Assignment Instructions for an Empirical Research Project in English/Writing Studies

Overview: Research Project

During the course of the semester, you will complete an empirical research project on a topic in English/Writing Studies. This should be a research question that can be answered in the confines of the semester. It will require a review of literature to ensure that it is a topic that will fill a gap in the scholarly knowledge base. You will choose a method appropriate for that question, then design and conduct the study, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative evidence. The research question is closely related to how the question is addressed, and thus the research method selected is an important decision. We will begin with a whole-class research project that anticipates the steps that you will undertake for your individual projects and gives you practice.

In summary, you will do the following:

1. Find a research question
2. Design the study
3. Review the literature
4. Collect data
5. Analyze data
6. Develop visualizations for the data
7. Write up the results in a research report
8. Present the findings in two additional formats: a lightning talk and a research poster.

The parts of the individual research project include the following:
   o Research Question
   o Annotated Bibliography
   o Review of Literature
   o Research Proposal
   o Certification in research integrity through CITI Program
   o IRB Application (including recruitment script and materials, Informed Consent forms)
   o Abstract
   o Research Study Report
   o Research Poster
   o Presentation of research poster
   o Oral Presentation
   o Delivery of Oral Presentation

Part One: Defining a Research Question/Problem

You will begin by identifying three areas or questions of interest to you in English/Writing Studies. From your Writing Autoethnography assignment in Week Two, you probably have already discovered areas of interest. That's a good start. Another possibility may focus on a question you've always wondered about in English/Writing Studies. This assignment begins to develop the research question or problem that will be the focus of the project. In a one-on-one conference during Week Two, we will explore these questions. Almost always, we can derive a

viable research question from our conversation. Once this question is developed, then the review of literature can begin that then leads to the methodology development and study.

What is it you want to explore or know? What question will help you find the answers? What will you study in order to get answers--people, texts, artifacts, practices? Why is this question important or significant? How will it make a contribution to the field, and, finally, is it doable?

Part Two: Review of Literature

A review of literature is the scholarship that has been done already on the research question, either on the question itself or closely associated. This review helps the researcher identify what has been done, how it was done (methods), and what the results were. It also suggests that there is a gap that your project will fill. Develop an **annotated bibliography** (Week Three), which will be used to frame the review of literature (Week Four). Note that *review of literature* is the process as well as one of the products that will result from your work. The annotated bibliography is a listing of sources with an annotation for each; the review of literature takes that information and synthesizes it into more of an essay form.

A review such as this is invaluable in helping the researcher (you) figure out the actual study, defining it more clearly. A good review will affect your thinking about the topic, perhaps tweaking or even abandoning the topic--particularly true in the latter case if the researcher finds the question has already been addressed fully. This review of literature becomes part of the final project. (The same is true of many parts of the process. Each section is compiled into the final report.)

Part Three: IRB Proposal

Complete CITI Certification (valid for three years). This is an important part of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) that focuses on the history of ethics in research and also guides our studies today.

Develop the **Research Proposal** (Week Five), which will be embedded in the IRB application (Week Six). This text will be direct and to the point. Begin with the Project Title. Then state the research question. Provide 2-3 sentences that clearly state the purpose and significance. Then, the review of literature cites the scholarly/research literature that has already been done. Its purpose is to demonstrate that you know the background, and a gap has been identified—that your research will fill. Provide a step-by-step explanation of the methods you will use. What are your sources for information (e.g., people, texts, artifacts, archives)? What research tools will you use (e.g., survey, interviews)? If people are involved, describe your participants. Who are they? What ages? How will you locate them? How will you recruit them to your study?

Our research projects will use <u>surveys</u> and <u>interviews</u> to gather information. Develop the questions for each. For the surveys, we will use Qualtrics and deliver the survey directly to the identified population for completion. Qualtrics provides reports that help depict the quantitative data in the research report. For interviews, the transcription of the interchanges will be coded for themes and patterns.

Conducting the study will take place over the next several weeks; the start time is dependent upon IRB approval. By Week Eleven, the draft of the research report should be completed.

Final Research Report
Below is an outline of how the study and its data will be presented. A common term for the organization of the final report is *IMRAD*: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion.

- **Study Name**
- **Abstract**
- **Introduction and problem statement**: Give an overview of the context surrounding the research, and a statement of the research question.
- **Review of the literature:** A review of literature of previous studies that have focused on this question is included here, and how this study extends a previous project or fills a gap is defined and explained.
- **Participants and context of the investigation**: Describe the participants in your study in terms of who was selected, how they were selected, demographic information.
- **Method and Procedure**: Describe the method you used for gathering information. This may be one method, or it may be a mixed methods approach.
- **Analysis and Results**: Present the data[1] that have been collected; then analyze them according to the method you've selected.
- **Discussion**: Synthesize the results in the context that has been defined in the introduction. What do these results mean? Are there implications for practice or policy? What is the significance in terms of your initial research question? What future research does it call for?
- **Graphic Representation of Information:** Include illustrations, charts, and tables that depict information graphically and demonstrate good principles of design.

Dissemination:
The research report is one of three genres used to give the results of the study. We will use two additional formats: a research poster and a lightning talk.
- Poster Development: Design a poster in PowerPoint that summarizes the research project and illustrates data graphically. We will draw on design advice for effective posters (Week Fourteen).
- Lightning Talk: Develop a lightning talk of no more than 3-5 minutes with 15-20 slides maximum (Week Fifteen).

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[1] Note that data is a plural word and requires a plural verb for correct subject-verb agreement.