

Health and Human Rights Blog Assignment

Overview

Select a focused topic of interest in the broad domain of health and human rights, which can be in the domestic or international context. Write a commentary of approximately 1,000 to 1,200 words that is suitable for a professional health journal. Articulate an important health and human rights issue, explain some of the complexities of solving the problem, and offer recommendations. A successful commentary communicates ideas clearly to a lay audience, while also demonstrating the author's expertise on the topic. At minimum of 7 academic sources must be cited.¹ A "commentary recipe" is provided in the instructions below.

Part 1: The first assignment will be a commentary, typed in a Word document. This will be due at the start of class on March 7. This will be graded using the attached rubric, and worth 12.5 points. Submit an electronic version to Blackboard, and print a hard copy to submit in person.

Part 2: The second assignment will be a revision and online posting of your commentary. Update your piece using the feedback from the professor and teaching assistant, and add a visualization corresponding to your commentary. This can be a chart, graph, table, or image. Schedule a meeting with the teaching assistant, where you will work together to post your final content to a course webpage. You will also submit a "track changes" version of the updated Word document to Blackboard, showing your edits. The final deadline to post the blog online is May 2, although we strongly encourage you to do this much earlier so that you can focus your attention on the grant proposal project.

On the last day of class, students will review each other's blogs to prepare for a class discussion on important themes in health and human rights, and strategies to foster change.

Purpose of the Assignment

Clear and effective writing is needed to communicate ideas and drive change. There are many styles of writing, and this assignment focuses on a style that is commonly used for academic and practitioner public health audiences. The structure will also challenge you to articulate a clear story and share an idea with a broad non-expert audience.

In addition to improving your communication skills, the library research that you do to develop the commentary will help you gain more content expertise for your final project.

As all of you are interested in promoting health and human rights, creating a class website with your work will allow us to exchange ideas with each other and external audiences.

¹ Academic sources include: journal articles, books, government reports, important policy documents such as the Declaration of Helsinki, and research reports from reputable non-partisan research organizations (e.g., RAND or Mathematica Policy Research). For this assignment, Wikipedia, reports from partisan think tanks or advocacy groups, and newspaper articles do not count as academic sources. If you have a question about whether a source is appropriate, email the professor or teaching assistant.

Anticipated Completion Time for Part 1

This assignment replaces the midterm. Expect to spend the same amount of time completing this as you would spend preparing for and taking a midterm in an honors seminar.

Completing this entails multiple tasks:

- *Narrowing down your interest*—This requires exploring articles, government reports, and other academic sources in your area to gain a good understanding of the topic.
- *Becoming familiar with this writing style*—Carefully review the recipe below, and the three annotated samples.
- *Assembling an outline*—Follow the recipe. Each paragraph needs a topic sentence, so a good strategy is to first write all of your topic sentences.
- *Writing a first draft*—This will likely require going back to the literature to learn more about the topic as you fill in the details.
- *Proofreading your draft*—Look for obvious grammatical mistakes. Also think about whether your topic sentences are clearly communicating your arguments, and check that each paragraph contains one core idea.
- *Doing more proofreading*—It is helpful to break this up over a few days, to give yourself time in between reading.
- *Finalizing the citations*—Keep your references organized, as you will likely want to use them again for your final project.
- *Attending office hours*—You are strongly encouraged to visit the professor and teaching assistant's office hours with an early draft. We will not review a draft sent over email, but we are happy to provide feedback in person. If you cannot attend office hours, send an email and we will schedule an alternative time.

DO NOT PROCRASTINATE UNTIL THE WEEKEND OR DAYS BEFORE THE ASSIGNMENT IS DUE!

At that point, we cannot guarantee that we can meet with you and it will be difficult for you to complete these steps thoughtfully.

Commentary Structure

The commentary should follow the following general recipe. Three sample commentaries with annotations describing how the recipe was applied and other remarks (e.g., citation practices) are available in Blackboard.

Title	Give a catchy title that communicates your main argument
Paragraph 1	Provide a lede. This is your hook to get your audience interested. These can come in several formats, such as a fact or piece of news, an anecdote, or something that sets a scene. See http://training.npr.org/digital/leads-are-hard-heres-how-to-write-a-good-one/
Paragraph 2	Pose a puzzle.
Paragraphs 3, 4, ..., N-1	Provide details for your argument. Each argument should get its own paragraph and topic sentence.
Paragraph N	Summarize your argument.

Formatting for the Commentary

Follow the format of the first sample (“All Star Data”). A title page should contain a catchy title, your name, the word count, and any acknowledgements. The commentary should be: double-spaced, 12-point font, 12” margins, include page numbers, use APA citation style for your bibliography, add spaces between paragraphs to make it easy to read.

The 1200-word limit is absolute. You will not get extra credit for writing more words—in fact, you will get less. Writing clearly and concisely is an important skill.

Print a hard copy to submit to class in person. Print single-sided only.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

I take academic honesty very seriously. You are required to be familiar with the university’s academic honesty policies and ignorance is not an excuse. Avoid plagiarism by properly acknowledging material and ideas taken from other sources. The University at Albany Library offers a useful tutorial on plagiarism and how to avoid it:

<http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1>

If you cite a source, you must document it. Restate all ideas in your own words or else use quotation marks around the relevant passages. Use APA reference style:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/>

I encourage you to discuss ideas with others and review your peers' drafts, but this should be your own unique work. Add an acknowledgement if you received any assistance, including speaking with other professors, communicating with the librarian, or receiving editing assistance (see Sample 1).

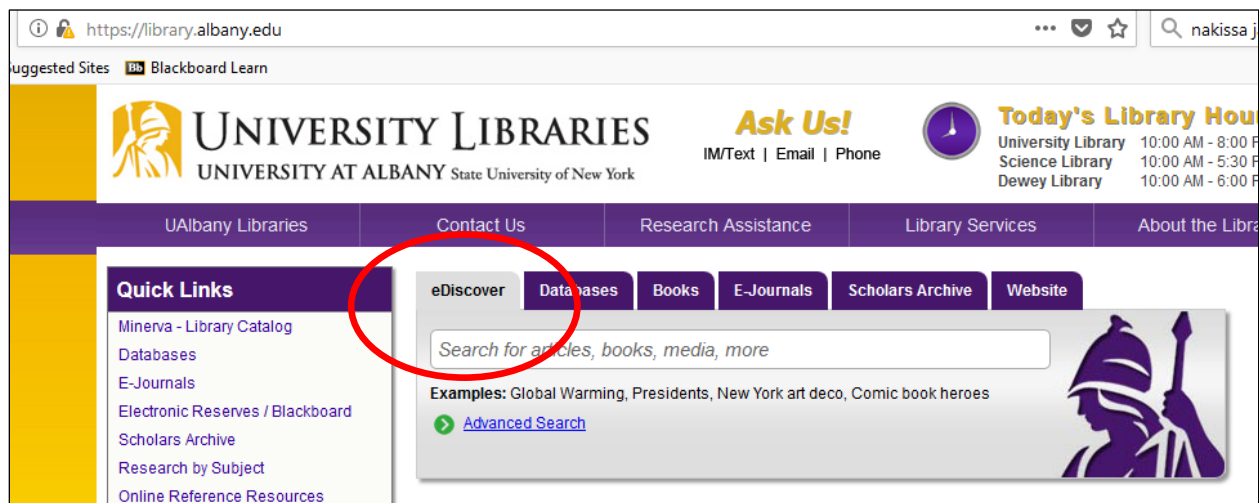
Stylistic Comments

- Use topic sentences
- Each idea gets its own paragraph
- Use a professional tone (see the samples as a guide)
- Cite all ideas and facts that you obtained from other sources (Wikipedia is not a source-appropriate sources are journal articles, books, and government reports.)
- Assume that your audience is familiar with health issues but not an expert in your topic (see the samples as a guide)
- Take advantage of Word's spell check and grammar check features, and also consider Grammarly

Library resources

To get started, look at the LibGuide that was developed for Professor Martin's other course: <http://libguides.library.albany.edu/pad704>

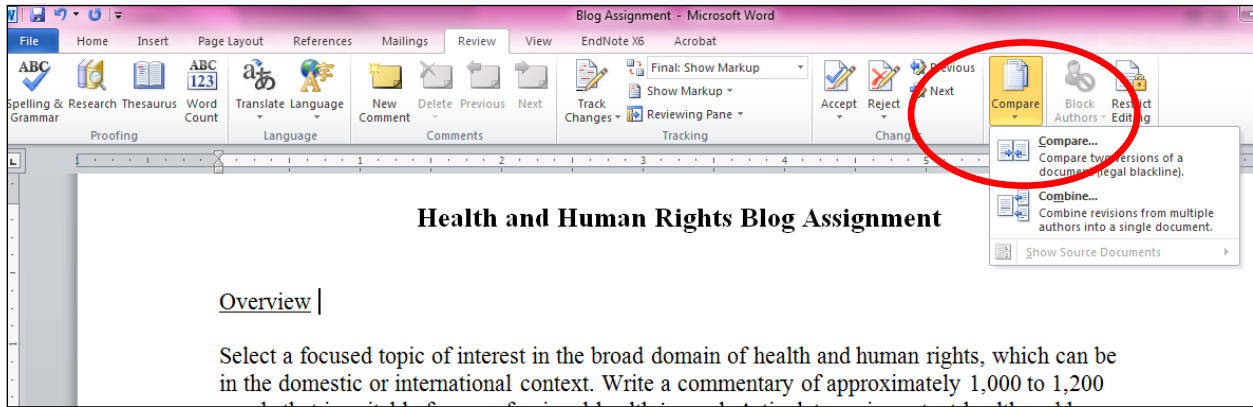
The university librarians strongly recommend starting all searches with their "eDiscover" engine on the main library webpage: <https://library.albany.edu/>. Once you log into the site as a UAlbany student, you will have access to all of the resources.



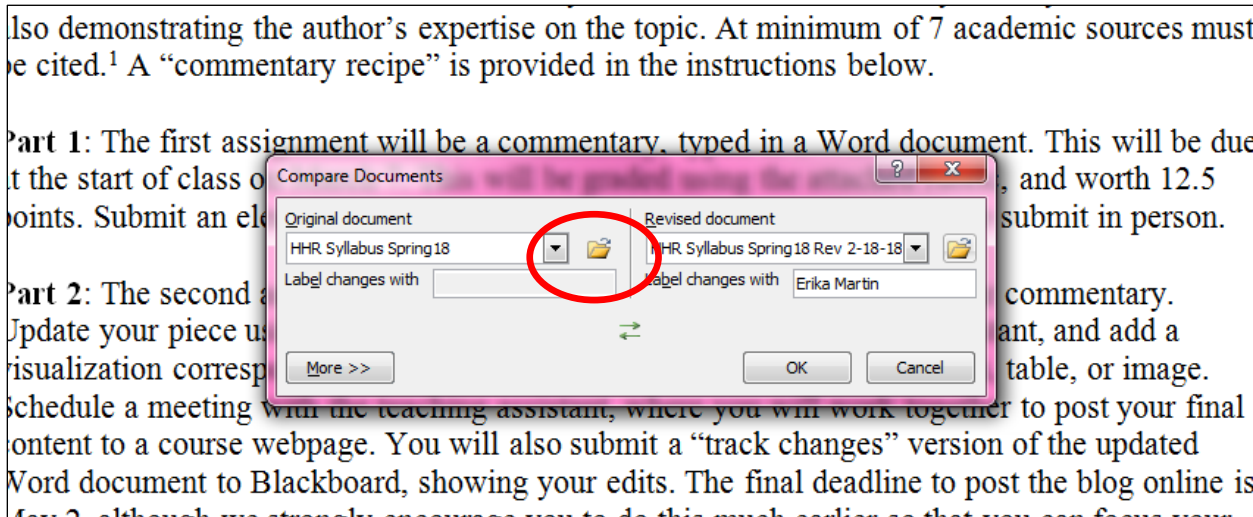
Creating a "Track Changes" Version in Word

For the revision and web posting (Part 2), you will upload an updated version of the Word document to Blackboard where we can see your edits. Word has a nifty compare documents feature that allows you to show mark-up between documents.

Start by going to the Review tab > Compare. From the drop-down menu, select “Compare... Compare two versions of a document (legal blackline).”



You will receive a dialogue box where you will be prompted to locate the original and revised documents. Click on the folder icon and Word will allow you to search through your directories to find the documents. The original document will be the version that you submitted on March 7. The revised document will be the updated version that you are posting online.



Click “OK” and Word will create a new document that shows all of the edits in track changes. This will be a new document, so you will need to save it with a new name. I suggested adding “track changes” at the end of the document name (e.g., “Revised Blog Track Changes”).

GRADING RUBRIC FOR PART 1 (COMMENTARY DUE MARCH 7)

Total score: _____ / 12.5 General comments:			
____ / 3	There is a well-articulated issue related to health and human rights.	The issue or how it relates to health/human rights is not fully articulated. (-0.6)	The issue or its relationship to health/human rights is poorly articulated. (-1.2)
____ / 3	Story has a clear narrative and logical progression of ideas (e.g., lede, problem statement, arguments, and conclusion)	In a few places the narrative is unclear or text needs minor reordering (-0.6)	There are several major errors in the narrative or organization (-1.2)
____ / 2.5	At least seven academic sources are used appropriately to support claims.	Some sources are missing, or there are some unsupported claims. (-0.5)	There are few academic citations and/or numerous unsupported claims. (-1)
____ / 1	All descriptions make sense, are to the point, and are easy to understand.	In a few places descriptions are not clear or there is extraneous information. (-0.2)	There are multiple instances of unclear descriptions or extraneous information. (-0.4)
____ / 1	Text can be skimmed to identify key points (e.g., appropriate topic sentences, one idea per paragraph).	There are a few places where text cannot be skimmed to identify key points. (-0.2)	It is not possible to skim the document and identify key points. (-0.4)
____ / 1	There are no or a few minor errors in grammar, punctuation, professional language, and spelling.	There are occasional errors or a few major errors. (-0.2)	There are many errors in grammar, punctuation, professional language, and spelling. (-0.4)
____ / 1	Assignment follows formatting instructions (e.g., title page, word count listed, font size)	There are minor errors. (-0.2)	There are major errors or multiple minor errors. (-0.4)

GRADING RUBRIC FOR PART 2 (REVISED BLOG DUE MAY 2)

Points will be awarded for satisfactory completion of the following tasks prior to May 2:

- Submit a revised version of the Word document to Blackboard, with edits shown in Track Changes. See the instructions above for how to do this. (+0.75)
- Add a visualization that is relevant to the text. This can be an image, chart, diagram, or table. If the image or visualization comes from another source, it must have an appropriate citation. If you create a chart using data, add a footnote explaining the original source. (+0.75)
- Meet with teaching assistant to post the blog online. (+1)

There will be no credit for late assignments.