

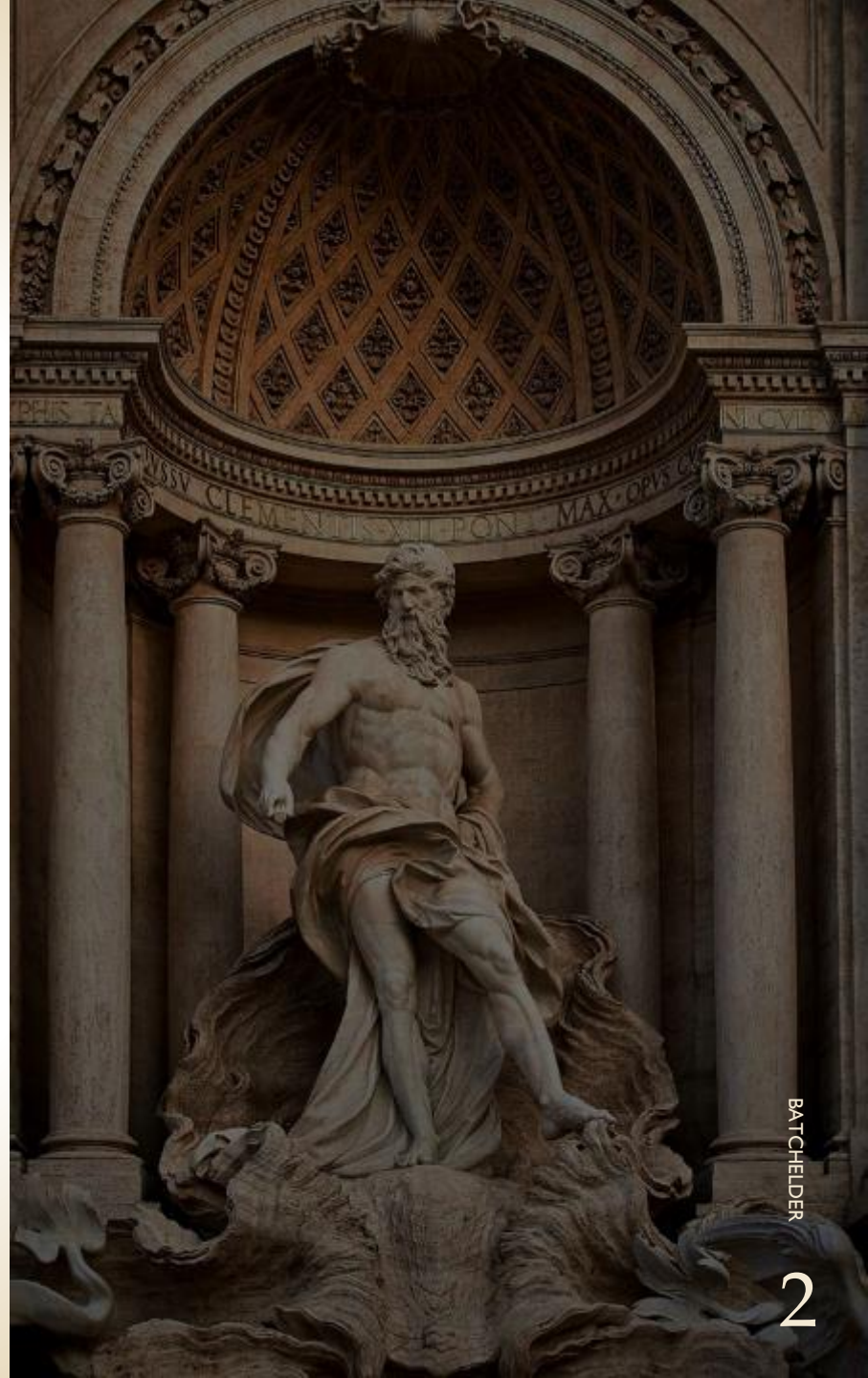


# SET Final Presentation January 2024

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# Designing a Final Project Assignment for PHIL 140, Intro to Ethics

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# Problem

The issue paper, a standard feature of ethics courses, lets students show mastery of course content by arguing for a specific position on a contemporary moral issue. Highly motivated and well-prepared students typically write very good papers with minimal scaffolding or instructor oversight, but others need more help.



# Strategy

I upgraded my issue paper assignment to a final project requiring sustained engagement with a topic beginning earlier in the semester than previously and including several stages to reduce the number of sloppy, superficial, or plagiarized submissions.

# Rationale

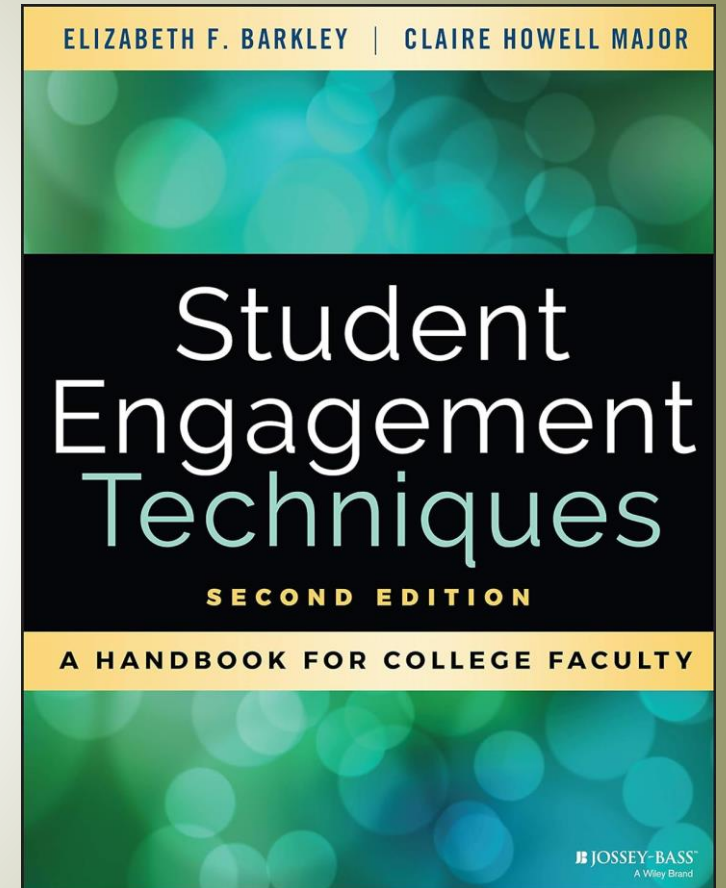
The technique I adapted from our readings, an issues journal, helped me encourage, supervise, and reward the topic brainstorming and preliminary research processes critical in writing a good paper. This experiment largely confirmed that students who read and write about current events with an eye to topic selection will write better essays and get a greater sense of the relevance of the class to the ‘real world’ and to their own lives, yielding increased interest, engagement, performance, and satisfaction.



# Contemporary Issues Journal

“Students are more motivated to learn things they believe are worth learning. In this [exercise, they] look for connections between course material and recent events [from] news sites, print sources, or broadcast media [and] write in a journal . . . how course material applies to these current affairs. This technique deepens . . . understanding of course-related ideas . . . and helps [students] appreciate . . . what they are learning in the classroom by making it easier for them to see its relevance to the real world.”

--- Barkley and Major, *Student Engagement Techniques*, 2d ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2020), 281.





# Final Project Assignment

Write a staged 1000- to 1500-word essay that takes a specific position on a selected moral issue. Refine your topic from the issues covered in posted resources, listed on the schedule, or discussed in class, e.g., capital punishment, reproductive rights, social justice, war and peace, sexuality and gender, treatment of animals, or the environment. Completed essays should combine discussion of theoretical course materials with examples from individual research on current events.

Begin brainstorming a topic by researching current events for the Contemporary Issues Journal, which asks for a summary and review of two news articles from reputable journalistic sources each week during the month of October. A topic proposal is due by 11/8, a rough draft by 11/29, and the completed essay by 12/13. While working on the early stages of the project, always keep the final goal in mind.

# Final Project Assignment, cont.

Essays should explain the significance of the selected issue; summarize main arguments on both sides of any public debate; include a discussion of relevant ethical theories or principles; argue for a position based on specific reasons; anticipate and refute objections; and end with a clear summary. These are broad, complex topics, and general essays are not good, so narrow your focus as much as possible and use examples to make your task manageable. Use a thesis statement and topic sentences, provide a well-reasoned argument for your conclusions, and include at least one paragraph near the end that anticipates and responds to at least one counterargument from the opposition.

Arguments must draw on established facts and opinions, so the use of four to six sources is required, including one or two of the posted learning resources, one or two other scholarly books or articles, and one or two recent news items, at least one of which must be from your journal. Include two or three direct quotations from your sources in the text of your essay. All sources must be cited properly using parenthetical references and a works cited page.

Essays should follow MLA citation and formatting guidelines. Review your academic integrity pledge and the similar statement in our syllabus before beginning. The instructor will answer specific questions asked in class or sent by e-mail. Help is also available from the Effective Writing Center.



# Final Project Schedule

Component		Credit (% of project total)	Due Date (by 11:59 pm ET)
Journal	Week 1	8	10/18
	Week 2	8	10/25
	Week 3	8	11/1
Proposal		15	11/8
Draft	Post	12	11/29
	Replies	9	12/6
Completed Essay		40	12/13

# Blackboard Folder Layout



## Instructions

Attached Files: Final Project Assignment (30.859 KB)



## Contemporary Issues Journal

Availability: Item is hidden from students. It was last available on Dec 6, 2023 11:59 PM.

Abstract (summarize and reflect on) **two** news articles per week drawn from reputable journalistic sources during the second, third, and fourth weeks of October.

Each abstract should be 200-300 words long and should include a full MLA citation of the article. Due dates for journal entries are 10/18, 10/25, and 11/1.

Type your abstracts directly into the text editor box in Blackboard. No file upload for this.



## Topic Proposal Upload

Availability: Item is hidden from students. It was last available on Dec 6, 2023 11:59 PM.

Your proposal should state clearly what topic you want to write about and then explain in 100–150 words why the topic interests you and what you intend to say about it. Please include at the bottom an MLA-formatted list of two or three credible sources you have already consulted or plan to consult in preparing your essay.

Type this into a neat double-spaced docx file of no more than a page with a properly formatted MLA title block and title at the top of the page and using one-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman type. Please remember to proofread and edit your work for typographical and other errors. Upload your proposal to this folder by Nov. 8 at 11:59 pm.



## Peer Review Forum

Upload a draft of your final essay here as an attachment to an initial post by Dec. 4, then come back in a few days to read and post replies on two classmates' essays.

Use comments and criticism from classmate replies to improve your final draft and remember to come back here and post a wrap-up responding to those classmate replies.



## Completed Essay Upload

Availability: Item is hidden from students.

Upload the final draft of your essay here by the end of the day on Dec. 17.

Remember to write and format your essay in accordance with the Instructions posted above.

Remember to click 'Submit' before navigating away from the upload dialogue.

# Outcomes

- Quantitative: journal performance a good predictor of final grade (see next page)
- Qualitative: better essays were submitted than in past semesters, on average
- Anecdotal: engagement improved
- Overall: great idea!



# Fall 2023 PHIL 140 Sections, Journal Scores v Final Grades

CRN	23277			23278		
Overall Final Grade Distribution and Journal Score Averages	Fin Gr	#	J Ave	Fin Gr	#	J Ave
	A	7	93.6	A	8	94.4
	B	7	82.9	B	2	77.5
	C	3	56.7	C	5	75
	D	1	75	D	0	--
	F	5	0	F	9	10
		23	64.3		24	57.3
Journal Performance as a Predictor of Final Grade	Of six students who got zeros on the journal, five failed the class and one got a C.			Of nine students who got zeros on the journal, eight failed the class and one got a C.		

# Conclusion

- This project was a lot of work and there were a few hiccups along the way, but the results were remarkable. Next time will be easier and further tinkering will make it even better.
- This experience improved my Ethics course and had a direct impact on my students, many of whom clearly enjoyed it.
- The SET Fellowship was a great experience. I grew in my profession, got to know colleagues from other departments and campuses I'd never have met otherwise, and now have a nice collection of pedagogy resources ready to consult as future needs arise. Two thumbs up!

Thank you, Joan, for  
organizing and  
facilitating this  
fantastic experience,  
and best wishes to all  
my inspiring colleagues  
in the 2023 SET cohort!

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