Appendix 3
H205 Spring 2012 Instructions for Individual Research Paper

Introduction:
Each group member has to write a four to eight (ideally about six) page research paper - roughly 1000 – 2000 words - of his or her subtopic done in preparation for the group presentation. This paper is due on April 16. You will receive an individual grade for this paper worth 15% of your total grade.

In order to get you started on your research and provide you with a chance for my feedback, I am asking you to submit a research proposal in preparation for your paper. Please submit a proposal of your individual research of about 100 words in length together with an annotated bibliography, citing at least three sources which are not part of the course readings, due on April 2. Should you not submit a research proposal on time, you will not be able to receive a grade of B+ or better for the research paper.

The Research Paper
The following questions should guide your research paper. Below are the categories for evaluation accompanied by guiding questions for each category as well as a rubric with a breakdown for evaluating your work.

1) Fit with Umbrella Topic: How does your research topic contribute to or fit with the umbrella topic? Briefly describe the connection that your research is making to the group topic and/or the other group members.

2) Discussion of Subtopic: What are the central arguments or themes that emerged from your research in support of your subtopic? Note: you need to consult at least two different reputable authors or sources and present these positions clearly, accurately and fairly. By reputable, I mean that you should consult professional books, journals and websites, not just Wikepedia or quick reference sites. By fairly, I mean that the position should not just be a rhetorical or straw position against which you will argue in your criticism – see below. It needs to be a position that is taken seriously.

3) Criticism: What arguments did you encounter in the research that can be considered objections, criticisms, or refutations of the arguments or themes under (1)? Note: Here you should cite at least one author or source that represents such criticism, objection or refutation. Of course you are encouraged to come up with more objections to demonstrate your critical thinking skills.

4) Professional Judgment: What is your own agreement or disagreement of the points under (2) and/or (3) as a professional educator? Note: you may (partially) agree or disagree with points under (2) and (3). It is important that you justify your position. Mention at least two points total of agreement or disagreement.

5) Personal Reflection:
What are two most important points you learned OR found most interesting OR found valuable OR irritating in the literature you consulted for your research from the perspective of a professional educator?

Please note: Your claims and critical comments should be backed up by sound arguments, meaning that you should not just make a statement but you need to give reasons to back up your claim. Example: Author X claims that the US has the best higher education system in the world because... (give reasons). Beware of committing fallacies (errors in reasoning). Look out for faulty generalizations.

For those of you who are unsure what an argument is or what I mean by critical reading, writing and fallacies, I have posted a handout under “Resources”, called “Critical Reading, Writing, Argumentation and Fallacies.” This gives you a quick overview with examples of how to evaluate an argument and it lists the major fallacies.

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<tr>
<th>Items of Evaluation</th>
<th>Grade %</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Discussion of Subtopic</td>
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<td>Discussed topic adequately and comprehensively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presented the arguments of at least two authors/sources about the subtopic in an accurate and fair manner</td>
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<td>2. Fit with Umbrella Topic</td>
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<td>Showed and clearly explained how the individual subtopic contributes and fits with the umbrella topic</td>
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<td>3. Criticism</td>
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<td>Stated clearly at least one critical argument against the original subtopic</td>
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<td>Cited at least one author or source</td>
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<td>4. Professional Judgment</td>
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<td>Presented two points of professional judgment, supported by reasons</td>
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<td>5. Personal Reflection</td>
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<td>Provided at least two personal statements with justification</td>
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<td>6. References &amp; Quality of Writing</td>
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<td>✓ Appropriate use of references and quotations. Direct quotes should not exceed 10% of text</td>
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<td>✓ Quality of writing is excellent (i.e., paper is free of grammatical, stylistic and spelling errors)</td>
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<td>✓ Paper is well organized, has smooth transitions, and structure is consistent throughout paper</td>
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<td>✓ Exposition of ideas is clear and paper is well reasoned</td>
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1. Fit with Umbrella Topic

This research paper focuses on the influence of “testing on education” in both China and the United States. Since testing is becoming more and more important in elementary schools around the United States, I wanted to compare our system with China’s because China places strong emphasis on testing. This topic is connected to the topic of international education as it compares two different nations and their education systems, as well as focuses on the benefits and the drawbacks of standardized testing in both countries and the effects of this standardization on the students. Testing around the world serves different purposes and allows all students to have an opportunity to perform on the same leveled playing field. International schools prepare students with curriculum similar to schools in the United States; therefore, testing allows for comparison between students in both countries.

2. Discussion of Subtopic

Education is sharing and receiving knowledge in order to improve one’s quality of life. The way people are educated differs around the world. Historically, China and the United States have been considered powerful nations. Nations reach this status by the impact their people make on the world. Both countries have high academic standards and great schooling systems; these systems are constantly analyzed and show many benefits and drawbacks. Although no method can be deemed correct or incorrect, constructive criticisms can lead to improvements.

In the United States, students go through a hierarchical education system, beginning with primary/elementary school, continuing with middle/junior high school, and finally moving on to higher education. According to journalist, Elisabeth Rosenthal, formative assessments are given throughout these phases. “These are not the big once-a-year or once-in-a-lifetime exams, like the SATs, but a stream
of smaller, less monumental tests, designed in theory, at least, primarily to help students and their
teachers know how they’re doing” (Rosenthal, 2011). Standardized state tests such as the Indiana
Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) are an example of smaller tests that students take
throughout middle school. These state exams ultimately reflect the performance of both the students
and teachers.

Admittance into a public high school does not require examinations, but once in high school,
tests are administered to determine college-readiness. For example, college-level courses such as
Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses are offered and taught in high school. The
AP or IB exams taken at the end of the year allow students to receive college credit and to experience
college level classes.

Finally, examinations are required to monitor the academic progress of students and evaluate
their preparedness for college or university. One such exam that high school students take for college
admission is the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The SAT assesses a student’s knowledge in mathematics,
verbal reasoning, and writing. Scores on these portions are combined and are out of 2400 points
(Fletcher, 2009). All colleges around the United States accept SAT scores as one of the admissions
criteria. The American College Testing (ACT) is another standardized test that can be used for college
admission. The ACT tests students in math, reading, English, and scientific principles. It is scored on a
scale of 0-36 points (Fletcher, 2009). Both the SAT and the ACT reflect the focus of education in the
American school system, which is why both are widely accepted around the nation. An average score
will gain a student admission into a decent university; an exemplary score may increase the likelihood of
being admitted into a prestigious university, perhaps in the Ivy League. Schools in this League are
considered to be some of the top schools in the United States. However, no matter how high the scores
are on these exams, students still have the ability to be admitted to a university with other credentials
including grades, essays, and extra-curricular activities. In the United States, all students are given a fair
chance to be accepted into a university, no matter how well they can take tests. Different universities have different standards: an American university chooses the students as a whole, not just by their test scores.

Although the Chinese and US education systems are similar in structure, Chinese students go through optional kindergarten schooling, then a government mandated nine years of schooling, which includes primary and middle school. After a student finishes middle school, he has the option of attending a senior high school or a vocational school, both lasting three years. However, if he chooses to attend a senior high school, he must be accepted. Acceptance is based on scores received on the Zhongkao, the senior high school entrance exam. Weekend classes are offered to help prepare students for this exam.

Once in high school, students begin preparation for the most important exam of their lives: the gaokao. The gaokao is a college entrance exam, similar to the ACT or SAT, but much more intense. Students begin preparing for it in 10th grade by attending cram sessions on the weekends and studying many hours during the week, along with completing their daily homework. Emphasis is placed on this exam because it is the only way for a student to be accepted into college. In China, the test scores decide which university a student will attend. If the university chose its students like American universities, there would be more room for corruption and bribery, so the gaokao “is the fairest and most humane way to distribute China’s [scarce] education resources” (Larson, 2011). The gaokao is scored out of 750 points. The “best” score is the highest score received on that year’s examination. That score becomes the standard score all colleges in China will use to accept their students that year. An intelligent student may receive a high enough score to get into a C9 university, which is a group of nine universities that are comparable to the United States’ Ivy League and include universities such as Peking University and Zhejiang University. A mediocre or low score can place a student in one of the other 300 universities in China.
The Chinese education system is highly test-based, while the US education system focuses on learning for personal enhancement. However, people from both countries are worried about where each country is headed. For example, China is beginning to worry that if their students continue rote learning and memorize information, they will be unable to advance and compete globally because the students will lack creativity. Without creativity, there is no innovation, thus pulling China back from being a powerful country (Hopper, 2010). Margot Landman, the director of a teacher exchange program for the National Committee on United States-China Relations, said, “It’s really deeply ingrained in Chinese culture to fit in, to not be the nail that sticks up and gets hammered down and there’s also a very deeply ingrained sense of shame and being afraid to make mistakes and I don’t think you make discoveries… without lots of failures” (Hopper, 2010). The effects of China’s testing system are affecting its economic stability because the students have lost their ability to think freely and to be flexible, due to the rigidity of the teaching and study methods.

On the other hand, the United States is moving closer to the idea of increased testing in order for its students to be competitive with Chinese students. The No Child Left Behind Act under the Bush administration requires all students to be tested for progress in math and reading. The results of these tests effect the funding a school receives. More pressure is put on teachers rather than the students because the teachers have their jobs on the line; the students do not have anything to lose if they score poorly. The No Child Left Behind Act and the new “Race to the Top” initiative under the Obama administration emphasize testing so that students can improve in various subjects; however, since school funding is contingent upon these test scores, students are technically not the main focus.

3. Criticism

Standardized tests are one of the most heavily debated topics comparing Chinese and American education systems. A strong opponent of the overuse of testing is Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary of Education under the Bush administration. Ravitch was once a supporter of the NCLB and
agreed on its formation. However, she currently opposes it. She believes that NCLB is "a timetable for the destruction of American public education" (Staff, 2011). In her opinion, subjects such as history, math, reading, science, arts, and government should all be of the same value in the classroom. With these new acts and initiatives, more time and effort are devoted to teaching math and reading in order to better prepare students for standardized test, thus "losing time for good education" (Staff, 2011). If students are just learning material for standardized tests, they truly are not learning.

Students may memorize information for one test, take the test, and forget the information afterward. There is no sense in testing students on information they will eventually forget. Ravitch said, "The schools will surely be failures if students graduate knowing how to choose the right option from four bubbles on a test, but unprepared to lead fulfilling lives, to be responsible citizens, and to make good choices for themselves, their families, and our society" (Downey, 2010). In order to better prepare American students, it is important to focus less on testing and focus more on the student. If teachers did not have to worry so much about their students receiving certain scores on these tests, they could have the opportunity to get to know their students better and find strategies to improve weaknesses. In an article posted on the Huffington Post, Ravitch says that the real reason why Americans are behind in education compared to China is because there is a lack of student effort (Ravitch, 2007). If students are not motivated to do well in school, they will not do well. Chinese students have the motivation to do well because they have to do well in order to pass the gaokao and continue their education.

Liu Jinghai, principal at Zhabei No. 8 Middle School in Shanghai, opposes the current teaching and testing practices in China. "Why don’t Chinese students dare to think? Because we insist on telling them everything. We’re not getting our kids to go and find things out for themselves,” he says (Gifford, 2010). Since Chinese schools are trained to prepare students for the gaokao, rote learning and memorization techniques are used in teaching. This prevents students from thinking analytically or
creating new ways to solve problems. Jinghai believes that the Chinese education system needs to be reformed in order to fix these problems that Chinese students face today.

4. Professional Judgment

There are many advantages and disadvantages to the Chinese method of testing and teaching, and as an educator I partially agree with the idea of the gaokao. An advantage of the gaokao is that it provides all students an equal opportunity to be accepted in a college. Students from every background in China can take this exam and receive a score that they deserve, regardless of their socioeconomic status. The basis behind this exam is to make sure that students get into college by merit and not by placing favors or bribing a university. For this reason, I understand why the gaokao is necessary for Chinese students.

However, as stated numerous times, preparation for the gaokao is purely memorization, which is the disadvantage of this system. Memorizing information does not necessarily mean that a student is actually processing that information. If information is not being processed and internalized then there is no use in learning it. I think that students waste three years of their lives preparing for a meaningless test. In the United States, tests like the ACT and SAT test knowledge that can be applied to real-life situations and require critical thinking skills. American students are forced to use prior knowledge and basic skills in order to solve math problems, for example. On the gaokao, students are not able to use their imagination because the gaokao asks for straight-forward, clear-cut answers. This type of testing does not help a student because it discourages thinking. In the future, I believe Chinese students may have a hard time solving problems they may face in their workplaces because they are so used to being given answers.

I have a bias toward the American system since I have been taught in this system. Although the American system of testing is not perfect, I think it has more positive aspects to it than the Chinese system. In America, a student who is struggling in classes is not told that he will not be able to go to
college. He is given numerous chances to complete work in class, to receive outside help, and to do well on tests. Accommodations are easily made for students who have difficulties and who may be weak in certain areas. Students with special needs, for example, are given the same opportunities as students without special needs to succeed in classes. Extra teachers, extra time on tests and extra support are given to these students to make sure that they know they can be successful. If a student does not receive the greatest score on a standardized test the first time, he has the opportunity to take it multiple times until he is satisfied with his results. This allows students to set their own goals and to reach their own potentials. In China, however, students only have one chance, and if that chance happens to turn out poorly, there is no hope for their futures.

5. Personal Reflection

The main thing I learned while doing research on this topic is to be thankful for the opportunities I received while applying to colleges. Before researching this topic and before entering college, I was against the system of standardized tests, mainly the ACT. I could not see why one number (ACT score) had a huge impact on college admission. I understood that there must be a standard to which all applicants must be compared to, but I did not like the idea in general. However, after researching another country’s testing policy and administration, I suddenly did not mind it so much. I would much rather be given the opportunity to take the ACT or SAT multiple times in order to reach a certain score, than have my life be dependent on one test. I am not the strongest test-taker, so being given the opportunity to study and take multiple exams in the United States is definitely what I would choose over any other option. I do not look at standardized testing as critically as I used to because I know there are students around the world who would love to be in my position and have multiple opportunities to succeed.

Every article I found while researching criticized the Chinese system of education. Americans and Chinese were equally critical of the gaokao and the preparation leading up to it. If there are so many
people against the gaokao, why has the Chinese government not made any efforts to improve its testing system? I find it quite irritating that the government sees how test preparation is affecting their economy, yet there are no alternative solutions to resolve the problem. I personally do not think that test preparation should totally consume a student’s life because it prevents the student from exploring other activities, such as sports or the arts. I think the Chinese government should try to find a better solution to educating its students because this system of preparation is setting the student up for failure in the future. The United States leads China in creating new businesses first, such as Apple or Facebook. This is because the United States has innovators who use their creativity and their abilities to change their way of life. China is a great country for manufacturing, because manufacturing consists of repeating the same action over and over to make a product, requiring little to no creativity. If China wants to advance in innovation, it must allow its students to think for themselves and allow them the flexibility and freedom in choosing their higher education institutions.
Bibliography


