famine relief for Somalia).
- Plan a neighborhood, school, or community coat and mitten drive.
- Work with your child's school to volunteer in the classroom. Work with your child's teacher so your child does better in school.
- Go Green: recycle, reduce gas/electricity consumption, reuse items, and develop systems within your own house (or workplace) to live (or work) in a more environmentally sound way.
- Develop ways to connect with relatives around the country despite busy lives.
- Donate electrical work at a local rifle range as a way to volunteer and meet new people.
- Find alternative places for kids in apartment building to play so they don't play in the parking lot.
- Create a women's walking group as a way to make friends and exercise.
- Start an activity group at a local nursing home as a way to help residents be more active and engaged with others.

Project Portfolio

The main purpose of the portfolio is to help you document what your problem is, what steps you took to solve it, and apply our coursework to your project. Each item in the portfolio should be at least one, double spaced page (12 point font, 1 inch margins). Your final portfolio will include all of the following pieces and be turned in all together on May 8th in this order:

- ➢ **Title and Author**

- ➢ **Introduction**: Give a description of the problem:
  - What is the problem? Why is it a problem? Be sure to explain the problem clearly so that I understand what the problem actually is.
  - How does this problem affect your life? Here, think about why you might consider this a problem. Does it make your life harder? In what ways? Try to be specific.
  - Do other people have this problem too? How does this problem affect other people? Here, you need to relate your problem to the larger community in which you live. Think about how *your* problem might be a problem for others too.
  - Is this problem important? Would solving this problem make lives better? How? Remember, you should not have a particular solution in mind just yet. Try to focus on the problem at hand.
  - Is there any background information that would be helpful to understanding your problem?

- ➢ **Creative Thinking** and **Analogies** (from Workbook Ch 3):
  - Document how you used one of the creative thinking tools (exotic association, ask around; compare and contrast; exaggeration; the intermediate impossible; mix and match; lateral thinking; problem as an opportunity; think preventively) to think of ideas to solve your problem. Be sure to define the creative thinking tool and explain how it helps unleash creativity.
  - Include a sketch of ideas you came up with when you used these creative thinking techniques. For example, you could include a sketch of your ideas in an exotic association.

- What is your problem like? Write an argument from analogy. To do this, compare your problem to another thing and explain why these two things are similar. Be sure to <u>define</u> what an analogy is.
- Is using an analogy helpful? Why or why not? When are arguments from analogy helpful?

➢ **Research** (Workbook Ch 4 [Argument from Authority], Workbook Ch 5 [Causes],):
- Research what may have caused your problem. There might be a number of possible causes of your problem. How do you know this is the cause? Remember, the most obvious cause might not be the *real* cause of the problem.
- Here, you will begin to think about how you might solve your problem. You should research what other people have done to solve problems like yours. What do other people say? What did other people do to solve their problems? You need to include citations about sources and claims other people make about this problem. (This means that you must do research on this problem rather than just asking friends.)
- Analyze how the information you find is specifically related to your own problem.
- You may use online resources like websites or blogs, but you must be careful. Please review what we have learned about online resources in Workbook Ch 4.
- Include citations of your research. You can choose any style of citation—but you must have them included for full points.

➢ **Solution and Anticipate Objections**:
- What did you do to solve your problem? What steps did you take? Explain step by step what you have actually done for this project.
- Remember that many projects don't have "successful" solutions, despite lots of hard work. Explain why or why not your solution worked or didn't turn out as you had planned.
- Imagine an objection someone might have to your solution. Then, try to answer this objection. Does your solution really solve the problem? Does your solution help just you or your community as well? What would you say in response to this possible objection? Why is your solution the best? Considering what you learned, would you propose a better solution now?

➢ **Personal Reflections**
- This is a chance for you to reflect and think about this semester. What did you learn doing this project?
- How did you engage with the public? How does your project affect others besides yourself? Was engaging with others difficult? Was it rewarding?
- Should I assign this project again? Did you like it or not? Why?
- Did anything surprise you?
- This is your personal reflection. Please be honest in your assessment and your answers.

Tips for Good Writing

- Proofread and edit your papers. In addition to spellchecking your writing, ask a trusted friend to see if your writing makes sense. Or better yet, visit the Learning Center on campus for help.
- Find your voice. Don't try to write in a fancy way using big or complicated words. Use your "natural" voice. (But be careful **not** to write too casually using texting abbreviations!!)
- Be honest. If something you tried didn't work, say so. You will not be graded on your "success" but rather on your writing and your effort.