**NOT AN ASSIGNMENT BUT A LIST OF SOURCES FOR THE NEXT ASSIGNMENT!**

**Researching a "Global" Topic in the Liberal Arts**

In the world of higher education you are guided not only by your own experience, but by the collective experience of those who have explored the world of knowledge before you. The liberal arts comprise the collected and enduring reflections of those fellow explorers who have helped develop, organize, and support research and inquiry into the human condition.

One of the aims of this course is critical thinking, an approach to information that searches for reasons, documentary evidence, and experiments of thought that have withstood the test of time. But critical thinking does not occur in a vacuum; a critical mind must have something to think *about*. In the college and university that something is the liberal arts.

Liberal comes from the Latin word *liber* which means “to free*.*” An art (from the Latin root *ars)* is a skill or ability. The liberal arts, then, are those skills or abilities that set us free. Pythagoras, an ancient Greek mathematician and philosopher, can be considered the founder of the liberal arts. He taught music, astronomy, geometry, and numbers theory as the four core subjects that he considered important for every educated person to know. Three more areas of study supplemented these subjects in the Middle Ages -- logic, grammar, and rhetoric -- to comprise what were then accepted as the seven liberal arts. On this foundation of subjects -- or disciplines -- was built the modern university with its curriculum of the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. Only in recent times has training in law, medicine, engineering, and business administration been separated from a broad liberal arts environment.

Journeys into history and culture can be a great source of interest and insight. In the Western world we have often examined history and culture through the lens of our Western experiences. However, it would be a mistake for modern scholars to think that the experience of the West is an adequate arch to support the journey of the whole human family into the twenty-first century.

Research in the liberal arts involves critically selecting, reading and evaluating information from a variety of sources. Given recent world events, there is no denying that we live in a global community where actions, events, and conditions can affect all of us. As we begin to explore topics for research we will be looking for issues that go well beyond the borders of one country or society, affecting possibly all who inhabit this planet earth.

If we explore from the perspective of medicine, we might think of public health issues. If we explore from the natural sciences, we might think of environmental concerns like global warming, endangered species, or water quality. From the perspective of the arts, we might consider how art reflects the world view of the artist or how the roots of Latin music evolved from Africa and the Caribbean.

As you explore your chosen global topics, consider also its connections to yourself, your family, or your community.

At this stage, begin thinking about a topic that you would like to research during the rest of the quarter. The point of your research will be to identify and describe the best information sources that you can for your topic. The standardized descriptions (annotations) that you develop for each of your best information sources will become the heart of your final project, the Pathfinder. One of the fundamental things that you should learn from this class is that information and research in the 21st century has few barriers other than the ones we put on ourselves. Obviously, language can be a barrier, but it can be overcome through curiosity and study. The greatest barrier is what might be called "willing ignorance," that is, our natural human tendency to live within our own narrow confines and be comfortable with what we "know" and believe. You are expected to push beyond what is comfortable and work toward a topic that will take you out of your everyday routines and into the larger 'global' issues. A good way to approach selecting a topic is to think about issues of interest or concern to you, your family or community. Many issues that hit close to home, such as those related to education, health care, and the environment, not only impact you and your community but often have implications on an international scale.

**Selecting a Global Topic**

Through the process of selecting a topic, use the discussion forum to share your thoughts on any issues raised. You should feel free to express your opinion about your classmates' topics. Dialogue about a topic is a good way to understand and define it more clearly. Please know that your opinions have NO bearing on your grade as long as you observe good 'netiquette' and respect differences of opinion. College is a wonderful place to encounter differences in a safe atmosphere that promotes open debate. I sincerely hope that this class will foster such interaction.

**What Does 'Global' Mean?**

Global is a term to describe environmental, social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of the whole world. In choosing a global topic, you may take a world-wide issue or examine how something is experienced or shared between nations. You could look at how you as a student in your country, are affected or affect people in another country, or at how an event or cultural phenomenon has affected the world.

**What Could Your 'Global' Topic Be?**

Coming up with a good research topic can be a challenge. Not only must it fit the assignment, but it has to be researchable. This means that your topic is one that is likely to be researched and written about by other scholars. Also, your topic must not be so narrow that you are unable to find enough information in the time you have available. At the same time, do not choose a topic that is so broad that it cannot be clearly defined or provide the basis for interesting or informative research that will result in identifying the 'best" sources on the topic.

Additionally, it is important to consider your own interests. A global research topic doesn’t have to be political, (like international relations between Pakistan and India.), though it can be; it can also be a creative subject. For example, if you like art, music, food, to name a few areas, you could look at cross cultural influences on a specific culture, comparisons between cultures.

*Examples:*

* *the differences between Japanese and Chinese art*
* *history of salsa music*
* *poems of child victims of war*
* *African influences on the "American" diet*

Another idea is to research on how something from another culture is created, valued, and shared. Some examples:

* *the traditional family structure found in North India*
* *social networking on the Internet in Iran*
* *cheese-making in the Netherlands*

The point is to choose something in which you are interested, that meets the definition above for 'global,' and which is researchable. Whatever topic you choose, you must be enthusiastic about it. If you are not excited about your topic, the research process can be tedious. Pick a topic that you care about, like to do, see, feel, or experience.