

## **21W.011/Walsh Fall 2015 SOME PAST TOPICS FOR ESSAY #2**

Students often ask, “What social/ethical issues can I choose?” The possibilities are wide. **This handout IS NOT a suggested list of topics!** It merely lists some past topics. You can select other issues; you should clearly define a topic, which is not overly broad and (b) present different points of view. **First, choose a topic area** (e.g., Race/Ethnicity); **then, focus on a topic** (e.g., Affirmative Action in College Admissions).

**SOME PREVIOUS TOPICS** (U.S. focus, unless otherwise noted).

### **POVERTY**

Child Labor: Should it always be Illegal?  
Reducing Homelessness: Different Approaches  
Minimum Wage Laws: Do They Reduce Poverty Rates?  
Welfare Reform of the 1990s: Did it Reduce Poverty?

### **GENDER/SEXUALITY/FAMILY ISSUES**

Abortion Rights: Pro and Con  
Adoption Policy: Closed or Open Adoption?  
Arranged Marriage: Cultural Repression or Alternative Marriage Strategy?  
Divorce: Should Divorce Laws be Liberal/No-Fault?  
Domestic Violence: Different Approaches to Ending Partner Abuse  
The Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con  
Sex Education: Does it Belong in Public Schools?  
Single Sex Education: Alternative Educational Strategy or Gender Discrimination?  
Reducing Rates of Teen Pregnancy: Different Approaches  
Intersex Children: The Case For and Against Sex Assignment Surgery  
Working Mothers and Workplace Equity: Competing Approaches  
Affirmative Action for Gender Equity in the Workplace: Pro and Con  
Women and Workplace Equity in China: Different Strategies  
Religious Debates around the Status and Role of Women (In e.g., Judaism, Islam, Christianity)

### **EDUCATION**

SAT and College Admissions: Should the SAT be abolished?  
High-Stakes Educational Testing as a Strategy to Improve Public Schools: Pro and Con  
Service Learning in High School/College: Should it be Compulsory?  
Homeschooling: Pros and Cons  
Public Charter Schools: The Case For and Against  
Online Elementary and High School Education: Pro and Con  
For-Profit Colleges: Pro and Con  
Improving the Quality of Teaching in Public Schools: Contrasting Strategies  
Public School Teachers’ Unions: Pros and Cons

### **RACE/ETHNICITY**

Affirmative Action (in Education, Employment): Pro and Con  
Immigration Policy Reform: Different Approaches  
Reparations for Slavery: Pros and Cons

## **HEALTH**

Rights of Dying Patients: Right to Assisted Suicide?  
Mandatory Immunization: Public Health Necessity or Violation of Individual Rights?  
Legalizing Medical Marijuana: Pro and Con  
Should Governments have the right to mandate contraception in overpopulated countries?  
Organ Selling: Should It Be Legalized?  
ADHD: Is it Overdiagnosed?  
Tobacco: Should It Be Made Illegal?

## **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY/ENVIRONMENT**

Keystone XL Pipeline: Pro and Con  
Hydraulic Fracturing (“Fracking”): Pro and Con  
Alternatives to Fossil Fuels: The Comparative Benefits of Solar and Wind Energy  
Genetically Modified Foods: Benefits and Drawbacks  
Animal Rights in Scientific Research: Different Perspectives  
Stem Cell Research: Pro and Con  
Nuclear Power as an Alternative Energy Source: Pro and Con  
“Designer Babies”: Should We Use Technology to Create More Perfect Children?  
Siting a Bio-Safety Level 4 Research Lab in Boston: Pro and Con

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY/MEDIA**

File Sharing: Open Knowledge or Illegal Downloading?  
Social Networking Technologies: Positive and Negative Influences on Society  
Violent Video Games: Are They a Danger to Children and Adolescents?  
The Net Neutrality Debate  
Debates on Surveillance in the Digital Age (also under “Const. Rights”)

## **CONSTITUTIONAL AND OTHER RIGHTS; CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

Constitutionality of the Military Draft: Pro and Con  
Speech Codes on Campus: Pro and Con  
Gun Control: Pro and Con  
Rights of Mentally Ill Persons  
Pornography: Free Speech or Hate Speech?  
Should the Legal Drinking Age Be 18 (or lower) or 21?  
Should Marijuana be Legalized?  
Capital Punishment: Pro and Con  
Solitary Confinement: Is it Cruel and Unusual Punishment?  
Philosophy of Prisons: Punishment or Rehabilitation?  
*Citizens United Case* (U.S. Supreme Court) and Its Political Implications  
Graffiti: Free Speech or Vandalism?  
What’s for Dinner?: Meat-Eating and the Question of Animal Rights  
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Sample Essays from *Angles 2010*: “Individual Rights vs. Public Health: The Vaccination Debate” at <http://web.mit.edu/angles/2010>  
“Should Physician-Assisted Suicide Be Legal?” – Hoyin Au

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21W.011 Writing and Rhetoric: Rhetoric and Contemporary Issues  
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