

The University Writing Center

"Because writers need readers"

Research Paper and Argument Topics

Race and Ethnicity	Criminal Justice
Gender and Sexuality	Religion
Multiculturalism and Diversity	The Political Process
Advertising and Marketing	Education
Economic Issues	National/International Policies
Environmental Issues	UCF Issues
Media Issues	Civil Liberties
Consumerism and Convenience Culture	Counter-Culture Issues
TV and Film	Youth Issues
Sports and Entertainment	Local Area Issues

Race and Ethnicity

- Should racial profiling be a legitimate law enforcement policy in some areas?
- Should Affirmative Action for state university enrollment be continued?
- Should the primary method of public school funding (property taxes in individual school districts) be amended to create more fairness in schools?
- If a university offers "African-American Studies" or "Black Studies" as courses, should it also offer "European-American Studies" or "White Studies"?
- How do certain television programs perpetuate racial or ethnic stereotypes?
- Should schools only purchase textbooks that offer revised or alternative perspectives on historical events?
- What should be done about racial disparities in the sentencing of criminals?
- Should the American government pay reparations and return land to Native Americans?
- Should hate groups have the right to distribute literature on university campuses?
- If research shows that certain racial or ethnic groups receive poorer medical care on average, how should this problem be corrected?
- Should government organizations have staff that accurately reflect the racial, ethnic, and gender balance in society?

Gender and Sexuality

- What should be done to eliminate salary disparities between men and women?
- What should be done to create equity in executive positions for women in particular corporations and industries?
- Should women be allowed in military combat? To what extent?
- Is healthcare for women underfunded? In what ways?
- Should insurance companies that cover the cost of Viagra prescriptions also be required to cover birth control and regular examinations for women?
- Are homosexual characters and topics appropriate for primetime television?
- In what ways does gender play a role in student success and teacher attention in the classroom?
- Should the Equal Rights Amendment be revived and made part of the Constitution?

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- Should the Family and Medical Leave Act be extended beyond 12 weeks?
- Should prostitution be legalized? Under what conditions?
- How does pornography differ from prostitution? Is it contradictory that one should be legal while the other is not?
- Should homosexual marriage be permitted in Florida?
- Should homosexual couples in Florida be legally allowed to adopt?

Multiculturalism and Diversity

- Should English be made the official language of the United States?
- Should ESL students be taught content courses in their native language?
- Should high school history classes and social studies curricula be changed to reflect diversity and multicultural perspectives?
- Should Columbus Day be discontinued in favor of a new post-colonial perspective?
- Should Christmas, Easter, and other religious observances be considered national holidays?
- Should the United States have a more stringent or more relaxed immigration policy?

Advertising and Marketing

- How do certain kinds of advertising perpetuate gender, racial, or religious stereotypes?
- How do certain kinds of advertising make claims of patriotic values?
- How do mass marketing and manufacturing affect originality and creativity in the arts and other fields?
- Does the American consumerist society conflict with democratic values? In what ways?
- How does advertising treat convenience as necessity?
- Are certain kinds of advertising unethical?
- Should product placement in television, film, and other media be controlled?
- Should product advertising and selling be permitted in public schools?
- Should communities retain the naming rights to baseball parks and football stadiums, or should businesses be allowed to purchase these rights?
- Does the modeling industry bear any responsibility to provide healthy, realistic physical role models for young women?
- Is the use of sexual imagery in ad campaigns unethical?
- Should tobacco and liquor advertising be allowed on television?
- Should all billboard advertising of alcohol be banned?
- Should tobacco and alcohol companies be allowed to use ad campaigns that could be considered child-friendly?
- Why are alcohol companies now allowed to advertise on television under certain conditions (after primetime, with responsible drinking messages in some ads, etc.)?

Economic Issues

- Should the local sales tax be increased/decreased?
- Should "sin taxes" on alcohol and tobacco be increased to help pay for the increasing costs of medical care?
- Should Florida increase the use of toll roads to pay for local road improvements?
- Do local power and utility companies operate as monopolies?
- Should purchases made over the Internet be taxable?
- Should the government provide financial assistance to people whose retirement funds were invested in the stock of companies that may have used unethical accounting practices (i.e., Enron, Arthur Andersen, etc.)?

- Argue for or against the earning potential vs. risk of investing in a certain kind of stock.
- Argue for or against a controversial trade tariff or tax.
- Many stock analysts describe the nature of today's stock market as completely different from the stock market of twenty or thirty years ago. Argue for or against this assertion.
- Does America have a responsibility to assist its industries financially and politically if other countries' industries receive similar assistance from their own governments?
- Argue for or against Federal Reserve strategies that attempt to keep inflation low.
- Large corporations such as Walmart and Barnes & Noble have been criticized for driving mom-and-pop shops out of business. Is this a valid criticism when considering the nature of supply and demand?
- A few years ago, the U.S. Mint issued a new form of dollar coin. Argue for or against the continued use of this new currency.
- Should the United Kingdom join other E.U. countries in converting its currency to Euros?

Environmental Issues

- Should national environmental policy focus on developing more oil resources or developing renewable energy sources?
- Should our national energy policy focus on building more nuclear power plants?
- How does overseas oil dependency influence our economy and/or international policies?
- Should genetically engineered food be labeled differently?
- How do city zoning laws and ordinances affect development and conservation?
- Which civic policies should be changed to encourage conservation rather than new land development?
- Should recycling be mandatory?
- How should recycling efforts be funded?
- Should fines for littering and dumping be stronger?
- Should fines and penalties for corporate pollution be more punitive?
- Should the fuel efficiency of SUVs and pick-up trucks be raised?
- Should the government offer tax credits for the purchase of hybrid or alternative energy vehicles?
- Should the designations of endangered and threatened species be changed?
- Should loss of economic/industrial benefits be considered when land is preserved for endangered species?
- Should more civilian oversight be created to monitor government and military pollution?
- Should environmental studies become a mandatory part of science curricula in public schools?
- Should third-world countries be held to the same levels of pollution control as more advanced nations?
- Argue for or against new environmental regulation concerning a specific industry (e.g., clear-cutting for raising cattle vs. tropical rain forest protection).
- Argue for a specific regulation that will make a certain business or industry more environmentally safe.

Media Issues

- How does profit motive in media corporations influence what and how information is broadcast?
- What ethical considerations or conflicts of interest exist for a corporate media news channel?
- How and why do certain media outlets contribute to sensationalism in news reporting?

- Is the Internet a positive development for news reporting? Does it represent a more democratic medium of information?
- How does specific media bias affect how news is interpreted and delivered?
- How has the conglomeration of media companies influenced radio and TV content?
- Do cable companies represent a monopoly?
- Should more customer options be available with cable television?
- Should cable services be offered on an *a la carte* system (for example, paying \$40 a month for 40 channels individually chosen by the consumer)?
- Should a stricter rating system be imposed upon television programming?
- Should tabloid television be scheduled only for late night time slots?
- Should parental locks be optional or mandatory on televisions?
- Consider media influence on national political campaigns fifty or a hundred years ago in comparison with such influence today. Should new regulations be imposed to make current campaign coverage more equitable?
- Should music-sharing programs that facilitate piracy on the Internet be outlawed?
- Should websites that allow the free download of bootlegged movies be shut down? Do production companies have the right to shut down websites that allow the free download of sound or video clips from their media?

Consumerism and Convenience Culture

- Should the official work week be shortened/extended?
- How is shopping an American cultural value?
- Which American or cultural values does the mall represent?
- How does the concept of consumer credit influence our economy?
- How does American consumer culture deal with the concept of death?
- How are the values, expectations, and rituals of specific holidays such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day influenced by consumer culture?
- What role does product packaging play in consumerism?
- What role does the national debt play in consumers' spending awareness?
- Consider the issue of disposable products and packaging and their impact on the marketplace as well as the environment. Argue for or against new regulation.

TV and Film

- Should televised sexual and violent content be censored by the government? Are mandatory ratings a form of censorship?
- Is there a gender-based double standard regarding nudity, sex, and ratings on television?
- Which values do "reality television" shows appeal to? How have they changed television viewing?
- What does the trend towards voyeuristic TV programs reveal about modern American culture?
- To what extent has television as a source of entertainment changed American neighborhoods and leisure activities?
- Which values/philosophies/worldviews are expressed by a certain television program?
- What impact has 24-hour news coverage had on our TV watching habits? How has it changed our view of information?
- How does MTV contribute to celebrity and image-selling?
- How has the television as an invention changed American household and family life?
- Why are the TV and film industries considered so hard to break into?

- Because celebrities are so often in the public spotlight, do they have ethical responsibilities to set good examples for young people?
- In the past, the Screenwriters Guild of America has pushed for the credit "A Film By [director's name]" to be banned. Why would the SGA want this, and is this a justified request?
- Do scriptwriters have a right to be allowed on the set of a movie they wrote, or is this a privilege to be allowed at the discretion of the director?

Sports and Entertainment

- How has the increase in ticket prices and athlete salaries negatively affected professional sports?
- Should professional tennis players only be able to use personalized/custom-made rackets?
- In World Cup soccer matches that end in ties, should penalty kicks be discarded for some other method of determining a winner?
- Should professional sports leagues such as the NBA, NFL, and MLB establish a promotion/relegation system that rewards strong teams from lesser leagues with promotion, while relegating poor teams to a lower division?
- What changes, if any, should be made to NBA rules to preserve the integrity of the sport?
- Do celebrity athletes bear any responsibility for being role models for children?
- Should the instant replay remain in effect in the NFL? Should it be extended to other sports as well?
- Should teams with potentially offensive logos and nicknames (like the Cleveland Indians and Washington Redskins) change their names to be more racially sensitive?
- To what level should collegiate sports be funded? What is their relationship to academics?
- Should college athletes be paid to play?
- Does Title IX actually promote gender equality in college sports?
- Should GPA standards for college athletes be raised or more rigidly enforced?
- How have professional sporting events been negatively influenced by entertainment, including Jumbotron, music, and crowd-pleasing activities?
- Should certain kinds of performance-enhancing drugs be allowed in different sports? Should creatine be banned from Major League Baseball?
- Should women be allowed to play in professional sports leagues that have no female league equivalent (NFL, NHL)?
- How have the four major professional American sports (baseball, basketball, football, and hockey) affected the rise of other sports such as soccer and lacrosse?
- How have ESPN and other media sources influenced (positively or negatively) professional sports in the last twenty years?
- Should communities bear all, part, or none of the burden of financing new sports arenas for professional teams?

Criminal Justice

- Should the criminal sentencing process be reevaluated or changed because of racially unfair sentences?
- Which changes should be implemented to prevent prison rape?
- How has the proliferation of privately funded prisons changed the criminal justice system in America?
- Should certain non-violent crimes be punishable by fines rather than jail time?
- Are state-mandated "three-strikes" policies unfair?

- Should children who commit certain crimes be treated as adults? If so, should there be a lower age limit to this policy?
- Are exile programs (where a criminal is sent to prison in a distant state) fair?
- What kinds of rights should criminals have?
- Which conditions of incarceration are fair?
- Are certain kinds of capital punishment cruel and unusual?
- Should capital punishment be suspended because of racial disparities?
- Should capital punishment be suspended because of the chance of executing an innocent person?
- Should prison be punitive or rehabilitative in nature?
- Now that genetic/DNA evidence is admissible in court, should controversial closed cases be re-opened?
- If someone has already been executed, should his or her case be re-opened under certain circumstances? Should some kind of reparation be made to the families of the wrongfully accused?
- Should there be a limit to the number of death row appeals that can be made?
- Presuming that capital punishment is allowable, what types of crimes should this apply to? Only murder? Treason?
- Is society's obligation to simply remove a criminal from society, to actually punish the criminal for crime, or a combination of both? Considering this, what is the purpose of the death penalty in America today?
- Should the legal requirements for obtaining a search warrant be changed?
- If an officer finds something that s/he was not looking for (e.g., narcotics in an automobile that was being searched for firearms), why should or shouldn't the officer have the right to take the accused into custody? Consider the issue of "reasonable suspicion" in your discussion.
- Why are lawyers stereotyped as sharks? Is this a fair representation, and if not, why is it so prevalent?
- Many consider today's justice system to be too slow. What improvements could be made to expedite the system without sacrificing due process?
- Some states have harsher penalties than others for drunk driving. Consider the policies of a particular state and argue for a change in the penalties.
- Define "terrorist." Under what circumstances, if any, is "terrorism" acceptable?
- Should terrorists be tried in a military or civil court?
- When tried in our court system, should the citizens of other countries have the same rights as citizens of the United States?
- Argue for or against an amendment to the statute of limitations for a particular crime.

Religion

- What, if anything, should constitute acceptable "prayer" or moments of silence in public schools?
- Should religious schools be required to teach health/sexual education from a non-religious perspective?
- Should religious phrases be removed from American money?
- Should government provide faith-based organizations with funds to help the needy?
- Should evolution be the official curricular focus of public schools regarding human origin?
- Should faith-based organizations be given tax exempt status by the government, even if the organization does not provide any concrete services for the needy (food, shelter, etc.)?
- Should the Orlando-based Holy Land theme park be given tax exempt status because it is run by a faith-based organization?

- Is the government justified in denying the Wiccan religion tax-exempt status because it fails to meet one of the government regulations in defining a religion – that of congregating at a regularly scheduled time and place?
- How has the role of the Catholic Church been affected by the recent accusations of sexual abuse by priests? Argue for a specific change in church policy regarding these crimes.
- Are public school winter holidays still generally organized around Christian holidays rather than those of any other religions? Argue for or against a change in policy.
- On campus, faith-based organizations can receive funds as part of a club. Does this follow the separation of church and state?
- Should Christmas, Easter, and other religious observances be considered national holidays?

The Political Process

- Should the Electoral College be discarded in favor of a simple popular vote in presidential elections?
- Do alternative political parties in America receive fair treatment during elections?
- Should third party candidates be allowed to participate in national debates?
- How do the media help or hinder third parties? Should they receive equal and free airtime on major networks?
- Should the campaign financing system be reformed?
- Should presidential candidates be barred from spending their own money for their campaigns? What is the relationship between personal campaign finance and free speech?
- Should terms of senators and congressmen be further limited?
- Should a national form of health care be created, or should health care remain a private industry?
- Examine the historical reversal of the value systems of Republicans and Democrats.
- Should a particular Congressional District be reallocated?
- Argue for a policy change that would make the American democratic process more efficient.
- Are checks and balances a crucial element in American government? Does this process work as it was originally intended?
- Has the executive branch of the American government gained too much power in the last fifty years? Cite specific examples in your argument.
- How has/will new technologies like the Internet change the political process?
- How can the voting process in national elections be made less confusing?

Education

- Is standardized state or national testing (such as the FCAT or SAT) helping or hurting American schools?
- Is the current system of public school funding (primarily through property taxes) unfair? Does it contribute to inequality in the public school system?
- Should tracking be used in determining courses for public school children?
- Should magnet and charter schools be encouraged or discouraged?
- Should the system of busing students to school be amended?
- Should local school districts be redrawn to create schools that are more equal?
- Should federal school vouchers be used at religious schools? How does the separation of church and state apply to this issue?
- Consider the needs of a teacher's salary vs. the realities of the funding schools now have. Argue for a change in education budget allocation.
- Do teachers in classrooms of thirty or forty children accomplish their intended tasks as educators? Should they be expected to?

- Some standardized tests scores factor in to how much money a school will receive in the next fiscal year. Is this an ethical way to demand accountability from a school, or does this further punish lower-performing schools?
- Consider the benefits and drawbacks of a home-school education vs. a public school education.
- Conservatives, liberals, and radicals all have different ideas about the purposes of a public education. Research several perspectives and argue for or against a particular viewpoint.
- How necessary are the arts in the public school system? Argue for or against a change in funding for a particular district.

National/International Policy

- In which situations, hypothetical or actual, is U.S. military intervention in other countries justifiable? In which situations is it not?
- Does the threat of terrorism warrant the suspension or curtailment of civil liberties?
- What policy should the American government have towards international political crises? To the Middle East? To Israel? To Tibet?
- What should our policy be towards trade with China?
- Should the United States support the expansion of NATO to include the Baltic states?
- Should mandatory military service be required for all men and women in America?
- What are the ethics involved when considering the separation of powers and allowing a Presidential Line Veto?
- Is shuttle diplomacy a better alternative to gunboat diplomacy in the modern world?
- Consider the CIA's pre-September 11th policy of non-assassination and its post-September 11th policy of pro-assassination. Argue for or against this new stance.
- Does the United States have a right to preemptively protect itself from terrorist attacks by attacking nations accused of sponsoring terrorism?
- Not considering the United States, what is the most powerful nation on the planet? Explain the criteria used in making this judgment.
- Should the United States change its policies on educating foreign nationals and issuing student visas?

UCF Issues

- What is the best solution to the parking issues on the UCF campus?
- Should the GEP (General Education Program) be changed? What courses should be added or dropped?
- Should the composition program at UCF be changed? How? Should the course be worth a different number of credits?
- Is the concept of UCF as a "metropolitan university" a good idea for the future of the school?
- Should Greek Park expansion take place, even if it means developing environmentally delicate areas?
- Is corporate funding of university research a good idea?
- Should public universities have the right to sell the names of campus buildings to corporations?
- Argue for or against the UCF football program joining the MAC.
- Should UCF fund the men's basketball team more heavily?
- Should UCF devise a different scheduling method for classes held in modules and portable trailers?

- Should the "tradition" of not stepping on the Pegasus symbol in the Student Union be reevaluated?
- Argue for or against more university funding for student services such as the Student Academic Resource Center and the University Writing Center.
- What purpose does the campus newspaper serve, and how well does it achieve its purpose?

Civil Liberties

- Should people between the ages of 18 and 20 be allowed to drink adult beverages that contain a lowered alcohol content?
- Should legal hemp production be reassessed by the Florida legislature?
- Under which conditions (if any) should medical marijuana use be legal? Under what rationale have some states gone against federal regulations and fought to allow medical marijuana use?
- Do terrorist attacks justify any suspension of civil liberties in the name of national safety?
- Should prison sentences for non-violent "victimless" crimes be commuted to community service or alternative methods of punishment? Is there such a thing as a "victimless crime"?
- What rights do airplane passengers give up by allowing themselves to be checked before boarding? Argue for or against a specific passenger check policy.
- What rights do people lose when on public school property? Is the suspension of these rights valid?
- Proponents of a lowered drinking age sometimes note the disparity between the draft age (18) and the legal-drinking age (21). Argue for or against the validity of this comparison.

Counter-Culture Issues

- Should people under eighteen years of age be required to have parental permission to get tattoos and piercings?
- Is ear piercing of children of a certain age child abuse?
- Should rave clubs have limits on their operating hours?
- Why have recent raves been shut down in the Orlando area? Was this action justified?
- Do owners of raves have a right to operate a business that can be potentially harmful to youth?

Youth Issues

- Should the minimum age for attaining a driver's license be increased? Should this be a national standard?
- Should the mandatory age for quitting school be raised or lowered, or is the current age of sixteen justified?
- Should computer skills be a fundamental part of education curricula?

Local Area Issues

- What kind of public transportation system would be best for Orlando?
- Would light or high speed rail best serve the interests of Orlando residents?
- Should local zoning restrictions be changed to encourage community development?
- How do current zoning restrictions limit or control growth?
- Should police patrol the University Drive area more stringently? Should regular speed traps be a part of this patrol?

- How does traffic light timing influence traffic in the UCF area? Should traffic light patterns be recalibrated to help reduce congestion?
- Should Alafaya Trail be expanded to four lanes from McCollough Road through Oviedo?
- Should off-campus UCF housing be restricted because of conflicts with local neighborhoods?
- Are the policies of local apartment complexes fair? How should they be changed?
- Should new development in the Orlando area face more stringent environmental considerations?
- Should carpool restrictions be placed on certain Orlando highways for certain times of the day?
- Should Orlando campaign for a professional baseball team? A professional football team?
- Would having a professional basketball team contribute to the prestige of the city?
- How does tourism in Central Florida affect local communities?
- Should legalized gambling in the form of casinos be considered as an economic boost to this area?
- Should dancers be allowed to perform nude in local establishments?