

### Solution Piloted

To motivate and guide students to do better independent research I instituted a final research poster assignment. These posters are intended to simulate the posters presented at most social science and science academic conferences. Research questions, methods, key results, and graphics are all combined on a single poster board for public display. My thought was that this encourages good work because it is so very public. Students are often more concerned with peer opinions than they are with mine, so I attempted to use this to my advantage. The assignment was handed out early during spring semester of 2003. Specific instructions and a series of responsibilities culminate in the final research poster that is submitted during the last week of class (see assignment below).

### Results Obtained

The research posters have been a huge success. Many students created very attractive and professional posters that demonstrated real independent research and hours of careful attention to detail. Many fewer students than in the prior semesters dropped the class to avoid the final project. I think this is both because I broke the assignment down into multiple due dates and because the creation of a visual and graphic demonstration such as a poster seems to be more fun for the students. Bear in mind that a significant amount of writing is incorporated into the best of these posters. Many students complained that they did not have enough space to say all that they wanted to say (I can't remember hearing a student saying they wanted to write more pages of a traditional paper). As a result of this need to pare down their writing, students were forced to prioritize ideas, and the projects showed much better than average organization. Also artistic or visually competent students felt they had a better shot at success with this kind of assignment.

### Recommendations

By keeping a number of the best posters from previous semesters on hand, I hope to improve the quality of future posters by example. Students desperately needed to see good work of this type since they are not familiar with the procedure. I had moderate success with a website designed to explain the process (Marilyn Levine, *Creating Posters for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, <http://www.lcsc.edu/ss150/poster.htm>)

On the following page is Mike's Assignment.

#### **Poster Project**

Cultural Geography

#### **"Geography of the Less Developed World"**

#### **200 Points Possible**

An important aspect of scientific research is the sharing of results, conclusions, and implications of such research with fellow scientists and the public at large. This is often done by summarizing the findings of a research project in a poster format and displaying it at a "poster session" where others can review and inquire about the project.

This semester we will be engaging in a similar exercise-- creating posters based on independent research, and holding a poster session during finals week to display our

findings and share ideas with fellow students, teachers, and interested members of the public. The theme for our poster session is "Geography of the Less Developed World."

Working in *pairs* or *individually*, you are responsible for choosing a research topic related to this theme, drafting a proposal that explains your intended research, following through with your research, and putting together a poster that summarizes your findings. The details are given below.

**Timeline** All assignments are due on the last day of class during the following weeks. Failure to meet any of the following deadlines will result in the automatic deduction of 5 points from your final project score.

**Week Ends Friday:**

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>April 11, 2003</b> | Deadline for topic choice sign-up (see <i>Topic Choice</i> below) |
| <b>April 25, 2003</b> | Due date for project proposal (see <i>Project Proposal</i> below) |
| <b>May 16, 2003</b>   | Deadline for approval of topic changes by instructor              |
| <b>May 29, 2003</b>   | Poster presentations (see <i>Poster Presentations</i> below)      |

**Topic Choice**

I give you very wide latitude when choosing a topic. Most important is that your topic is closely related to the issues covered by our text. Use the textbook and newspapers as a guide, brainstorming about ways you might relate ideas in the text to YOUR interests.

Once you have decided on a general topic, the next step is to narrow your focus in order to provide depth to your research and keep the project manageable. It is much better to cover a specific aspect in depth, than to just scratch the surface of a broad topic. Many of you will initially propose topics that might be better covered as Ph.D. dissertations.

For example, if you want to research the processes related to the destruction of tropical rainforests in one of these countries, you should focus on a particular region like the Peruvian Amazon, and delve into the specifics of that situation (environmental, political, economic). You will need to decide on a primary research question (Why is the rainforest being destroyed in Peru?). You will probably then want to narrow this question to some specific sub-questions (How much land is being destroyed? Who is destroying the forest? What are the motivations of those doing the cutting? What are the effects of the cutting?) Notice that many of these questions could stand alone as your primary research question. For example, the question, "What are the effects of rainforest destruction?" is itself a significant research question. Social effects? Economic effects? Environmental effects? You may find during your research that your topic is too broad or there is too much unrelated information in your notes. You will need to focus again on an even narrower topic (i.e. What have local Peruvians done to stop the logging of their forests?)

The possibilities are endless, just remember to stay focused on one of the themes from our text: language, religion, international economics, population growth, environmental problems, rural housing, urban and city structure, etc. Most of these topics are most interestingly approached when we ask how they are changing or how geography and history led to the situation we are in today.

### **Hints for choosing a topic:**

***Be Specific:*** I cannot stress enough how critical this is. In the beginning, you will probably start with little more than a general idea of what you want to do. Do some reading and begin to think of how to narrow the focus of your topic, while keeping it in the context of our theme. Please do not hesitate to make an appointment to see me if you are having trouble narrowing the focus of your topic.

***Be Original:*** Consider focusing on a specific place or event that would allow you to take photos, collect your own data, or interview professionals. If you choose a topic that allows you to collect some original data, and if your project is locally significant, your project may someday help to shape future planning or other types public policy. *It will also assure you of an outstanding grade in the class.*

***Possible Topic Areas:*** See the final page of this handout for general ideas.

### **Project Proposal** 20 points possible

After choosing a topic and doing some preliminary research, you are expected to write a one page (typed, double-space, 12-point font) proposal which summarizes and explains your intended research. You are also expected to include (on a separate sheet, also typed) a bibliography of resources (books, articles, Internet sites) used up to this point. Your project may change somewhat after you proposal, but this important step will help you clarify your goals.

### **Project Proposal Requirements:**

- Content of proposal summarizes and explains your intended research
- Please include your class time and days at the top
- Content of proposal is one page in length, typed, double-spaced, 12 point font
- Additional bibliography page is attached which lists resources used up to this point
- If working in a pair, please turn in only one proposal.

### **Research Tips:**

**Use the college library:** Take full advantage of Glendale's library. As a Glendale College student, you should have access to information at other public college and university libraries, either electronically through Glendale's library, or in person at CSUN, CSUF, CSULA or other such institutions. Get to know the reference librarians, as they can give you a great deal of help if you ask for it.

**Use the Internet:** Computers with Internet access are available on the first floor of the library and in all of the campus computer labs. A good place to start is with your text book's web page or my list of annotated links:

<http://www.glendale.cc.ca.us/geo/resource.htm>

Once again, please do not hesitate to make an appointment to see me if you are having trouble with any phase of your research.

**Poster Presentations** (Finals week; 180 points possible)

We will hold a poster session where you will have the opportunity to display and discuss the content of your poster with others. In addition to presenting your poster, you will have the opportunity to view, discuss, and evaluate the content of other posters. Everyone will be expected to evaluate at least 4 posters during our poster session (see attached peer evaluation form). The 5 peer evaluations are worth 2 points each for a total of 10 points.

Your poster should be neat, attractive, and professional, as well as thorough and informative. Be creative and original; your final product should be something you would be proud to display at a public meeting. **Your final score will, in part, be determined by the same criteria used for the peer evaluations. Please use the attached peer evaluation form as a guideline for putting your poster together.**

**Poster Topic General Ideas (many of these will require more focus or do not fit this semester's them perfectly):**

**If you are interested in one of these, talk to me about the details.**

1. The Zapatista Revolution: Roots Of A Peasant Revolution
2. Baku: Politics And Black Gold In The Middle East
3. Dam It! Dams And Damned Disasters In South Asia
4. Elbow Room: The Most Crowded Places On Earth
5. Dirt Poor: The Poorest Countries On Earth
6. Madagascar: The Most Incredible Cultural Diffusion In History?
7. Apocalypse Now: The Ten Most Environmentally Devastated Places On Earth?
8. Hernando Cortez And The Head Of Moctezuma: The Fall Of The Aztecs
9. Murder By Numbers: Genocides in the less developed world
10. The Roots Of Genocide: Rwanda Or Armenia Or America Or ..... Pick A Place.
11. Ecotourism: Solution Or Neo-Colonialism? (They paved Paradise and put in a parking lot...)

These are only meant to stimulate your imagination. The possibilities are endless.

**Less Developed Countries and Regions (GDP \$10,000 and under):** Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, American Samoa, Angola, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burma, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Dem. Republic, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, French Guiana, French Polynesia, Gabon, Gambia, Gaza Strip, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Grenadines, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Herzegovina, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Islands, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Lithuania, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Martinique, Mauritania, Mayotte, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Montserrat, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, New Caledonia, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Nive, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Samoa, São

Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Syria, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tokelau, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Turks and Caicos Islands, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Wallis and Futuna, West Bank, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

What follows is Mike's form for his students' peer review.

**Poster Project Peer Evaluation**

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Poster: \_\_\_\_\_

Poster Author(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Content and Communication**

\_\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Topic Choice:** Relevance to cultural geography; topic focuses on how human cultures have interacted with each other or the earth.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Title and Topic are Focused and Specific:** Title clearly states the topic of investigation and the overall project is focused and specific; it is not just a collection of information on a broad list of related subjects. Title is placed at the top of the poster.

\_\_\_\_/20 pts **Originality and Depth:** There is clear evidence that that information presented is original and thoroughly researched, going far beyond what is presented in the text book.

\_\_\_\_/20 pts **Abstract:** The abstract is a concise, informative, one-paragraph statement of no more than 150 words clarifying the research topic and summarizing the findings and conclusions. It is clearly labeled ABSTRACT and is placed in an easy to find location near the title.

\_\_\_\_/20 pts **Photos/Illustrations/Diagrams/Tables:** Photos, illustrations, diagrams, and/or tables are used to expand on ideas presented in the abstract. There are a minimum of 4 such items, all of which are clear, relevant, and informative. They may be photocopies, original student artwork, or items taken from the Internet or other digital sources. If any of these are actually cut from their original source, the publication from which they were taken must be brought in to demonstrate ownership. Destruction of library property will not be tolerated. The authors of such information MUST be referenced.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Map (or Maps):** At least one map showing some aspect of the project has been included. It may show the area of study, or the distribution of some phenomena. Maps are neat and clean.

\_\_\_\_/20 pts **Captions:** Any and all photos, illustrations, diagrams, tables, maps, figures, etc. are explained with clear captions. The text in the captions is grammatically correct, well written (in student's own words), proofread, approx. 50-150 words for each caption or in the text body explaining the image, and understandable. Jargon (unexplained "big" words) is avoided.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Diversity of Research Sources:** There is clear evidence that the project has drawn from a variety of sources, such as published books and articles, and Internet sources. Sources are scientific and specific to the topic. Newspapers, news magazines, and overly simple sources are avoided unless there is a specific need.

\_\_\_\_/20 pts **Citations and Bibliography:**

Citations: Ideas or information from published material or the Internet is cited in the text of each caption using the following form: (Jones 1998). Also, the source for any map, figure, photo, chart, table, etc. is placed at the base of the photo or figure, using a similar format.

Bibliography: A complete bibliography of all sources is placed in the lower right corner of the poster. This includes any source for information, ideas, specific facts,

maps, photos, etc. Included are the author's full name, year, title, publisher, and place of publication. Internet sources include the author (if possible), name of the web site or organization, date of posted material, and web site address.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Informal Discussion**: Author(s) are able to discuss material with others and answer basic questions regarding their project.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Dimensions of Poster**: Posters are approx. 90 cm (3 ft) in height; the center panel is approx. 60 cm (2 ft) in width, and each of the two side panels are approx. 30 cm (1 ft) in width. [Tri-panel fold-out presentation boards (called "project display boards") may be purchased at the Glendale College Bookstore, or at art, stationary, or office supply stores (Dimensions: height = 91.5 cm (3 ft), center panel width = 61 cm (2 ft), side panel width = 30.5 cm (1 ft)). Posters may also be made from cardboard.]

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Legibility**: Print and illustrations can be easily read; handwriting of less than professional quality is avoided.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Logical Sequence**: Poster is logically outlined and/or broken into sections, with subtitles, numbers, or arrows to guide the audience through the poster in an orderly way; poster has a unifying theme that is developed throughout.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **Attractive**: Poster is uncluttered, colorful, and professional. Poster elements are glued down cleanly and thoroughly.

\_\_\_\_/10 pts **General**: Name(s) of poster author(s) are on the front of the poster, just below or to the side of the title; poster stands free on table.

### III. Comments

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_/100