DEVELOPING YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC

This exercise is designed to help you develop a thoughtful topic for your research assignment. Answer the following questions to help you better understand and refine your thinking about your research topic.

A What research topic interests you?

Choose a community issue or problem that matters to you. What social injustice do you see? Don't have a topic? Browse the following online library resources for inspiration: CQ Researcher, Opposing Viewpoints, or TED talks. You can find links to these sites at http://libguides.lmu.edu/needatopic

B How did you become interested in this topic?

Why did you choose this topic? In 2 or 3 sentences, explain why you are interested this topic (Examples: This directly impacts me or someone I know by…, or Hearing about this topic stimulated me to learn more because…)

C Think about the following elements of your topic:

WHO	WHAT	WHERE	HOW
Who is involved? Whom does it affect? Is there a specific population you want to focus on? Identify the stakeholders and their opinions.	*What is the issue or problem? Consider the "so what" of your topic. Why should it matter to others?*	*Where did it begin? Is there a geographic location you want to focus on? Where does it fall on the moral spectrum (Good/Bad/Just)?*	*How does one aspect of your topic affect another? How serious is the issue/problem?*

D   Do background reading:

Did you identify any major concepts or theories related to your topic?

A good way to enter the conversation of a field or discipline is to study the vocabulary and theories. List the concepts or theories here:

Define the basic terms used in this issue

Consider the varying ways that stakeholders define key terms. Do different people define or "see" things differently?
Example: X defines "racial profiling" as _____, but Y explains it as _____, which includes implicit (or unconscious) bias.

Could you identify any scholars or experts who do research on your topic?

They may be identified or listed as Further Resources. List the experts/scholars here:

Did you find any additional keywords to use when you search?

Keywords change based on who is speaking, for example, a scholar might say "preadolescent," whereas a journalist might say "tween." List new keywords here:

Did the articles cite any useful sources that would be useful for your research?

List additional sources here:

Social Structures - What roles do social structures play in your issue or problem? "At issue is not the goodness of the individual person living in the system, rather it is the system itself called into question."[1] Looking at your issue or problem, can you answer (at least 2 of the 5) following questions?

1. **Economics -** What is the role of economics in this issue? Who benefits? Who is burdened? Who is responsible?
2. **Politics -** What is the role of politics in this issue? Who has power? What kind of power? What role does politics play in the history of this issue?
3. **Culture-** What is the role of culture in this issue? Which cultures play a prominent role?
4. **Environment -** How is the environment impacted? How is the issue impacted by the environment? What is the geography of the issue?   (Where is this happening or potentially happening?)
5. **Religion-** What roles does religion play in the history of this issue?[2]

The Common Good and Social Justice - Different social groups have different levels of access to social power and resources based on a variety of historical, political, economic, and social factors as you have examined above. These inequalities inhibit our ability to **promote the common good**. Social justice refers to efforts to combat these large-scale inequalities and achieve economic, legal, political, and social equality for all.

Based on what you know, so far, about your social issue, name one social group you think is among the most negatively affected by the status quo (the way things are). Explain your reasoning.

(Hint: Social group refers to a group of people who share some physical, cultural, or economic characteristic. This could include race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, belief, ability, age, location, place of origin, social class, socioeconomic situation, and so on.)

[1] J. Holland and P.J. Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 199.
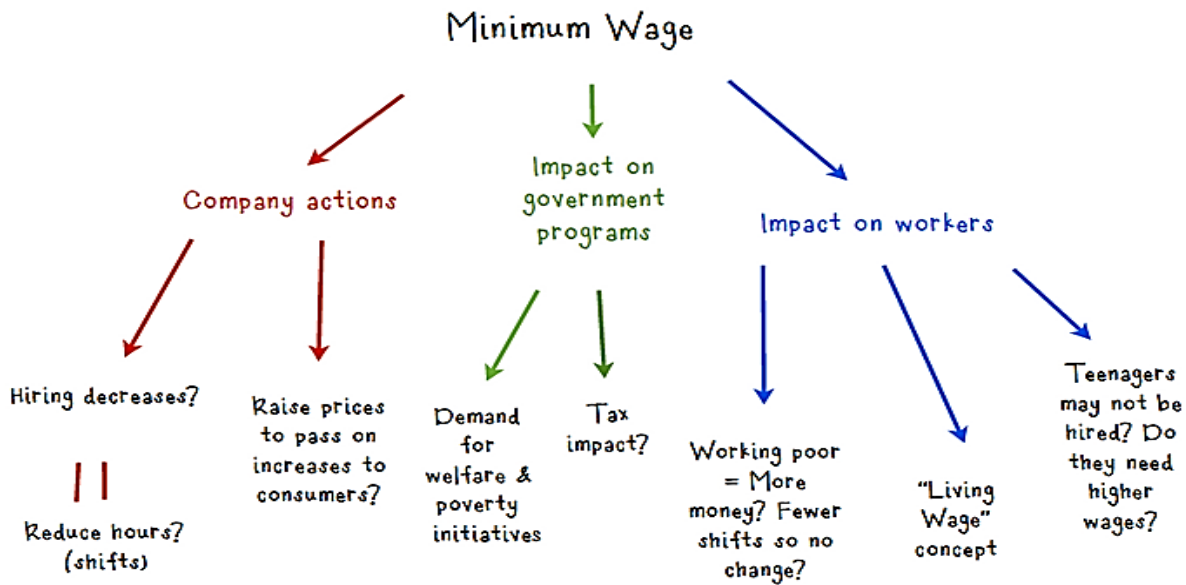[2] Questions adapted from: M. Cimperman, *Social Analysis for the 21st Century: How Faith Becomes Action* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

F   Create a concept map or informational outline for your topic:

Using everything that you now know about your topic, create a concept map. To get started, look at the example concept map below. For more examples of concept maps, visit http://libguides.lmu.edu/RHET1000/ResearchExploration

EXAMPLE CONCEPT MAP

Minimum Wage

Company actions

Impact on government programs

Impact on workers

Hiring decreases?

| |

Reduce hours? (shifts)

Raise prices to pass on increases to consumers?

Demand for welfare & poverty initiatives

Tax impact?

Working poor = More money? Fewer shifts so no change?

"Living Wage" concept

Teenagers may not be hired? Do they need higher wages?

YOUR CONCEPT MAP

TOPIC: MINIMUM WAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

1. WORKERS
   1. LIVING WAGES
   2. DECREASE IN ENTRY LEVEL JOBS / FEWER SHIFTS
   3. WORKING POOR / RELIANCE ON SUPPLEMENTAL GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

2. CORPORATIONS
   1. PRICE HIKES
      1. PASSED ON TO CONSUMERS?
      2. DECREASED PROFITS?
   2. FEWER JOBS / SLOW JOB GROWTH
   3. OUTSOURCES JOBS OVERSEAS

3. GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS
   1. IMPACT ON WELFARE GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
   2. TAX IMPACT
   3. ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

YOUR OUTLINE

G Scholarly conversations surrounding your topic:

Which subject areas (disciplines) investigate and research your topic? Most library resources are arranged by subject areas (disciplines), including databases, books and even our Research Guides http://libguides.lmu.edu/. Knowing which academic discipline conducts research on your topic will help you find scholarly information more efficiently. Circle all that apply:

General & Multidisciplinary | African American Studies | Art & Art History | Asian Pacific American Studies | Biology | Business | Chemistry | Chicana/o Studies | Classics | Communication Studies | Computer Science | Dance | Economics | Education | Engineering | English | Environmental Science | Film & Television | Health & Human Sciences | History | Law | Mathematics | Modern Languages | Music | Sociology | Philosophy | Physics | Political Science | Psychology | Theatre Arts | Theology & Religion | Women's Studies | Other (Please List) _____

H Incorporating diverse points of view:

What do I feel about this problem? How do my life experience and cultural, gender, race, ethnicity, and social class backgrounds influence my view of the problem? What assumptions do I hold about the issue/problem? How might someone from a different background view the problem?

In 2 or 3 sentences, please reflect…

What are my feelings about the information I am finding? Am I developing an open mind when encountering varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives? How does this new information compare to my existing knowledge about the topic? Am I surprised? Confused? Inspired? Are any of the sources challenging or uncomfortable?

In 2 or 3 sentences, please reflect…

How am I addressing other points of view? How does your approach integrate different perspectives on your topic?   List all the intended parties/types of people and their points of view. What voices are missing?   Look back at section C (Who) and section E (social group).

In 2 or 3 sentences, please reflect…

Topic feedback / instructor approval

My Written/Oral Assignment is: _____

My research topic is: _____

Instructor Comments:

Optional- writing workshop activity

Pass the problem - In small groups or pairs students give and receive feedback from their peers on their social issue/problem topics.

J Student Feedback

Student #1

Questions I still have about the research topic are:

Here is another perspective or point of view you may want to consider:

Student #2

Questions I still have about the research topic are:

Here is another perspective or point of view you may want to consider: