



# VCU



## 2020-2021 Common Book Report

The Common Book Program is one of the largest initiatives in [University College](#). The Common Book Program grew out of the nationally-recognized Summer Reading Program to become a university-wide endeavor that welcomes our first-year students into the vibrant intellectual culture of VCU and engages community partners in the conversation as well. VCU and Richmond come together to explore important social challenges, and to consider how to be part of the solution. Past themes have included the opiate crisis, immigration, eviction, and voter suppression.

The Common Book Program offers the VCU community many opportunities to wrestle with complex social issues through an interdisciplinary lens, starting with reading the Common Book in the fall and continuing in programming throughout the year. The book is integrated into the [Focused Inquiry](#) (UNIV 111/112) curriculum, helping students to explore the real-world applications of the Common Book and to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving around its central theme. In addition, faculty in University College foster partnerships across both VCU campuses and within the broader Richmond community to provide interesting and rigorous programming to a wide audience over the course of the academic year.

Each fall, an interdisciplinary selection committee convenes to discuss potential Common Books suggested by members of the VCU community and through the



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submission form on this website. The committee examines all nominations to narrow the list to a few options that are then sent to the Dean of University College and VCU's Provost for final selection. The chosen book is then distributed to an incoming class of first year students, who begin their examination of the book and its social challenge in academic conversations that happen as soon as they arrive on campus to start their VCU careers. Units across the University and Richmond also have the opportunity to request the book, to use it in their own programming or to join with the Common Book Program.

Our University-wide selection committee brings together members from a variety of units, such as VCU Libraries, VCU Aspire, the School of Dentistry, the ICA, the College of Humanities and Sciences, the Wilder School, the College of Health Professions, University College, the Division of Student Affairs, the Honors College, the Global Education Office, the VCU Graduate School, and it includes undergraduate and graduate students as well.

Selected books share the following traits:

- they prompt students to think deeply and analytically about an important current issue;
- they encourage students to consider issues from differing perspectives, promoting VCU's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- they address an issue that is illuminated by interdisciplinary inquiry, making it appropriate for students and faculty with a wide range of academic interests;
- they allow students to understand the importance of civil debate about difficult problems, providing an opportunity to model the nature of academic inquiry for incoming students; and
- they encourage students to think for themselves about problems that face the 21st-century



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## **The 2020-2021 Common Book: *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying our Democracy* by Carol Anderson**

*One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying our Democracy*, by [Carol Anderson](#), Ph.D., was the 2020-2021 Common Book. In her book, Anderson, the Charles Howard Candler Professor of African American Studies at Emory University, explores the history of efforts to suppress African American voting participation. To do so, Anderson investigates what happened in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* that struck down part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and enabled states with a history of racial discrimination to change voting requirements without approval from the Department of Justice. She follows the story of government-dictated racial discrimination unfolding through voter suppression laws. (See the full [press release](#) by Brian McNeill).

*One Person, No Vote* was selected because of its timely relevance to the 2020 elections. For many first-year students, the 2020 election represented their first opportunity to cast a ballot in a presidential election. *One Person, No Vote* served as a text to help students understand and engage with the history of voter suppression and disenfranchisement, and to see how it continues to inform politics today. Moreover, Anderson's book underscored the importance of every person's voice and exercising the right to vote.

### **Book Distribution Across Campus**

Each new first-year student received a copy of *One Person, No Vote* as part of their Student Orientation welcome bag during the Summer 2020 (**3,814 total books**). In addition, books were distributed to the following groups:

**Graduate School: 650 books**

**Richmond Public Library (RPL): 559 books**

**Miscellaneous University College**

**Mailed books (transfer, 1st year, repeat, and out of sequence students): 436 books**

**UTAs: 60 books**

**GTAs, UC staff, etc.: 25 books**

**ELP and Fall UNIV 111: 20 books**

**Residential Life Administrative Staff and Resident Assistants: 180 books**



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**VCU Libraries: 150 books**

**ASPiRE: 100 books**

**Open High School: 209 books**

**University Administration (Deans, Assoc. Deans, President's Office, Provost's Office)**

**Associate Dean's Office: 21 books**

**Provost's Office: 20 books**

**VCU Board of Visitors: 16 books**

**President's Office: 15 books**

**Dean's Office: 15 books**

**Council of Deans: 12 books**

**New VCU Faculty: 65 books**

**Department of English: 65 books**

**Weeks of Welcome Discussion Facilitators (Non-UC): 61 books**

**Allied Health Professions: 54 books**

**School of Social Work: 50 books**

**School of Pharmacy: 50 books**

**Student Affairs: 50 books**

**VCU Health Hub: 50 books**

**REAL Program: 50 books**

**Alumni Relations: 40 books**

**Academic Advising: 36 books**

**VCU Police Recruits: 32 books**

**I2CRP Student Organization, Medical School: 30 books**

**Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs: 30 books**

**School of Education: 30 books**

**Department of Chemistry: 24 books**

**VCU Votes: 20 books**

**John Tyler Community College: 20 books**

**Student Services and Records & Registration: 20 books**

**ICA: 15 books**

**Student Athletics: 15 books**

**Institute for Inclusive Excellence: 10 books**

**Writing Center: 10 books**

**Rams in Recovery: 10 books**

**Art Education Graduate Students: 9 books**



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**Summer Scholars: 5 books**

**Total books ordered: 7,665**

### **Weeks of Welcome (Welcome Week) Discussion Groups**

Integral to the VCU Common Book Program is the Welcome Week Discussion Group Program. This event, typically held the day before Fall semester classes begins, pairs groups of 15-20 students with a faculty or staff volunteer discussion leader, for a 50-minute introductory discussion about the Common Book. The sessions provide an opportunity to model the kind of academic discussion that will occur in the Focused Inquiry classrooms, help the students adjust to VCU academic life, and permit them to get to know other members of their residence hall floor (the most typical strategy for grouping students for discussion sessions), and permit them to meet a faculty member.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Weeks of Welcome Discussion Groups looked different this year. In August 2020, 106 VCU and Richmond facilitators led 942 first-year students through an introductory conversation about the 2020-2021 Common Book, *One Person, No Vote* by Carol Anderson. These conversations were held over Zoom, due to a combination of two factors: first, our inability to predict when students would be on campus, because their move-in dates were staggered; and second, because of the change in the academic schedule. Both factors were a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the pandemic, and despite the new Zoom medium, the discussions were overwhelmingly a success when measured by facilitator and student satisfaction.

A comprehensive report of the 2020 Weeks of Welcome Discussion Groups is available [here](#). Briefly, of the students who responded to the survey ( $n = 861$ ), 40.3% said that the sessions were very helpful or helpful in introducing them to each other (another 43.5% said somewhat helpful), and 70% said that the sessions were very helpful or helpful to them in learning about the perspectives of other students. 65.3% said that the sessions were very helpful or helpful in showing them what it will be like to puzzle over difficult topics with their peers. 76% thought that the discussions were very helpful or helpful in increasing their understanding of the VCU community, and 53.3% thought that the conversations were very helpful or helpful regarding their transition to the VCU community. Of the facilitators who responded to the survey ( $n = 83$ ), 89% were likely or



very likely to facilitate discussions again. 81.9% were likely or very likely to seek out other Common Book programming on campus, and 59.8% were likely to seek out *One Person, No Vote* programming in Richmond. Example qualitative comments from facilitators are below.

- The students were fabulous. Not a one of them had read the book (a few admitted they hadn't even looked at it), BUT that is not unusual (and with the smaller # in a breakout room that is very likely the same % as any other August). They were eager to connect and our conversation was useful and engaging, though not centered on a close reading of the book, to be sure. :) No worries, though, that's what the faculty in UNIV will do when classes begin.
- The students did not read the book but seemed intrigued by the subject. I had 5 students who participated often (outside of introductions) which was good. I had some students make connections across majors which was nice. They seem excited about the year even though COVID is throwing some curveballs. The book is very timely so they seem invested.

**Number of group sessions: 120 sessions**

**Number of student participants: 942 students**

**Number of faculty/staff/graduate student participants: 106 volunteer facilitators (34 from Focused Inquiry)**

### **Focused Inquiry Classroom Engagement**

*One Person, No Vote* was a required text in all Fall 2020 sections of UNIV 111: Focused Inquiry I and UNIV 112: Focused Inquiry II. The text formed the basis for classroom discussions, presentations, research projects, and reflections. **(Some examples of faculty assignments and student work related to *One Person, No Vote* are attached).**

**Number of Fall 2020 UNIV 111-112 sections: 172**

**Number of students enrolled: 3,247**



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## Author Visit

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, Carol Anderson visited VCU. (See the full [press release](#) by Brian McNeill.) All activities took place virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Activities included the following:

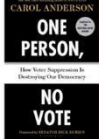
### *On the VCU Campus--*

- Virtual Q&A session with selected VCU Votes and social work students to discuss their responses to her book **(approximately 25 in attendance)**
- Virtual public keynote lecture **(approximately 600 in attendance via Zoom webinar; 893 registered)**
- The live webinar was also streamed live on Facebook. The viewership for Facebook is not captured.


### *In the Community--*

- The Richmond Public Library and VCU Health Hub hosted a virtual Q&A session on Oct. 21, 2020, between members of the Richmond community and Dr. Carol Anderson. **(25 in attendance)**

VCU's University College and the Office of the Provost present




**CAROL ANDERSON**  
Author of the 2020 VCU Common Book  
*One Person, No Vote*  
*How Voter Suppression is Destroying our Democracy*



**October 21, 2020**  
6:00 p.m.  
Virtual presentation will be held online

The event is free and open to the public.

[commonbook.vcu.edu](http://commonbook.vcu.edu)



## Additional 2020-2021 Common Book Activities<sup>1</sup>

### Events sponsored by VCU schools, departments and programs

#### VCU Votes and Department of Focused Inquiry

- Nov. 12, 2020, VCU Votes and the VCU Common Book Program hosted a virtual screening and panel discussion about PBS's docuseries *The Vote*. Panelists included Dr. Alli Reckendorf, Dr. Kimberly Matthews, Dr. Julianne Guillard, and Chelsea Higgs Wise, MSW. The conversation was moderated by VCU's Commonwealth Times Editor Hannah Eason. The event was entitled "Protest,

<sup>1</sup> We noted the number of attendees at the virtual events, where applicable. However, in addition to hosting virtual webinar-style events, many partners live-streamed their events to social media and posted them to YouTube. Thus, the total number of viewers may exceed the number of attendees reported here.



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Progress, and The Vote: Modern Lessons from Women's Suffrage.” **(62 in attendance)**

## **Honors College**

- Oct. 14, 2020, the VCU Honors College hosted Nicole O'Donnell, who discussed the barriers faced by students when voting. Linking to concepts in Carol Anderson's book "One Person, No Vote," those who attended debated possible reasons for student voter suppression and discussed what our community has been doing to address barriers and promote a culture of voting. **(113 in attendance)**

## **School of Social Work**

- Sept. 16, 2020, the VCU School of Social Work virtually hosted “Social Justice in Politics: Get out the Vote in 2020” to discuss the importance of getting out the vote for Decision 2020. Dr. Charles Lewis, executive director of the Congressional Research Institute of Social Work and Policy, will discuss how students, faculty, administrators, and individuals in higher education settings and beyond can support voter advocacy and work against systems of voter suppression. **(51 in attendance)**

## **Department of Political Science and VCU Office of Alumni Relations**

- Sept. 21, 2020, hosted by Dr. Alex Keena, assistant professor in the VCU Department of Political Science, the VCU Office of Alumni Relations presented a discussion on election integrity and advocacy efforts in the lead up to the 2020 presidential election. Dr. Keena was joined by a panel of VCU alumni involved in the protection of free and fair elections, voter registration, and advocacy efforts and issues regarding voting accessibility and security. This event was titled “The Right to Vote: Election Integrity and Advocacy.” **(90 in attendance)**

## **Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture**





- Oct. 6, 2020, the Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture and the new VCU student chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), hosted a virtual panel discussion, titled "Race, Media, and the 2020 Election," as part of its Speaker Series. Moderating the panel was Aloni Hill, Ph.D., assistant professor of journalism in the Robertson School, and Robb Crocker, podcaster, digital journalist, and doctoral student in VCU's Media, Art and Text program. **(approximately 55 in attendance)**

## Department of English

- The Department of English hosted a service-learning course (ENG 215) entitled "Civil Rights/Voting Rights Literature." Students trained for and completed 20 hours of service learning, which included virtual phone banking, literature drops across the Richmond region, and voter protection at the polls. Students worked with a community partner, New Virginia Majority, to get out the vote. **(60 in attendance)**

## Events sponsored by Community Partners

### The Richmond Public Library

- Richmond Public Library and VCU's Common Book Program partnered to sponsor community-based book discussions. Individuals, organizations, and book clubs could request up to 10 free copies of *One Person, No Vote*, while supplies lasted. Over 60 book club sessions were held.
- The Richmond Public Library hosted a virtual exhibit on ["Block the Vote: The Deliberate Suppression of the Black Vote."](#) This exhibit traced the history of voter suppression and felony disenfranchisement in Virginia and throughout our nation. It focused on regressive voter suppression laws left behind from the Jim Crow Era and how they continue to suppress the Black vote.
- Oct, 20, 2020, the Richmond Public Library hosted a film screening and panel discussion of "Suppressed: The Fight to Vote." This virtual event highlighted the fight for voting rights in 2020.



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## REAL Life Program

- Real Life hosted a book club reading and virtual discussion of *One Person, No Vote*. The book club was led by two summer interns, one of whom is a student at VCU. Reflections of this event were highlighted in a [blog post](#).

## Monthly Newsletters

We produced and distributed 4 newsletters to VCU and community partners, as well as VCU administration, faculty, staff, and students ([457 on distribution list](#)).

- [September 8, 2020](#) – 56.7% opened the email.
- [October 1, 2020](#) – 50.6% opened the email.
- [October 14, 2020](#) – 46.5% opened the email.
- [October 19, 2020](#) – 47.6% opened the email.

As of 2019, [MailChimp](#) found the average email open rate across industries was 21%, with a range of 15% - 25% considered to be a good open rate. By these metrics, the Common Book newsletters were opened at above average rates.

## Program Videos

The Common Book Team produced two videos that were shared as part of the 2020 Student Orientation for incoming VCU students. Videos feature the Dean of University College, as well as several University College faculty and FILL peer mentors, who shared their experiences with the Common Book program. The videos were also posted on the Common Book [website](#) and social media for broad viewing.



## Examples of assignments related to *One Person, No Vote*

### Example 1.

***After looking at *One Person, No Vote's* project, main claim, method, and use of sources, and knowing that you've so far only been responsible for reading a very short part of the book, what do you think about the book's ability to convince you of the main claim?***

Our job in source evaluation is not to go off on a rant if we disagree. Our job here is to dispassionately consider and evaluate the book's credibility. There are two tasks in this discussion:

1) After doing the individual assignment on Anderson's project, main claim, method, and use of sources, write an **initial post** that does a couple of things:

- Lay out her project and main claim in your own words. This would be part of a summary if you were making an annotation of Anderson's book.
- Lay out her method, and also discuss her use of sources. The method would be part of a summary, and discussing her use of sources would normally be part of the evaluation in an annotation.
- Give us your overall preliminary impression: do you feel inclined to find the text convincing? Why or why not?

2) **Respond to two students' posts:** remember that peer assistance posts

Peer assistance responses should help someone explain their thoughts more clearly (ask questions!), and move beyond their initial thoughts (make an observation about something that they seem not to have taken into account!)

Peer assistance responses are due **by the end of the next class day**; in this case, by 11:59 pm on **Wednesday, Oct. 7**.

### Example 2.

In Unit 2, we're learning that annotation as an activity has to do with taking notes on a reading, in our case, to create annotated bibliographies to help you organize and remember your research. Annotation is also the process we use to analyze text, whether we're skimming quickly or power through thoroughly. This assignment asks you to read the **first two pages** of *One Person, No Vote* by Carol Anderson (and also the **endnote pages** that have the information from all her superscript numbers), while considering:

1. **Project:** What is her project? That is, what question or problem is she addressing? What is she going to do in this book?



2. **Main claim:** What is the conclusion that she's come to after studying the issue? Main claims will often be big, sweeping statements of something that might \*look\* like fact but authors typically then spend the whole text convincing you of those claims.
3. **Method:** How is she going to accomplish her project? What evidence do you see her using? Is the evidence credible, and how did you check? What kinds of arguments is she making? Note that to answer this, you **need to read her endnotes!!** They're included at the end of the file. You may comment on the endnotes, too.

### Your task:

1. Submit a document describing where in the text each of these three things (project, main claim, method) might be.
2. For each location in the text (project, main claim, method), discuss why you chose that particular passage. Keep in mind that there may be more than one location where you learn about project, main claim, and/or method.

### Example 3.

#### UNIV 111 A2 Rhetorical Analysis: Grassroots Rhetoric

### The Gist:

Now that we've spent time thinking deeply about our own spaces and places and practicing reflection and narration, we'll move to analyzing language that has a purpose to persuade. Using your knowledge of voter suppression you learned about in Carol Anderson's *One Person, No Vote*, you will choose a grassroots voter rights organization and analyze their online or in-person rhetorical strategies. Your audience is someone who has heard of the organization but doesn't know much about them, and your goal in this 1000-1250 word paper is to explain *how* the organization attempts to persuade its ideal audience to get involved in the movement, primarily through analyzing their use of rhetorical appeals. After conducting your analysis, you will explain the relevance of that analysis for the upcoming election. In other words, based on your reading of Anderson and your analysis of the grassroots organization, what do potential voters need to know as they prepare to vote?



## The Details:

We're constantly surrounded by persuasion, especially online, and we'll spend time in class learning about how writers and speakers use rhetorical appeals to attempt to convince their audiences to act. After this, you will choose one of the grassroots voters rights organizations listed below, or find one of your own, and you will write a thesis-driven paper in which you explain how the organization attempts to appeal to its audience and whether or not it is successful in doing so. You will then broaden out and, based on your analysis, explain what voters need to know as we get closer to the 2020 presidential election.

Here are some organizations to choose from. Feel free to choose one of these or choose another you know about. Just be sure to ok it with me:

- [Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#)
- [BlackPAC](#)
- [Black Belt Citizens](#)
- [Black Voters Matter Fund](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice](#)
- [Collective PAC](#)
- [Electoral Integrity Project](#)
- [Four Directions](#)
- [Greater Birmingham Ministries](#)
- [Indivisible](#)
- [Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law](#)
- [League of Women Voters](#)
- [League of United Latin American Citizens](#) (LULAC)
- [Legal Services Alabama](#) (LSA)
- [MOVE Texas Civic Fund](#)
- [Jolt Initiative](#)
- [Demos](#)
- [NAACP](#)
- [Native American Rights Fund](#)
- [New Georgia Project](#)
- [The Ordinary People Society](#) (TOPS)
- [Priorities USA](#)



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- [VoteRiders](#)

After choosing your organization, this unit will proceed in steps:

1. Learn about the rhetorical situation and rhetorical appeals.
2. Analyze your organization's website, taking copious notes.
3. Formulate a thesis statement and a basic outline.
4. Draft, peer review, and revise.

### **The Nitty Gritty:**

- 1000-1250 words
- 12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced, one inch margins
- MLA or APA works cited and in-text citations
- Includes a writer's memo before the title and after the heading that answers these questions:
  - What are you most proud of in this essay and why? What do you feel still needs more work and why?
- Rough draft due via email: Sunday, 10/11, by 5:00pm
- Peer review in class: 10/14 or 10/16
- Final draft due: Sunday, 10/18 at 11:59pm; upload to Canvas as a word doc or a google doc

### **Writer's Memo:**

At the top of your essay, answer the following questions in paragraph form:

- What are you proudest of in this essay? Why?
- What still needs work in this essay? Why?
- What activities in or out of class helped you write this essay?
- What grade do you realistically deserve on this essay and why?

### **Example 4.**



## Unit 2 Overview

### Goals & Learning Objectives

Having engaged in personal reflection in Unit I, Unit II now asks you to consider the limits of your individual knowledge and experience and recognize the value of others' knowledge and experience. Where Unit I asked you to explore your own experience and contexts, this unit asks you to take an examination of your personal views as a point of departure for making connections to other perspectives, worldviews, and kinds of expertise. Part of your work in this unit will be to negotiate multiple perspectives through an engagement in textual analysis, which constitutes one of the primary methods of academic work. Out of that analysis, you will generate ideas and questions and begin to develop substantive claims using evidence.

#### Our **goals**:

- To practice close reading, summary, analysis, and evaluation, with an eye toward identifying and evaluating the rhetorical strategies of different kinds of texts
- To draw connections between and among texts by putting different kinds of texts in conversation with each other
- To begin to understand how reading multiple kinds of texts broadens our perspectives, helps us to generate ideas and questions, and aids in our development of claims (or arguments)
- To begin examining complex topics with the help of multiple sources and perspectives

#### Our **learning objectives**:

After Unit 2, students should be able to:

- summarize, classify, and recognize the rhetorical strategies of several substantive (and, in some cases, scholarly) course texts and give examples from the texts that evidence those strategies
- distinguish different types of texts by identifying their genre, perspective, type and use of data, and relative merits and weaknesses and then relating the texts to each other through comparison and contrast
- begin formulating questions for further research based on their reading and discussion and developing a plan for what types of information and perspectives they will need to seek out to begin answering those questions



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Core Assignment: 1000- to 1250-word essay that puts two texts in conversation with each other

## Overview and Goals

Here is the [rubric](#) for this assignment.

Here is the [list of readings](#).

In the broadest terms: the Unit II core assignment asks you to develop a 1000- to 1250-word piece of writing that puts two texts (at least one of which is a written text) in conversation with each other. As part of this assignment, you will engage in summarizing, evaluating, and analyzing each text.

## Choose a Theme, Choose Your Texts

More specifically: for this assignment, you will put two course texts on a similar theme in conversation with each other. Because our focus this unit and next unit is on *One Person, No Vote* and the issues it raises, I ask that you choose a theme related to those raised by Anderson's book: voting rights, voter suppression, racial discrimination, gerrymandering, court battles, voter activism. In class and on Canvas, we will be working together to identify some of the themes that are shared and developed across course texts, and in your paper, you should focus on ONE of those themes, choosing TWO texts that cover that theme and analyzing their approach (as described below). The texts you choose may have some overlaps, but should come at your topic from different angles, using different perspectives, employing different rhetorical strategies, or through different genres.

**\*\*Quick Tip:** Note that your Unit III paper will ask you to explore the factors that make for free, fair, accessible, and convenient voting and craft a voting policy proposal based on your findings; thus, you may find it useful to use this assignment to evaluate texts that will be helpful to you next unit, as well.\*\*

## Focus on Comparing *Approach Over Content*

Your goal is to compare the way that each writer has *approached, learned about,* and come to *know or understand* your theme. That means that you should focus **less** on comparing the information about your topic and **more** on *how your texts approach* the topic and *the way your texts discuss* the topic—and how that impacts your understanding. You do not need to do





research beyond what we cover in class, and your task here is not to interpret or analyze your topic itself. Rather, your goal will be to summarize the two texts' approaches and then analyze and evaluate the merits, weaknesses, and perspectives of each approach. The questions that drive this assignment are what different sources offer and how we can effectively and responsibly gather sources even before we delve into the substance of a complex topic.

## Guiding Questions

We will talk a lot about rhetorical strategies over the next few weeks. As you think about how your two sources approach your chosen theme, you may also find it useful to consider the following questions:

- What do the two sources have in common?
- How do the sources address the theme in the same or similar ways?
- How do the sources address the theme in different ways?
- How does one source extend or elaborate on the ideas in the other?
- How does the format, style, or genre of each source affect the way you understand the theme?
- Who is the audience for each source, and how does that affect its format and style?
- What are the most powerful examples of the theme in each source, and why?

## Paper Format, Structure, and Organization

This paper should be **1000 to 1250 words in length**. I've included more detailed outlines below, but in most cases, your paper will include:

- an introduction that identifies your theme and your sources and offers your statement of purpose.
- for each text, a series of body paragraphs that tackle the texts in-depth, identifying the perspective(s) and approach(es) taken by each text, offering direct evidence of those perspectives and approaches in the form of quotation and paraphrase and then connecting that evidence back to your main purpose.

*\*\*In our last assignment, we talked about how the best evidence or support in a narrative is vivid, specific, and detailed, and the same is true for this paper. You'll want to provide specific examples, in the form of quotation and paraphrase, of the perspective and approach taken by the authors of your texts. The more specific and pointed your examples are, the more vividly they'll illustrate the author's approach and perspective.\*\**

- for each text, a paragraph devoted to evaluating the relative merits and weaknesses of each source.



- a paragraph that discusses the relationship between the two texts, comparing and contrasting them and describing how your two texts expand upon, extend, elaborate on, and/or challenge or contradict each other.
- a conclusion that explains what you learned, related to this theme, from looking at these sources together and the value of considering multiple sources (your “so what”).

### *Purpose*

Your statement of purpose (and the overall main idea of the paper) should:

- address the approaches of your two texts to your theme AND
- note any differences or similarities between the two approaches AND
- comment on the effect or significance of those approaches together

I’ll provide some examples in class and on Canvas.

### *Structure and Organization*

The structure and organization of your essay should follow one of the two examples below. If you feel that you cannot stick to one of these two examples, you must meet with me to discuss an alternative structure.

#### **Example 1:**

A variation of this format may be useful if you have an equal amount of examples to discuss for each source.

- Identify the two sources and state your **main idea**: the essential way that these two sources relate to one another in terms of what they offer (should be connected to the theme you chose).
- Discuss how Source #1 addresses the theme and provide evidence from the text that exemplifies its perspective and approach. Discuss its merits and weaknesses.
- Discuss how Source #2 addresses the theme and provide evidence from the text that exemplifies its perspective and approach. Discuss its merits and weaknesses.
- Compare and contrast how the two sources address the theme. Describe their relationship.
- Explain what you learned, related to this theme, from looking at these sources together and the value of considering multiple sources (your “so what”).



## *Example 2:*

A variation of this format may be useful if one source plants the seed of an idea and the other expands on it, or if one source deals with the theme more thoroughly than the other.

- Briefly introduce your two sources, your theme, and your **main idea**.
- Identify and summarize source #1, how it introduces the theme you have selected, and what its perspective and approach is. Discuss where/how the theme appears in the source and provide examples of its perspective and approach to the theme. Then discuss its merits and weaknesses.
- Identify and summarize source #2 and restate the **main idea**: the essential way that this source and its perspective and approach expand upon what the first text offers.
- Discuss more specific way(s) that source #2 addresses this theme, further detailing its perspective and approach to the theme. Provide evidence. Discuss merits and weaknesses.
- ^ Repeat as appropriate ^
- Sum up the comparison and contrast that has taken place in the preceding paragraphs and sum up the relationship between the two sources. Do not simply repeat yourself; present the summary of your findings in a new way.
- Explain what you learned, related to this theme, from looking at these sources together and the value of considering multiple sources (your “so what”).

You must properly cite any sources, both in the body of your paper (in-text citations) and in a bibliography or works cited page. We will talk more in class about how to do this, but remember that the [Style Guide on VCU Writes](#) is an excellent resource.

## Important Dates

### *Visual Map*

To help us think about what it means to put two texts “in conversation with each other,” you will create a visual map that visually demonstrates an interaction between your two texts with regard to your main idea and relevant examples. We will take inspiration from some of the data visualizations we’ll be exploring this unit, and you may find [this site](#) useful, too.

You will have a chance to share your visual maps—and view your classmates’ maps—on Canvas site. Plan to post your map by **Friday, October 16**. Post comments on at least *two* of your classmates’ visual maps by **Monday, October 19**.

### *Rough Draft and Workshop*

You will circulate a rough draft of your paper + a completed self evaluation for peer review no later than **Tuesday, October 20**. When you circulate your draft, make sure to submit it to



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Canvas, as well. Complete your review of your peer's work no later than **Thursday, October 22**. (You are only required to review one paper and receive one review. Make sure that all of your group members have had their draft reviewed. If you need help with coordinating, talk to me.)

### *Final Draft*

Your final draft is due to Canvas by **11:59 pm on Monday, October 26**. Remember to include a writer's memo (as outlined below). Your paper should follow the formatting guidelines in the syllabus and should include in-text citations and a works cited page.

(This assignment is based on assignments by Professors Mike Abelson and Courtney Sviatko for UNIV 111)

### Writer's Memo

When you turn in your final draft, I would also like you to submit a short writer's memo (per the syllabus). Please address the questions below. Submit your memo as a separate Google doc.

First,

- This paper has asked you to account for the way that perspective and approach affect the relative merits and weaknesses of a text and--in sum--consider the value of reading texts written from different perspectives that take a variety of approaches. As part of our discussion, we've touched on the role that race and gender, as well as other identity markers, can play in our understanding of bias, objectivity, and neutrality. In the first part of your writer's memo, please spend some time reflecting on your selection of texts for this paper; how you went about evaluating the texts; your perceptions of bias, objectivity, and neutrality up to this point; and how you might think about evaluating texts on the basis of perspective and approach going forward, particularly as we get ready to take the first steps in designing and implementing a research process for Unit III.

Then,

- Describe the process you used to write this paper (from forming your topic until this revision).
- How did your paper change during this writing process? What changes did you make from the first draft to the final? *Be specific*. What have you re-thought? Did you re-think the purpose? Did you re-think the organization? Etc.
- In what ways, did the workshopping process contribute to the development of your paper? Was there anything you discussed during workshop that led your changes?



- Discuss the strengths of this paper in terms of **content** (ideas, claims, risk, details, evidence, and development) and **style** (organization, voice, language, etc.).
- What questions remain for you as you submit this paper? (These may be specific questions for me, or they may be more general questions about yourself as a writer and the process of writing.)

Finally,

- Use the “Comments” function in Word (you’ll find this under the “Track Changes” toolbar) or in Google Docs (you’ll find this under the “Insert” menu or in the tools at the top of the screen) to insert one or two comments or questions *in the body of your paper*. These comments should alert me to passages or sentences that you found particularly challenging. You can alert me to issues that you were able to resolve or—perhaps more helpful—to issues that you weren’t.

## Example 5.

## Unit 3 Overview

### Important Dates

**Friday, October 30:** Draft a description of your problem, based on unit 2 materials and any other research you’ve done up to this point

**Monday, November 2:** Submit your research plan:

Thinking about the types of sources we’ve talked about in Unit 2 (logico-scientific vs narrative; logos, ethos, pathos, and kairos) and so far in Unit 3 (primary, secondary, substantive vs. scholarly), what kind of sources will you seek out in order to answer your research question?

What search terms will you use to find each source?

Where will you look for each type of source?

Why do you think this collection of sources will help you answer your research question?

Do you have any questions going forward? How could you get those answered?

**Friday, November 6:** Submit your sources, with a brief summary of each and 1-2 sentences (per source) explaining why the source will be useful. Use the CRAAP test to note strengths and/or limitations of the sources.

**Friday, November 13:** Submit a draft of your solution, in which you describe your solution, explain how it solves the problem, and offer some evidence as to its feasibility. You should include your reasons, with evidence, for why this is the best way of solving your problem.

Additionally, you should strive to anticipate any objections to your solution and refute those objections using evidence-based reasons and 2) discuss alternative solutions that you



considered but ultimately found less effective than the one you finally chose, with reasons (again, grounded in evidence) for why these alternatives would be less effective.

**Week of November 16:** In lieu of in-person class, you will have a one-on-one virtual meeting with me to review your draft. You should do your best to have a full draft ready by the time of your meeting, and you will also need to fill out a rubric before the meeting starts.

**Final draft & video presentation are due on Wednesday, December 2, by 11:59 pm.**

## Goals

Unit III asks you to engage in the research process in order to develop a claim and support it *based on evidence*. Building on the work you did in the previous unit to evaluate sources and reflect on the process of gathering information in a responsible and effective manner, you will be asked to investigate a topic by reading multiple perspectives and engage with those perspectives ethically and critically. Finally, you will take a position by making a claim and supporting that claim with research-based evidence.

Our goals are:

- To plan and implement a basic research process, by:
  - choosing a topic;
  - developing a research question;
  - identifying and critiquing substantive (and in some cases, scholarly) sources;
  - summarizing, classifying, and assessing how you'll use those sources;
  - integrating evidence and data from multiple sources; and
  - formulating a claim based on evidence
- To distinguish among different types of sources (scholarly, substantive, reference) and give examples of how to use each as part of the writing and research process

## Core Assignments

Essay Assignment

Overview and Goals

The rubric for this assignment is [here](#).

Where the Unit II assignment asked you to evaluate the approach taken by two sources with regard to a particular theme, Unit III asks you to engage in the research process in order to



investigate a topic, consider multiple perspectives related to that topic through critical and ethical reflection, and take a position by making a claim that is developed based on, and supported through, your research.

For your Unit III formal paper, you will craft a basic policy proposal that offers a solution to one of the voting problems we read about in our Unit II readings. In essence, this means you propose a policy designed to ensure that voting is free, fair, accessible, convenient and/or representative, however you define those terms and based on your understanding of the issues related to voting, voting access, and voter suppression that we have read about so far. You should plan to focus on one of the issues we've discussed (broadly construed) and do some research to better understand the nature, context, and scope of the problem, including its causes and effects and any relevant stakeholders (i.e., people affected by the issue). Since you will ultimately need to make the case for the solution you propose as the best possible solution, you will also need to understand alternative (albeit, in your view, less effective) solutions and be able to anticipate and refute any objections that might be raised against your solution. As you consider possible solutions, you may find [this report from the Brennan Center](#) to be a helpful resource.

Because you will have limited time to do research, the more specifically you focus on a precise issue, the more likely you are to be successful. Use Unit II to your advantage by using what you've already learned about voting access and suppression to select your problem. Once you've established your problem, you'll use research to look at possible solutions to this problem. Finally, you'll write a policy proposal (1000-1500 words) wherein you'll use relevant, research-based evidence to persuade your reader that your proposed path to improvement is logical and optimal.

Your claim, in this paper, will take the following form: To solve x problem, we must do y. You will then offer reasons, grounded in evidence taken from your research, to argue for y (your solution) as the best way of solving problem x.

*A note about the timing of this paper:* this unit coincides with the 2020 US election, as well as with a likely rise in COVID cases due to the onset of cold weather. First, I want to acknowledge that either or both of these may make for difficult circumstances, and if you are struggling in the last few weeks of the semester, I would urge you to reach out early so that we can strategize about how to get you across the finish line.

In the case of the election in particular, I realize that writing this paper could highlight or exacerbate any feelings you are having about the election, regardless of the outcome. To that end, I want to say that you and your ideas are welcomed, valued, and respected in our classroom community. Furthermore, this project is asking you to do the crucial work of civic engagement, by thinking critically and collectively about how to advance a social good,



whatever that means to you. It is my hope that--by working together as a class community--we will be able to help each other through the last several weeks of the semester.

**Source Requirements/Evidence:** This assignment requires you to engage in academic research, finding and using at least 4 relevant resources, one of which may be a course text (you are welcome to use other course texts if relevant, but you must find three new sources on your own). We will talk about argumentative strategies and how to develop claims throughout Unit III, and we will build on what we learned in Unit II to generate our own approaches to making a case, including blending facts, statistics, anecdotal examples, and relevant quotations as evidence.

We will talk more about finding and evaluating sources, but, generally speaking, you'll want to be looking to sources such as credible websites, longform journalism, oral interviews, data sets, and secondary articles from the VCU Library. (Search their collections [here](#).)

It is VERY important that you **cite the sources you use!** If you borrow ideas or language from a source, you should cite the source in MLA or APA style. We will continue to spend time on this in Unit III, as we did in Unit II, and you are (always!) welcome to ask for help. Failure to cite a quote (or to put it in "quote marks") is plagiarism, so please be careful to acknowledge all your sources in the paper!

**Organization:** You will need to include the following:

*Introduction:* In your first paragraph, you should discuss the problem, including a general description, any relevant context, its scope, its causes and effects, and its most relevant stakeholders. Although this is technically your introduction, you will need to include your research in this section, and it may be longer than a single paragraph. The last sentence of this section should make your claim: to solve this problem (that you've just outlined), we must do y. Your proposal claim/solution must match your problem.

*Body paragraphs:* In detail, you will need to describe your solution, with reference to its key components or features. Additionally, you will need to explain how your solution solves the problem and offer some evidence (this can be brief) as to its feasibility. Among other things, is there (or could there be) funding available? Are there people who can help implement the solution? Do the necessary structures, institutions, tools exist to implement the solution? Finally, you will need to give persuasive reasons, grounded in evidence (which will be uncovered through your research), for why this solution is, in your view and based on your research, the best way of solving the problem.

In addition to the above, you should have one or two short body paragraphs that 1) anticipate any objections to your solution and refute those objections using evidence-based reasons and 2) discuss alternative solutions that you considered but ultimately found less effective than the one you finally chose, with reasons (again, grounded in evidence) for why these alternatives would be less effective.

*Conclusion:* Your conclusion should be a kind of call to action, in which you will briefly remind your readers of the merits of your proposed solution and urge action on the issue.

**Self Assessment:** As always, you will need to turn in a writer's memo along with your paper. The instructions are below. In addition, you will need to bring a completed self assessment based on the [rubric](#) to your conference with me.





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## Individual Presentation

In keeping with our discussion about the type, genre, and rhetorical strategies employed by different sources, you will record a short (2 to 3 minute) presentation in which you present your voting policy proposal to your classmates and me. You can think of this as a kind of pitch, in which you will synthesize the key elements of your research and proposal and present them succinctly and convincingly to your audience. To that end, you should describe

Your problem

Your solution

& Call us to action

Because this presentation will be brief, you should carefully organize your ideas and thoroughly rehearse to make sure you do not go over the time limit.

You should have some kind of eye-catching visual that helps your audience to follow along with your pitch, such as representative images, a slide show, etc.

Note that, unlike your video narrative, you do not need to do any special editing or effects. Rather, you should talk directly to the camera and make your appeal.

*Extra process work points:* If you visit the writing center, meet with a librarian (including attending Jenny Stout's office hours), or meet with a FILL mentor, I will give you credit for the equivalent of a process work assignment. Please make sure to email after doing any of these tasks to let me know how it went.

[Visit the writing center](#) (can do this as many times as you want)

[Chat with a librarian](#) (any of these contact methods counts!)

[Make an appointment with a Peer Mentor from the FILL](#) (Focused Inquiry Learning Lounge)

In addition to making an appointment through Navigate to meet with a FILL peer mentor, you can text them, 804-635-FILL (804-635-3455), or chat with them on the [FILL webpage](#)

[How to make appointments in Navigate](#)



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I may alert you to additional workshops or events, as they are offered, for which you can get credit for attending.

More details on this TK:

Please remember that you will need to submit your essay twice. First, as a regular submission, including your writer's memo, and second, with all identifying information removed so that it can be included as part of the department-wide assessment. I'll have additional instructions for you later.

(This assignment is based on assignments by Professors Melissa Johnson and Beth Kreydatus for UNIV 111, as well as on [this policy proposal assignment](#) that I believe was designed by Professor Sarah Duerden at Arizona State University)

## Writer's Memo

When you turn in your final draft, I would also like you to submit a short writer's memo (per the syllabus). Please address the questions below. You may submit your memo as a separate document, or you may type your thoughts directly into the text box on Bb.

First,

- Describe the process you used to write this paper, including:
  - How and why did you choose your topic?
  - Did you seek out specific sources? If so, describe what you were looking for.
  - Did you pay attention to who created the sources you chose? What made you feel as if these sources were credible?
  - To what degree were you able to integrate your knowledge from unit 2 into selecting your sources for this paper? How did you evaluate the merits and limitations of each source you chose? How did you account for limitations across your sources?
  - How well do you feel the process of selecting your sources went? Is there anything you'd do differently next time?
- What questions remain for you as you submit this paper? (These may be specific questions for me, or they may be more general questions about yourself as a writer and the process of writing.)

Then,

- Use the "Comments" function in Word (you'll find this under the "Track Changes" toolbar) or in Google Docs (you'll find this under the "Insert" menu or in the tools at the top of the



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screen) to insert one or two comments or questions *in the body of your paper*. These comments should alert me to passages or sentences that you found particularly challenging. You can alert me to issues that you were able to resolve or—perhaps more helpful—to issues that you weren't.