Instructions for Writing Response Papers

Tiffany Muller Myrdahl

Geography 3381 / Global Studies 3381: Population in an Interacting World

Although response papers often get a bad rap as they are perceived of as useless busy work, you are encouraged to find value in these assignments. After all, they serve two important functions:

1. Response papers require you to concisely articulate the argument/s provided by the author/s whose work you have read or film you have watched. This helps you to become a more active reader/participant, which means that you look for clues and ask questions as you read, rather than passively accept any author’s argument. Further, by thinking about and working through an argument in writing, you are doing work that is essential to exam preparation, as exams will ask you to discuss arguments as well as analyze them.

2. Response papers also help me (and the TAs) know how you are doing in the course, as they allow us to see how well you comprehend the material you read and watch.

When you write response papers, then, make certain that you follow these instructions so that we all get the most out of the assignment. Response papers are graded on a ✓/ ✓−/ ✓+(and 0 for those who do not turn response papers in) system, so there is no partial credit for this assignment.

- Answer each question in full.
- Write in essay form, not in a list or series of bullets. I want to see how you connect topics and move from one point to the next, both within and between paragraphs.
- Write no more than one single-spaced page.
- Submit a typed, hard copy of the response paper in the class period following the text/video, unless otherwise noted in class.
- Be prepared to discuss your write-up in class.

One last note: Let me be clear that, unless I specify otherwise, I am not asking for your opinion about a text/film. As such, comments like, “The film was interesting” or, “The text was boring” are not useful—they tell me nothing about what you took away from the exercise of reading/watching. Instead, I will ask for you to summarize and evaluate arguments: you should be able to discern, a) what point/s the author was trying to get across, and b) what strengths and weaknesses exist in the argument (e.g., does the author make logical leaps? Does the author obviously exclude or not account for certain groups/points of view? What are the implications of these leaps of logic or exclusions?) In the same regard, your work is not being graded/evaluated on (the strength, weakness, or “correctness” of) your opinions; rather, your work is graded on your ability to correctly identify key arguments and discuss their relative strengths and weaknesses. If the distinction between the former (your opinion) and the latter (your synthesis and evaluation) is unclear, please come discuss your questions with me or one of the TAs.