

Pre-Capstone Workshop Exercise: Discovering Potential Topics and Research Objects

A Quick Note About Terminology

Capstone projects must have a clear design, with a specific **research object** located within a general **topic**, analyzed within a well-defined **methodology**, and everything aligned together. A **research object** is something very precisely defined, concrete, and distinctive that you analyze directly-- anything you could point to and say, "Yes, that's a thing I could show you and directly analyze." It could be a media text, material object, virtual or physical space, discursive formation, practice, performance, relational context, or audiencing context. A **topic** is a much broader abstract phenomenon: a social, political, and/or cultural issue pertinent to critical/cultural communication studies, something that could be researched using multiple different methodologies and studied by analyzing many different kinds of research objects. A **methodology** is a disciplined research approach that aligns a particular method of analysis with a particular theoretical framework or set of frameworks. You all should know what theories and frameworks are. A method of analysis is a specific way analyzing a particular research object, such as a textual analysis, a media platform analysis, an on-site visual/material/spatial analysis, etc.

The Exercise

(1). Your skill-set and interests. For five minutes, brainstorm a list of specific theories you continue to think about; specific personal, social, political, and/or cultural issues pertinent to CommStudies you know something about; and methods of analysis you have experience using --things that you are personally invested in, have researched, and might even consider yourself an authority on.

(2). Your identity. For five minutes, brainstorm a list of specific intersectional positionalities and/or subcultures that you are engaged with and might even consider yourself an authority on.

(3). Where your mind is right now. Now, take five minutes to list one to three social, political, and/or cultural concerns that have been on your mind a lot in the last few weeks, concerns that feel critically important to you or stimulate your curiosity right now.

(4). Research objects you know. Now, for five minutes brainstorm a list of specific "research objects" or "objects of analysis" you are intrigued/fascinated/obsessed/angered/troubled by. Don't worry if something here appears on the other lists as well.

(5). Your curiosities. Now look at all four lists. Circle one item from each list that you want to take a closer look at. Spend ten minutes considering the larger social and/or cultural topics or issues that these items reflect and freewriting a list of questions that you'd like to be able to answer for each of the things you circled and making a list of some things you might to do to research and address your curiosity about these concerns.

(6). Your connections. Now take another five to ten minutes to freewrite about any connections you see among the different concerns, looking for something that might cohere into a potential topic to explore or a list of potential research objects to analyze for Capstone.

As soon as you do this more concrete exploration and before you start actually writing your Initial Project Proposal, it will be good to extend this to write to yourself about the following bigger questions:

1. What do I want to happen in Capstone? What is my goal?
2. What/How do I want to feel when I am finished?
3. What/How do I not want to feel? What am I afraid might happen?
4. What are some concrete, behavioral things I can do to do to get where I want to be and avoid what I don't want to feel/happen?