

Human Issues Studies

Suggested Guidelines for Final Written Reports

Updated – December 2005

Overview

Many students choose to submit a final synthesis paper as an element of their Human Issues (HI) projects. Your decision to do this should be made in dialogue with your HI Faculty Advisor. These guidelines are designed to be a resource for students and faculty as they determine the structure and content of a final paper. Above all, final papers should be a **synthesis** of the major aspects of your project rather than just a description or narrative of your activities.

Format & Length

The specific format and length of your paper will be determined in part by how much writing you have done throughout your project. For example, if you have done considerable reflective and critical writing throughout your project, your final paper may be shorter and analyze the major outcomes and impacts of your project. If you have done less writing in the developing stages of your project, your final paper will more likely be longer and contain both descriptive and analytical perspectives on your entire project. Remember, though—quality matters more than quantity.

Ultimately, the length and content of your final paper should be agreed upon by you and your HI Advisor, and it should follow the writing/publication style guidelines of your major (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.). In particular, you will want to discuss your HI Advisor's expectations for the “voice” of your paper: the nature of Human Issues Studies requires a level of reflexivity on your part that is best expressed in a “first-person” voice that is more personal than an objective “third-person” voice.

Paper Sections

What follows are potential sections for your final paper, along with questions to consider within each section:

Title: Provide an interesting title that accurately describes the main focus of your project.

Introduction: What is the human issue/problem/questions that you are addressing in your work? What makes it a problem? What questions/perplexities did you have as you began this project? What goals and actions did you initially set for yourself through this project?

Your Positionality (This section could be a sub-section of the Introduction): Why was this project important to you? What was your position coming into the project? What relevant experiences were you bringing to it? How do the issues you addressed relate to your deepest concerns, beliefs, values, and abilities? What values (Dominican, societal, your own) do you see embedded in this project or are you using as a lens through which to analyze your human issue? What ethical dilemmas were revealed as you became involved in your project and how, if at all, did you reconcile these dilemmas? (This last question could also be addressed in the “Results” section.)

Literature review: What is already known about your issue? How has it been studied, documented and understood? What perspectives, themes, concerns and solutions does the current literature bring to this issue? How have these findings shaped and enhanced your understanding of your human issue and your action? (NB: This section should include perspectives from your previously identified disciplines.)

Engaged Learning/Meaningful Action: What actions did you take and what were the contributions you made? What were your most significant incremental steps? What, if any, actions were taken or will be taken by others as a result of your work? What did you learn from others as a result of your action (i.e., from your interviews, data collection, service, observations, etc.)?

Results/Reflections: What do you take away from this project—what have you learned? What impact have you had on others? In what way have you contributed to a “public understanding” of your human issue? What are your perspectives and understandings of human issues, community, yourself, etc., and how has your experience affected your understandings? What experiences did you most value and why? How has your thinking changed? How are you different now? What new skills and understandings will you bring to your next action/activism project?

Conclusion: In summing up this project, what stance are you taking on your human issue? What recommendations do you have for further action or consideration? What are the next incremental steps that logically flow out of your project, were you to continue it beyond this class/project? What would you do the same or differently if you were to do this project again?

Reference Section: Identify (using appropriate formatting) both the works consulted/referenced throughout your project and the sources referenced within the body of the paper.

Additional Resources

You are not alone in completing this project. Many resources exist to support you throughout your experience:

- HI Advisor (regularly consult with her/him)
- Human Issues Studies Program office (project assistance, sample papers, etc.)
- Edgewood Library (<http://library.edgewood.edu/>) and Reference Librarians
- Writing Center (<http://edgenet.edgewood.edu/LSS/writingcenter/default.htm>)
- The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing (<http://nutsandbolts.washcoll.edu/>)