ESSAY # 1: Speculating about Causes
ENGL 111; Speweik

Proposal Due: Submit proposals to the discussion board forum by Thursday, Sept. 14 (note: discussion board is different from the chatroom.)

Rough Draft Due: Tuesday, September 19
Final Draft Due: Thursday, September 28

Other dates to remember:
- Thursday, September 14: Writing Center Presentation in SE 223
- Tuesday, September 26: Meet on the 4th floor of the library for tour by Beth Johns

Reference: Summary of basic features of Speculating about Causes essay is available on the V-Space site.

The Assignment: In a 3-5 page essay, you should argue for the existence of a trend or phenomenon that affects higher education today. (For details about the selection of topics, see “Step 1” below.) In this essay, you will describe the trend/phenomenon you observe, list 3 main causes for the trend you identify. One of the three causes will be your favorite cause, the cause that you think is the most likely cause for the trend. You will develop a separate counterargument that argues against the “most likely” cause and a rebuttal that answers that counterargument. Ultimately, it should be very clear to readers which cause you think is the most likely for the trend you describe. See below for the components of the essay.

The Speculating about Causes essay is structured differently from the basic argument paper, but it still seeks to persuade an audience. For this paper you will need to do the following:

✧ Step 1. Identify an important or intriguing trend or phenomenon that affects higher education in today’s universities (example of trends we’ve read about so far include: rise of cheating, the rise of vocational as opposed to liberal arts education, the rise of technology as a teaching tool, increasing or decreasing diversity on campus, rise in commercialization of higher education, etc. You may also choose a trend that you deduce on your own.) A good test for a topic: Are the causes already settled? Or can I speculate about them in a new way? If you can still speculate about causes, proceed with your topic.
   In-Class Example: Grade Inflation.

✧ Step 2. Read the essays assigned for Thursday. Decide on a topic and argument and submit a proposal for your topic to the discussion board by Thursday, September 14.
   What does a proposal include? For this assignment (your first “real” essay), you should include the following in your proposal:
   ✧ Thesis
   ✧ Main ideas used to support your thesis
   ✧ Counterargument to your thesis

✧ Step 3. Plan your essay. Start by doing some prewriting that you will later turn in with your rough draft. Refer to NCH 47-65 for guidance on prewriting. You will need to brainstorm plausible causes for your trend using your own observations. You can supplement with research as needed.

✧ Step 4. Begin working on the rough draft.
   Your essay should include a paragraph that addresses each of the following:
   1. Introduce the topic and explain the existence of the trend/phenomenon. In the introduction, state a thesis that includes the possible causes for the trend and indicates which one you think is the most likely cause.
2. Explain and support possible cause #1 (use examples, evidence, quotes from a source, and/or other facts and discussion to support it. Note: all sources need to be cited.)
Briefly explain what weakness makes this cause unlikely as an explanation for the trend.
3. Explain and support possible cause #2. (use examples, evidence, quotes from a source, and/or other facts and discussion to support it. Note: all sources need to be cited.)
Briefly explain what weakness makes this cause unlikely as an explanation for the trend.
4. Explain and support the most likely cause, which is #3. In addition to explaining this cause, you will need to explain why this cause is the most likely of the three you’ve chosen.
5. Consider a counterargument against your most likely cause. Develop the opposing perspective as fully as possible. Then (preferably in the same paragraph), give a rebuttal for this counterargument. The rebuttal should address why the counterargument does not weaken your argument. (You may want to consider unstated assumptions in the opposing view and refute them for the rebuttal.)
6. Conclude your argument in a way that is thought-provoking and interesting to readers. Do not just restate your position, but do not introduce entirely new main points in the final paragraph either.
7. Consider your audience’s needs. Do you have clear topic sentences, clear transitions, interesting examples, an interesting introduction and conclusion, a minimum of mechanical errors? Have you really considered and accommodated the opposing viewpoint?

✧ **Step 5. Follow MLA format guidelines.**
✧ **Step 6. Revise based on my feedback and that from your peers, edit your work, and proofread it so you can turn in an error-free copy for your final draft.** Make an appointment at the Writing Center if you need help at any stage of your project. You may also schedule a meeting with me (x4332 or hrspewei@svsu.edu).

**What is the difference between trends and phenomena?**
A trend is a change over time. It identifies an activity that is increasing or decreasing. If changes have direction and momentum over a long period of time, we call them trends. These differ from fads, however, which are temporary, insignificant changes in people’s preferences and actions. Fads enjoy brief popularity and then fade quickly after fulfilling the human desire for novelty. They are too short-lived to be considered trends.

Phenomena are permanent patterns of activity. They continue to happen, and the ways in which they happen do not change. Neither phenomena nor trends should be confused with events, which happen only once.

An ‘A’ paper will be well-developed, clearly organized, and engaging with clear attention to the needs of a specific audience. It will also be relatively free of mechanical errors, word choice errors, and errors in sentence structure. An ‘A’ paper will make me and your peers think without making us work too hard to understand your message. This is something that is very difficult to achieve on the first essay (but remember you can revise your essays for the final portfolio). The B, C, and non-passing essays will be deficient or weak in one or more of the areas described above.

*Caveat:* Remember to keep all drafts related to this essay (from prewriting to final draft) in a centralized location. Keep a hard copy and continue to back-up all electronic copies you produce. It is a good idea to save the rough draft separate from the final draft (instead of saving over the top) in case you lose your rough draft hard copy at some point. Just some words to the wise!