

Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development

Volume 14 | Number 14

Article 4

2015

Exploring the Relationship Between the Co-Curriculum and Academic Outcomes: A Methodology

Natalie Berger

Indiana Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Berger, Natalie (2015) "Exploring the Relationship Between the Co-Curriculum and Academic Outcomes: A Methodology," *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*: Vol. 14 : No. 14 , Article 4.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth/vol14/iss14/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Association of Christians in Student Development at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.



Exploring the Relationship Between the Co-Curriculum and Academic Outcomes: A Methodology

Natalie Berger

Indiana Wesleyan University

28

Abstract

Higher education is currently evaluating the value of non-academic components of four-year institutions, particularly in relation to their impact on academic outcomes. In evaluating these areas, new methodologies are consistently developed exploring the co-curriculum and academic outcomes. However, no methodologies exist that evaluate the relationship between student involvement and academic outcomes. The methodology outlined in this research develops a quantitative means of measuring the relationship between student involvement in the co-curriculum and academic outcomes abilities using two new measures. These measures were then tested for reliability and validity. The researcher collected and scored student essays, which measured student ability in academic outcomes. Students also completed a questionnaire asking questions about involvement in seven areas of campus: residence hall activities, all campus events, leadership, multicultural, spiritual, intellectual, and athletics. Scores from the essays and the surveys were matched, and then analyzed. Both measures were found to have reliability and validity.

Defining the Problem

Students enter college and have extensive opportunity to be involved on campus. From getting involved in a major to joining an intramural team, the variety of opportunities for students is extensive. Student involvement is “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 518). An involved student contributes significant time and energy to their studies, attends extracurricular activities, and has consistent and frequent interactions with other members of the campus community (Astin, 1999). Astin (1999) explains, “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (p. 519). The more time and energy a student devotes to something, the more involved they are, the better they will perform as well as learn. While this relationship is evident within the classroom, students do not spend all their time studying. A significant portion of students’ time and energy is devoted to co-curricular activities, which include engaging in extracurricular activities, interacting with faculty, staff, and peers, and living in a campus residence (Kuh, 1995). Many academic affairs professionals believe academic gain to be the most important component of a student’s college experience (Astin, 1993). While the value of academic pursuits is often assumed, the value of co-curricular activities is not as evident (Kuh, 1991).

According to Kinzie and Kuh (2007), universities that focus on student learning will present varied opportunities for learning both inside and outside the classroom. Because students are consistently involved in both areas of the university, the relationship between these two parts of an institution is important to consider. Boyer (1990) establishes the idea that the campus curriculum should be integrative, including not only academics, but campus life and community as well. According to Boyer (1987), “all parts of campus life—recruitment, orientation, curriculum, teaching, residence hall living, and the rest—must relate to one another and contribute to a sense of wholeness” (p. 8). In this case, the co-curriculum and curriculum are closely aligned, working toward the same goal of student learning. A university that prescribes to Boyer’s system “recognizes the essential integration of personal development with learning; it reflects the diverse ways through which students may engage, as whole people with multiple dimensions and unique personal histories, with the tasks and content of learning” (Keeling, 2004, p. 3). All components of the curriculum and co-curriculum contribute to student learning, and integrating these areas will only increase student learning (Keeling, 2004). The American College Personnel Association (1994) states that:

The key to enhancing learning and personal development is not simply for faculty to teach more and better, but also to create conditions that motivate and inspire students to devote time and energy to educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom. (p. 1)

The conditions both inside and outside the classroom are important to student learning. Aligning the goals between the curriculum and co-curriculum would create what Kuh (1996) terms a “seamless learning environment,” which he describes as the most effective learning environment. If the curriculum and co-curriculum have the same outcomes, they can partner together to create a holistic campus community. It is important for student and academic affairs professionals to begin recognizing the ways in which the curriculum and co-curriculum interact, because separation between these two serves as a block to effective learning environments (Schroeder & Hurst, 1996).

If a primary outcome of education is student learning (Keeling, 2004; Fried, 2007), then both the co-curriculum and the curriculum should be promoting collaboration, in order to create the best learning environment. As “the part of a ... curriculum shared by all students. It [general education] provides broad learning ... and forms the basis for developing important intellectual, civic, and practical capacities” (“Association,” n.d.). General education, or the core curriculum, should be promoting student learning. Established core outcomes provide a means for measuring whether or not the core curriculum promotes student learning. Measuring student involvement alongside core outcomes can in turn create an opportunity for exploring the relationship between these two areas of campus. Unfortunately, little research correlating student involvement with academic outcomes currently exists. Much of the existing research explores these areas of campus either qualitatively, or theoretically. No existing data provides the necessary information to comprehensively evaluate student involvement. Similarly, it is very difficult to quantitatively measure how well students are able to perform in academic outcomes on a broader scope (beyond individual departments).

Explaining the Methodology

Because much of the current research into collaboration between student involvement and academic outcomes revolves around theoretical and qualitative research, this study sought to establish a quantitative methodology for exploring the relationship between these areas. By developing two separate measures, one for student involvement and one for academic outcomes, and correlating the scores from each measure, this study was able to quantitatively explore the relationship between student involvement in the co-curriculum and students’ ability in academic outcomes. Each measure sought to be as comprehensive as possible, and was intended to provide information not currently available using established assessment measures.

Participants

Participants in this study were graduating seniors enrolled for at least two years in a small Christian liberal arts university in the Midwest. A convenience sample was conducted using an existing senior capstone course of 183 students, comprising 42.3% of the total seniors at the institution. Seniors were defined as any student participating in the seminar

with senior credit standing, who had attended the university for at least two years. As these students had a minimum of two years' opportunity to gain skills in the institutionally defined liberal arts outcomes, and also had at least two years to be involved co-curricularly, they were strong candidates for the purposes of this research.

Measures

Student involvement. Two separate measures were developed for this study. The first was an inventory questionnaire exploring student involvement in co-curricular programming. The questionnaire, implemented at a small liberal arts institution, separated student involvement into seven separate categories based in the literature as well as the AAC&U's Essential Learning Outcomes (Kuh, 1996; Astin, 1999; "Association," n.d.). These categories were: spiritual, intellectual, all campus events (events open to any student on campus that were not hosted by academic departments), residence hall events (events open to students in campus residential living), multicultural, athletics (including intramurals), and leadership (student involvement in leadership positions and leadership-related activities on campus). Students completed the survey online through Survey Monkey, and included basic demographic information such as age and major.

Every answer to each question in the inventory was given a numerical value ranging from one to five. These values were added to create a scale for each category. Students then received a score for each category, based on their answers; lower scores indicated lower levels of involvement in the respective category, while higher scores indicated higher levels of involvement. Each student also received a total involvement score, although this score was not utilized in the data analysis.

As this study was developed from a lack of preexisting research, the inventory was newly created for this research study. Therefore, reliability was not established for the inventory in advance of this initial research study. However, the questionnaire was tested for scale reliability through this study, and six of the seven scales were found to have reliability (see Table 1). The only scale that did not prove reliable was the scale on athletics. Based on the

Table 1

Reliability Analysis of Involvement Scales

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation
Spiritual	.770	5	13.39	12.818	3.580
Intellectual	.681	6	13.00	10.831	3.291
All Campus Events	.817	14	38.24	82.077	9.060
Wing/Hall Events	.790	7	21.42	16.218	4.027
Multicultural	.692	8	14.17	14.082	3.753
Athletics	.604	3	6.76	7.014	2.648
Leadership	.877	20	34.73	81.658	9.037
Rubric Scale	.712	5			

Cronbach's Alpha of .604 it was determined that the athletics scale was not reliable, while all other scales have high reliability. In addition to testing for scale reliability, the inventory appeared to have a high degree of face validity as it closely aligned with previous research and literature-based involvement constructs.

Core outcomes. The second measure developed for this research utilized existing course data. Students enrolled in a senior seminar course were required to write a five- to seven-page essay exploring a controversial topic (Appendix B). They were asked to explore two sides of the controversy without bias and present their own reasoned opinion. Through this paper students demonstrated an ability to use writing skills and critical thinking, the two core outcomes measured for this study. The rubric used to grade this essay was the instrument used to evaluate how well students were able to practice the outcomes described (Appendix C). The rubric organized the essay in five categories.

1. Position number one analysis (depicting one side of the controversial issue without bias).
2. Position number two analysis (depicting a conflicting side of the controversial issue without bias).
3. Personal perspective and analysis of personal biases.
4. Quality of cited sources.
5. Organization, grammar, clarity, spelling, and required length.

Each category was given a numerical score ranging between zero and fifty (the first three categories) or zero and twenty-five (the last two categories). The latter two categories were given lower scores for purposes of grading for the course. The higher the score, the better the student demonstrated an ability to perform in that area. As the essay asked students to demonstrate each outcome, and was not based on self-report, the rubric functioned as an accurate measure of student ability in the measured outcomes.

Reliability and validity were not available for the rubric, as this essay assignment had not been previously assigned to students at this institution. However, inter-rater reliability was built into the essay instrument through training and measurement. Four raters were recruited from a Masters in Higher Education program at the institution being studied to grade the essays submitted by the participants in the study. The raters were first-year graduate students and were offered compensation for their time. Two other raters included the Director of Assessment and the researcher. Raters participated in a calibration session that ensured all evaluators reached a consensus regarding rubric standards and utilized identical evaluation methods. For this calibration session, raters were asked to evaluate five essays using the rubric. The

raters then shared results, and worked together to understand what the most accurate scores were based on the rubric. In this way, raters were able to reach a consensus regarding the rubric standards, and were able to measure the essay more accurately.

In addition to developing a calibration session for raters, inter-rater reliability was built into the rubric evaluation itself. Five essays were randomly selected for all raters to evaluate. The scores for these essays were compared upon completion of the evaluation. Based on the scores submitted by each grader, it was determined that the measurement was consistent; there was little variation in scores across raters.

Data Collection

Students were given six weeks to complete the essay assignment and submit their work using the institution's web-based course management system. Prior to evaluating the essays, the raters took part in the above-mentioned calibration session in order to gain inter-rater reliability. Meanwhile, IRB approval was sought before distributing the student involvement survey. When IRB approval was received, the researcher presented the survey to participants, who were offered extra credit in their senior seminar course for completion of the survey. Informed consent was on the first page of the survey, and informed students that while their name was solicited in order to connect survey scores with rubric scores, their scores were kept confidential, and their identities played no part in the research beyond the initial matching of rubric scores to survey responses. Students had two weeks to complete the survey.

Analysis

Upon completing the evaluation of the essays and receiving surveys, rubric and survey scores were matched by student, so that scores could be correlated. The data was cleaned; any students who had completed the survey but had not completed the essay, and vice versa, were removed from the study. After cleaning the data, an analysis of scale reliability was performed on both the inventory scales and the rubric scale (see Table 1 above). A factor analysis was then performed on the rubric categories in order to determine if the total essay score measured one component, or if each category needed to be correlated individually (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002) (Table 2). The results of the factor analysis of the rubric categories found that there was only one extraction; all rubric categories contribute to the overall essay score in a way that is not significant enough to analyze each individual rubric category. The factor analysis shows that one component was extracted with a total eigenvalue >1 at 2.542, and no other components were extracted with an eigenvalue above 1. Table 2 illustrates these relationships.

(Table is on next page)

Table 2

*Factor Analysis of Rubric Categories**

Rubric Category				Component 1		
Position 1				.782		
Position 2				.691		
Personal				.636		
Sources				.668		
Quality				.776		
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.542	50.833	50.833	2.542	50.833	50.833
2	.844	17.683	68.515			
3	.727	14.545	83.060			
4	.453	9.066	92.126			
5	.394	7.874	100.000			

Note. *1 components extracted.

34

Based on the factor analysis and scale reliability, a multiple regression was performed measuring six predictor variables on one criterion variable. The athletics variable was not included in the multiple regression, as the scale was not found to be reliable. Because the factor analysis determined the rubric scores measured only one component, the total essay score served as the single criterion variable in place of individual rubric scales. In addition to the multiple regression, a bivariate correlation was performed analyzing the correlation between the seven predictor variables (athletics was included in this analysis), each other, and the criterion variable. The multiple regression and bivariate correlation were used to better understand the relationship between student involvement and academic outcomes.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to the methodology outlined above. The primary limitation is that research of these variables in a quantitative manner has not been performed before. The involvement questionnaire and essay rubric were two new instruments implemented for the first time through this research. While both have high face validity, and the questionnaire proved to be statistically reliable, it would be beneficial to utilize these instruments in further research in order to attain higher reliability and validity. Another limitation to this methodology regards the outcomes measured; only two outcomes of a possible eleven existing at the institution studied were measured. One of these outcomes

(writing proficiency) is not expected to have a high correlation with student involvement and it is not likely that student involvement will be a significant predictor of student writing ability.

Further Study

Further implementation of this methodology would be beneficial in order to gain more reliability and validity. In addition, it would be beneficial to create an assignment and rubric that measured multiple outcomes not measured by the rubric represented here. For example, many students chose to write about religious and political issues in their essays. It might be possible to alter the essay assignment to direct students toward choosing a certain controversial topic. There would then be increased consistency in rating the essays, and a category could be added considering how students process different outcome areas. Another possible alteration would include creating a series of miniature assignments that had students process various areas related to different outcomes. Finally, because the involvement inventory is broken down into individual categories, it would be simple to either revise questions to better fit a variety of institutions, or to add categories specific to the institution being studied.

Implications

Little quantitative research has been performed exploring the relationship between student involvement in the co-curriculum and student ability with academic outcomes. Because of the gap in the research, this study is valuable not only for its findings but for the methodology established. Quantitative data has been collected using two new measures. While these measures would likely need to be adapted at different institutions, they can now be utilized for future research. Institutions will be able to better understand the impact student involvement in the co-curriculum has on what students learn. Moreover, using this or a similar methodology provides information about specific areas of the co-curriculum. Because the involvement inventory creates scores for each area of involvement, institutions can gather data regarding how individual areas impact student learning.

Conclusion

Student involvement in the co-curriculum is articulated in the literature as being valuable to student learning (Astin, 1999; Fried, 2007; Kuh, 1996). This study sought to determine quantitatively if there was a relationship between student involvement in the co-curriculum and student ability in core curriculum outcomes. As very little research was done prior to this study, a new methodology was developed. The methodology outlined in this study provides a quantitative means of measuring variables previously studied in only qualitative ways. By developing a simple means of assessing student involvement, this study has created a measure that can be used across institutions. Furthermore, the measure

utilized for assessing student abilities in academic outcomes can be easily altered to fit a variety of institutional settings. Hopefully, this methodology is the first step in many research studies exploring the complex yet vital relationship between academic outcomes and student involvement.

References

- American College Personnel Association. (1994). *Student learning imperative*. Retrieved from <http://www.acpa.nche.edu/sli/sli.htm>
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). *What is a 21st century liberal education?* Retrieved from <https://aacu.org/leap/what-is-a-liberal-education>
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college?: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 18-29. Retrieved from <http://www.jcsdonline.org/> (Original work published 1984).
- Boyer, E. L. (1987). *College: The undergraduate experience in America*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fried, J. (2007). Higher education's new playbook: *Learning reconsidered*. *About Campus*, 12(1), 2-7.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning reconsidered 1: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- Kinzie, J., & Kuh, G. D. (2007). Creating a student-centered culture. In G. L. Kramer (Ed.), *Fostering student success in the campus community* (pp. 17-43). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning development outside the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. D. (1995). The other curriculum: Out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. *Journal of Higher Education*, 66(2), 123-155. Retrieved from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_higher_education/
- Kuh, G. D. (1996). Guiding principles for creating seamless learning environments for undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37(2), 135-148. Retrieved from <http://www.jcsdonline.org/>
- Mertler, C. A., & Vannatta, R. A. (2002). *Advanced and multivariate statistical methods* (2nd ed.). Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.
- Schroeder, C. C., & Hurst, J. C. (1996). Designing learning environments that integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37(2), 174-181. Retrieved from <http://www.jcsdonline.org/>

APPENDIX A: STUDENT INVOLVEMENT INVENTORY

Demographics

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Transfer Student:

Years at [school redacted]:

Spiritual [4-21]

How often do you attend spiritual renewal week events?

Occasionally attend some events (1)

Most days most semesters (2)

All or nearly all days all semesters (3)

Please indicate how often you attend the following.

Chapel

Small Group

Never attended (1) Rarely attended (2) Occasionally attended (3)

Frequently attended (4) I did not sign up for a small group (n/a)

Please indicate how often you attend the following.

Sunday Night Community (previously Vespers)

Church Services

Never (1) Once a month (2) Twice a month (3) Three times a month (4) Four times a month (5)

Intellectual [6-25]

How often do you participate in the following?

Meeting with faculty outside of class

Attending non-course related speakers and/or lectures

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Please indicate the frequency with which you attended the following activities.

Plays (student directed or main stage)

Classical music or choral performances

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

How often did you participate in the following?

[School redacted] Theater productions (as an actor or crew member)

No Productions (1) 1-2 Productions (2) 3-4 Productions (3)

More than 4 Productions (4)

How many years did you participate in the following?

Music ensemble (e.g. Orchestra, Chorale, [school redacted] Ringers, etc.)

I did not participate (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3)

3 years (4) 4 or more years (5)

All Campus Events [14-42]

How often did you attend or participate in the following campus events?

Airband

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Nostalgia Night

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Reject Show

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Welcome Weekend Hoe Down

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

My Generation Night

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Sing Noel

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Silent Night/[name redacted] Halapaloosa

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Cardboard Boat Regatta

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Parent's Weekend

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

[School redacted]-athon

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Youth Conference

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

Sex and the Cornfields

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

How often did you attend "Study Break"?

Never (1) 1-2 times (2) 3-5 times (3) 6 or more times (4)

How often did you attend other events not listed but open to anyone on campus?

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Wing/Hall Events [5-15]

Please respond to the following question.

How many years did you live in campus housing?

I did not live in campus housing

(1) One year (2) Two years (3)

Three years (4) Four or more years (5)

How often did you attend the following?

Wing/Floor Retreat

Never (1) Once (2) Twice (3) Three or more times (4)

I did not live on campus (n/a)

How often did you participate in the following?

Brother-Sister Wing Event

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Pick-a dates

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Open House (your wing or other wings)

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Floor Educationals

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Programmed Residence Hall Events not listed (e.g. guest speakers, cook outs, etc.)

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

For other events, please list.

Multicultural Events [8 – 22]

How often did you attend the following?

Mosaic Night

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 times (4) 4 times (5)

How often did you attend events for the following?

World Religions Week

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

World Opportunities Week

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Social Justice Week

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

How often did you participate in the following?

Lighthouse

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 or more times (4)

Spring Break Trips

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 or more times (4)

Semester Abroad

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 or more times (4)

International Academic Trip During J-Term

Never (1) 1 time (2) 2 times (3) 3 or more times (4)

Athletics

How often did you participate in the following?

Intercollegiate Athletics

I did not participate (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

How often did you participate in the following?

Intramural Athletics

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

How often did you attend the following?

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

Leadership [13-38]

How often did you participate in the following?

Leadership Networking Night (LNN)

Never (1) Once (2) Two or more times (3)

How often did you attend the following?

Pursuit (Previously Lit at Nit)

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

How often did you attend events for the following?

National Student Leadership Conference

Never (1) Rarely (2) Occasionally (3) Frequently (4)

For how many years did you hold the following positions?

Personnel Assistant

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

Discipleship Assistant

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

Discipleship Coordinator

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

Orientation Leader

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

Orientation Cabinet Leader

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

[School redacted] Student Outreach Position

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

[School redacted] World Outreach Position

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

CREW/Other Admissions Position

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

Student Ambassador

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

Chapel Coordinator

Never (1) 1 year (2) 2 years (3) 3 years (4) 4 years (5)

Other position and number of years

APPENDIX B: POSITION ANALYSIS PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Each student will select a topic for which they can analyze multiple valid perspectives (e.g. What is the appropriate Christian position on capital punishment?). Students are encouraged to select a topic around which they have significant questions and would enjoy exploring in greater depth. This is not the time to write a paper about an issue with which you are already very familiar. You should currently feel some ambiguity regarding your topic and use this assignment as an opportunity to explore and reach a more informed conclusion.

Students should consult the list of suggested topics and submit their proposed topic for instructor approval by February 27th. After the topic has been approved, students should write a 5-7-page paper (plus a bibliography) that describes two opposing or conflicting perspectives related to their topic. These descriptions should fairly and accurately describe the positions and include an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses. Students are expected to explain and analyze the nuances of these arguments and should avoid broad generalizations or straw-man arguments when describing a particular position. Students should appropriately cite 4-5 credible sources to support each perspective. Credible sources include scholarly books/journals and major print media (e.g. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *the Economist*, etc.). Cable news, and their corresponding websites, are often rich sources of opinions, but lack the depth of analysis and academic credibility required for this assignment. Finally, the paper should include the student's personal perspective or opinion on the topic and an analysis of the student's potential biases related to the topic. Sources may be cited using the style most commonly used in your major (e.g. MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). Whatever style you choose, please be consistent.

Please refer to the evaluation rubric below for specific assignment expectations. This rubric will be used to evaluate your work.

APPENDIX C: POSITION ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

	Needs Improvement	Average	Above Average	Exemplary
Position #1 Analysis	Points Range: 0-34 The student's summary does not clearly explain the perspective.	Points Range: 35-39 The student's summary of this perspective is accurate but may be lacking in clarity and/or fairness.	Points Range 40-44 The student's summary of this perspective is explained clearly, accurately, and fairly. The argument's strengths and weaknesses are discussed.	Points Range 45-50 The student's summary of this perspective is explained clearly, accurately, and fairly. Strengths, weaknesses, and nuances of the argument are explained and demonstrate the student's ability to critically examine an argument.
Position #2 Analysis	Points Range: 0-34 The student's summary does not clearly explain the perspective.	Points Range: 35-39 The student's summary of this perspective is accurate but may be lacking in clarity and/or fairness.	Points Range 40-44 The student's summary of this perspective is explained clearly, accurately, and fairly. The argument's strengths and weaknesses are discussed.	Points Range 45-50 The student's summary of this perspective is explained clearly, accurately, and fairly. Strengths, weaknesses, and nuances of the argument are explained and demonstrate the student's ability to critically examine an argument.
Personal Perspective and Analysis of Personal Biases	Points Range 0-34 The student's perspective on the selected topic is unclear.	Points Range 35-39 The student's perspective on the selected topic is clear.	Points Range: 40-44 The student's perspective on the selected topic is clear, thoughtful, and fair to conflicting perspectives.	Points Range: 45-50 The student's perspective on the selected topic is clear, thoughtful, and fair to conflicting perspectives. The student provides an analysis of his/her potential biases and how they might affect his/her conclusions.
Quality of Cited Sources	Points Range: 0-16 Fewer than two pertinent sources were cited for each of the two positions. In all cases, the cited sources were not appropriate for citation in academic work. Sources are not cited appropriately or consistently.	Points Range: 17-19 Fewer than four pertinent sources were cited for each of the two positions. In most cases, the cited sources were not appropriate for citation in academic work. Sources are cited, but not with consistent style.	Points Range: 20-22 Four pertinent sources are cited for each of the two positions. In some cases, the cited sources were not appropriate for citation in academic work. Sources are cited appropriately and consistently.	Points Range: 23-25 Four or five credible and reliable sources are cited for each of the two positions. These sources may include scholarly books/journals or major and reputable print media (e.g. <i>New York Times</i> , <i>Washington Post</i> , <i>Economist</i> , etc.). Sources are cited appropriately and consistently.
Organization, Clarity, Spelling, Grammar, and Required Length	Points Range: 0-16 The paper is not well organized and many sentences are unclear. The paper has many spelling and grammatical mistakes. The length requirement was not met.	Points Range: 17-19 The organization of the paper is not clear. Several sentences need to be clarified as well. The paper also has several spelling and grammatical mistakes. The length requirement was not met.	Points Range: 20-22 The paper is well organized, but a few sentences are unclear. The paper also has a few spelling and grammatical mistakes. The paper is 5-7 pages in length.	Points Range: 23-25 The paper is well organized and the style is appropriate for academic writing and clear. The paper is absent of spelling and grammatical mistakes. The paper is 5-7 pages in length.

(Notes)