

Parag Budhecha
Writing 20

Major Project I Assignment

Important Dates: First Draft Due Tuesday, February 15
Peer Critiques Due Thursday, February 17
Second Draft Due Tuesday, February 22

Length: 4-6 pages

We have analyzed several different perspectives on the topic of higher education and examined how they “talk” to one another. It’s now time to add your own voices to that conversation.

In this assignment I’d like you to identify a claim of your own about the role(s) and purpose(s) of higher education. You should build your own argument by analyzing the articles we’ve read (using Harris’s techniques of coming to terms, forwarding, and countering).

Remember, though, that just analyzing the articles using Harris’s techniques will not yield an active claim, though it’s more than likely that your claim will emerge out of your work with the articles we’ve read. We have also talked about what it means to make an original claim, and what a “significant” claim is. Note: Do not try to opine on what higher education “should” be or do; I don’t think any of us are in the position to give expert judgment on this topic. But we can offer thoughtful commentary on what expectations, challenges, and roadblocks higher education faces, what is at stake, and for whom.

It is crucial in this type of short essay that you quickly narrow your field of inquiry. The articles we’ve read introduce and examine many complex issues and you couldn’t possibly deal with them all, or even a few of them, in this essay. So it will be important for you to contextualize and specify your topic of analysis in the first few paragraphs.

For instance, you might want to examine the relationship between the university and the public. But this is much too large a subject area for this essay, so perhaps you could focus on the university’s role in serving the greater good of the community. You might ask yourself questions like: How does this role get talked about: as an assumed purpose? as an afterthought? as non-essential? What are the articles’ differing claims regarding the university’s role in society and for the public? What conflicts come up in these discussions? What are the different ways that the university’s responsibility to the public gets defined, and by whom? What aspects of higher education are “categorized” and perhaps invisible? What (or who, and under what circumstances) makes them visible? How does the ethos of the authors, as well as the determined (invented) ethos of the universities and public, play a part in this dynamic? How are students (or youths) and their needs portrayed in these scenarios? These kinds of questions can help you zero in on a specific topic of inquiry and guide your analysis.

You also need to provide evidence for your claims, using the readings we’ve done as well as your own ideas and experiences. This is where *your* ethos plays a big part in the effectiveness of

your argument, as well as in the way you organize your claims, your choice of words, style, tone, etc.

Also, make sure that you have addressed any counterpoints in your argument. As we've remarked in class, a strong argument does not ignore any points or claims that run counter to it. (You might think of it as performing the move of "countering" on your own claim.) So while defending your claim (and even in defense *of* your claim), you need to consider the other sides of the issues you raise. These "other sides" include not only the opposite viewpoint, but also any points that complicate the issue, or that raise questions about the issue. It is also important that you deal with these counterpoints respectfully; this means that you should not summarily dismiss them or defensively shoot them down, but discuss their validity, their relevance, their appropriateness, etc. (You might think of this as "coming to terms" with the counterpoints.) At times, writing about a counterpoint can help you to revise your argument: make it more nuanced, change its focus, use qualifiers, etc.

Finally, are your claims and your conclusion significant? Remember that your readers would like to know what you consider to be the affects, implications, consequences, ramifications, etc., of your claims. Ask yourself questions like the following: So what? Why is this important or significant? What is the result of this? For whom? Under what circumstances? Do the answers to these questions lead you to feel that you need to revise your thesis, or that your conclusion does not effectively position your ideas more widely or globally?

Use at least three (four would be better) of the articles we've read about higher education to help you discuss, analyze and defend your claim.

Purpose of the assignment: In this assignment I am asking you to make a claim of your own while, using Harris's techniques, putting several voices in conversation with each other. There does not appear to be an either/or in this discussion, as there rarely is in any contested issue. All of the exercises and short writings we've completed so far have built up to this major project assignment.