Essay Paper Project  
Humanities 10-5 The Economics of Oil and Energy

This class includes a mid-term essay assignment that requires each student to submit an essay that is, according to HSA10 guidelines, supposed to be "5 to 7 pages in length." I (Professor Evans) interpret that to mean a paper that has between 1,500 and 2,500 words.

Assignment Objective

Primarily this is a writing assignment to evaluate and improve your general writing skills and to prepare you for the larger writing assignment, your research paper due at the end of the semester. To be more specific, we want to evaluate and help improve your

1. ... ability to select an interesting theme and make an argumentative case supporting some perspective, position, point of view, proposition, advocacy, thesis or strain of reasoning and, in writing, make your case subject to the constraints and limitations, including length and time limitations, imposed upon the project.
2. ... ability to organize support material, including data, evidence, citations and so forth, efficiently and effectively in the presentation of your case through writing (although we do not expect much of this in this project - that will be the focus of the research paper).
3. ... ability to format and organize a fluid and focused presentation that both supports your proposition and does so in a way that organizes the argument for the reader while trying to maintain and even optimize reader interest (which implies order instead of chaos, a smooth flow instead of random turbulence).
4. ... ability to be fair and reasonable in your presentation (we don't write polemics).
5. ... ability to manage an open-ended writing project, which does require time management skills and personalized project planning (the bigger the project, the more the required planning).
6. ... ability to present an artful and interesting presentation that moves both information and perspective off the page while engaging the reader.
7. ... ability to solicit and accept criticism and to revise based upon that criticism.
8. ... (back to the original theme) ability to truly make your case.

For this essay I want you to draw upon the base of information that you have built by virtue of your reading and specialized team assignments over the last few weeks to develop a paper that meets objective one above. You must write about a subject linked to one or both of the two primary (traditional) energy sources that was assigned to your team. I will allow an exception to this rule if and only if you ask for permission in writing (email is adequate).

Especially for this paper, your thesis does not have to deep, profound, or politically poignant. It merely has to be something that you have learned or observed where you want to point that out. For this I use the "blog" standard - if it is good enough to be in a high-quality blog, it is good enough here.

I write blog-level material constantly (and have a daughter who makes a living writing a blog) sometimes for general exposure on the internet and sometimes dedicated to themes for classes that I teach. At the time of composing this I am writing a paper about modern inflation and how current economic policy might promote inflation in the future. That paper, though, will be five times the length of this assignment. If I were given this assignment to do with you, I might consider one of these themes:

1. Projections for the explosive growth of shale gas in our energy futures might seriously be hampered by low market prices for natural gas.
2. Over time, natural gas might be a suitable substitute for gasoline for cars if our national objective is to reduce emissions and our reliance upon imported oil.
3. Reliance upon nuclear electricity in the future could make us very reliant upon imported raw or processed uranium.
4. The recent rise in the price of gasoline is not due to political developments in the Middle East

Your topics can be even more modest than these (but should not be much more ambitious).

Preparation Tactics
It is acceptable and even recommended to discuss, as a team, potential paper topics.

You have been working with teams and you want to use some of the material, including some of the data, that you uncovered in your research. The paper should begin with an overview of the current U.S. energy profile including a brief discussion of trends and either intertwined in this or discussed separately, a little more background material about your general area of expertise as assigned by the team (oil, coal, the distillates, etc.).

You will want to use graphics, data tables and the like (although they will not and should aid in the "length" requirement except to the extent that they use words). As you have seen in your own research, a good graph is worth many words and they are easy to summarize in words.

This baseline component of the paper can easily take up more than half of the length of the writing assignment, possibly making the length of the paper a little less onerous.

Given this, here is a recommended tactical plan for executing this assignment:

1. Have a general team discussion about this assignment, facilitated by the CEO. Discuss potential topics and discuss with me if you please. Try to begin to settle about candidates for subjects. But even before you finalize your subject, complete the steps below.
2. Adopt a crude, flexible outline for your paper (I did that on a sheet of paper for this assignment!). You can change it, but do it. I'll help! Below I provide a tentative outline that you can use for starters.
3. [Hard to do] Set aside blocks of time and give yourself a timeline (deadlines) for (a) choosing the subject, (b) writing the baseline material (which may come before (a)!) (c) writing out the theme and the primary support and (d) writing the opening of the paper. [This last one must have come as a surprise - don't you write the opening first? Not me, I write it last and recommend that you do the same].
4. Sit down and get the paper underway long before it is due (how long before depends upon the length and difficulty of writing the paper - in this case at least 10 days).
5. Work through a draft quickly, not paying excessive attention to quality. and improve the paper in the revision.
6. Allow adequate time for revision, solicit help on revision if possible, and add quality to the paper in the process of revision.
7. Do not rush or pull an over nighter to write your paper. Such a paper may come out just fine - some of you are natural writers who make few mistakes, but you are rewarding terrible work habits by doing this. The kind of stress that automatically comes with crisis-to-crisis work habits can take a terrible toll on your mental and physical health as you grow older.

About the thesis or proposition

For reasons that I have explained in the class, I do not require students to articulate a formal and easily identified thesis statement nor do I expect you to dedicate the paper to defending a formal thesis statement.

Having said that, make sure that you understand that the paper must offer a proposition, theme, thesis (it is allowed, just not required), perspective, point of view that is informative and potentially controversial. Ask yourself. "Is it possible that I am wrong about this?" and "Is it possible that someone would disagree, even strongly, with what I propose here?" If the answers to both questions are "yes," then you probably have complied with the spirit of this assignment.

Here are some simple propositions from other areas, one of which passes the test and one of which fails the test:

Kobe Bryant is the best basketball player to ever don a jersey. [Pass]
Kobe Bryant is a great basketball player (and here is a list of accomplishments). [Fail]

Popular music from the era of the Vietnam War had a strong political impact at the time. [Pass]
When comparing popular music today to the same from the era of the Vietnam War, popular music has changed. [Fail]

Organized religion is having an effect upon national politics [Fail]
Organized religion is having a negative (or positive) effect upon national politics. [Pass]
Although a paper that is merely descriptive may be extremely informative (most of the papers that I write are descriptive because they are for my students) and useful to a reader, a purely descriptive paper does not fulfill the spirit of this assignment. An example of a paper that would be merely descriptive might have a title like:

*The role played by coal in the production of electricity in the United States, 1950-2010.*

That paper would not be acceptable. The information in that paper, though, might be the necessary foundation for this paper:

*Clean coal as an essential component of the US energy future*

where perhaps the writer would argue that (1) coal can be made clean at low cost, (2) we have an abundance of coal in the United States, (3) coal-mining creates jobs.

A shorter paper like the one being assigned here might mention all three but stress only one in support.

In energy research, there is a bit of a thin line between informative papers that are largely descriptive (which we want to avoid) and papers which are partly descriptive, which is necessary, but also stake out a proposition that is potentially controversial and not self-evident.

Fortunately for you, you have already read many energy forecasts and projections and estimates for technology and fuel and their role in our future, therefore any attempt on your part to describe a technology or fuel as having a greater or lesser role than established projections is inherently controversial and fits our requirement!

If you think that nuclear power is safer than current views, if you think that wave power has more potential than the consensus or the EIA, if you think that coal should be promoted even more because of its low cost structure, or if you think (like me) that natural gas should play a more prominent part as a transportation fuel than gasoline (which would require you to offer an explanation about why that hasn't yet happened and then explain why is advisable), then all of these subjects qualify.

The theme of your paper does not have to be simple and the argument does not have to be linear or contained (in fact, my biggest complaint against the thesis statement is that it encourages linear thought and narrowness of perspective). It can be a general theme that is multi-faceted and nuanced in support. The *clean coal* example above is complex.

A simpler and more manageable theme, narrower and less complex, might be

*Residential PV Solar in Western Washington is economically unfeasible*

(an excessively expensive renewable alternative because of restricted sunshine and the availability of cheap hydro power).

Although I allow complex themes, I do advise the latter type of paper because it is easier to manage and to support.

**An outline**

Way back about a thousand words ago I suggested that you use at least a crude outline for your paper in order to organize your thoughts. Generally, the longer the paper the more complex the outline. Keep in mind that you are not chiseling the Ten Commandments when you construct an outline - by necessity it must be flexible and you must be willing to change it.

Here is a suggested simple outline for this paper:

1. **Opening**, which must include your proposition or theme in this assignment (as I have said in class, when you are a skilled writer you can sometimes roll out your proposition slowly, but not here). Remember that I advise you to actually *write* this section *last* when you write your paper.
II. General background information, typically about historical energy sources and uses in the U.S. - the material that you have been reading collectively and presented collectively to the class.

III. Specific background information about the area of expertise implied by this paper (e.g. more about the role of nuclear power or how fuel exports are changing). This can be rolled into point II if you are skilled but I suggest that you segregate it.

IV. The theme, where the argument is to be made. For more complex themes it might be wise to outline subcategories to make sure you pursue an organized argument. Using the example of the clean coal theme above, your outline might have the subcategories

   A. The cost of clean coal given new technologies
   B. Abundance of domestic goal implies no imports
   C. Employment in the coal industry

You may have noticed that this outline does not have a final step labeled summary or ending. That is because in a short paper I do not want you to provide a summary or ending. I just want you to stop writing when you have made your case. You are done. Students write terrible summaries.

Formatting and related rules

For this assignment we will use formatting rules identical to the little two-page essay assigned at the start of the course. (Unlike that assignment, the assigned formatting is not being used here as an example. This document is using narrow margins, an 11 point font, and single line spacing to save paper when printed).

Use standard Word default margins, which are one inch on all sides, top, and bottom. Use a common 12 point font (like Times New Roman) for the main body.

Format your title like the example shown below. The title should use 14 point bold, and everything else 12 point regular.

The Economic Feasibility of Residential PV Solar in Western Washington
Gary R. Evans
HSA10-5 The Economics of Oil and Energy
February 24, 2013

Lines should be spaced at 1.5 spaces and paragraphs should be indented. There should be no additional space after a paragraph (which will require you to override the Word default)

According to Professor Evans,

"... quotes should be indented one full tab left side only, with quotation marks as shown, with a double space separating the quote from the main body of the text and 1.5 space within the quote, as was done for this quote. A quote is typically footnoted (sometimes not because of context) as is tautologically shown here." ¹

Footnotes are best to use because they are easier to work into blended documents. Eleven points is the default font size for footnotes in Word and we will use that. For formatting footnotes we will use the Chicago Manual of Style, which has online representation which will format your footnotes for you. You are encouraged to use the SourceAid citation builder.²

Number your pages (not done here to save space). Please put a final word count at the end of the essay, as was done here.

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² Found at http://www.sourceaid.com