**Topics for the Project Paper**

﻿You will start to work on the portfolio paper from Sequence 2. Several possible topics are provided to you, but you are also free and encouraged to find your own topic (you shouldn’t feel constrained to the topics I offer). If you would like to talk to me about the topic just for your own insurance, I would recommend that you discuss with me as early as possible. Note that a group of 3 students will work under the same topic, *but you will submit your individual essay and portfolio, rather than a group one*.

1. **Is Artificial Intelligence Good for Society?**

<https://www.britannica.com/procon/artificial-intelligence-AI-debate>

* **Pros and Cons at a Glance**

| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| --- | --- |
| Pro 1: AI can make everyday life more convenient and enjoyable, improving our health and standard of living. | Con 1: AI will harm the standard of living for many people by causing mass unemployment as robots replace people. |
| Pro 2: AI makes work easier for students and professionals alike. | Con 2: AI can be easily politicized, spurring disinformation and opinions masquerading as facts. |
| Pro 3: AI helps marginalized groups by offering accessibility for people with disabilities. | Con 3: AI hurts racial minorities by repeating and exacerbating human racism. |
| Pro 4: Artificial intelligence can improve workplace safety. | Con 4: Artificial intelligence poses dangerous privacy risks. |

* **Discussion Questions**

1. What applications would you like to see AI take over? What applications would you like to see AI stay away from? Explain your answer(s).
2. Think about how AI impacts your daily life. Do you use facial recognition to unlock your phone or a digital assistant to get the weather, for example? Do these applications make your life easier or could you live without them? Explain your answers.
3. Have you used ChatGPT or another AI text generator? What did you use it for and why?
4. Do you think using AI for homework is OK? Why or why not?

* **Take Action**

1. Consider Kai-Fu Lee’s TED Talk argument that [AI can “save our humanity](https://www.britannica.com/Considerhowyoufeltabouttheissuebeforereadingthisarticle.Afterreadingtheprosandconsonthistopic,hasyourthinkingchanged?Ifso,how?Listtwotothreeways.Ifyourthoughtshavenotchanged,listtwotothreewaysyourbetterunderstandingofthe%E2%80%9Cothersideoftheissue%E2%80%9Dnowhelpsyoubetterargueyourposition.).”
2. Listen to AI-expert Toby Walsh discuss the [pros and cons of AI](https://www.britannica.com/podcasts/thinkers-and-doers/movers-and-doers-Karthik-Krishnan-Toby-Walsh) in his interview at Britannica.
3. Learn “[everything you need to know about artificial intelligence](https://www.zdnet.com/article/what-is-ai-heres-everything-you-need-to-know-about-artificial-intelligence/)” with Nick Heath
4. Examine the [“weird” dangers of AI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhCzX0iLnOc) with Janelle Shane’s TED Talk.
5. **Is Binge-watching Good for You?**

<https://www.britannica.com/procon/binge-watching-debate>

* **Pros and Cons at a Glance**

| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| --- | --- |
| Pro 1: Binge-watching establishes beneficial social connections. | Con 1: Binge-watching leads to mental health issues. |
| Pro 2: Binge-watching has health benefits such as stress relief. | Con 2: Binge-watching can cause serious physical health problems. |
| Pro 3: Binge-watching makes a show more fulfilling. | Con 3: Binge-watching makes the show less fulfilling. |

* **Discussion Questions**

1. Do you prefer watching several episodes of a new show at one time or one episode per week? How does your viewing experience change when binge-watching?
2. What other pros and cons for binge-watching can you list? Which side do you find more convincing and why?
3. What reasons can you think of to explain why some streaming services like Netflix drop a full season at once? What reasons might a service such as Disney+ have for posting just one episode per week?
4. Does binge-watching shows contribute to digital addiction? Explain your answer.

* **Take Action**

1. Contemplate [Talib Babb’s comedic take](https://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/why-binge-watching-is-good-for-you)on “Why Binge-watching Is Good for You.”
2. Investigate your own binge-watching with the “[Quarantine Binge Watching Calculator](https://www.omnicalculator.com/everyday-life/binge-watching).”
3. Consider Jake Pitre’s [critical theory of binge-watching](https://daily.jstor.org/critical-theory-binge-watching/).
4. **Do Standardized Tests Improve Education?**

<https://www.britannica.com/procon/standardized-tests-debate>

* **Pros and Cons at a Glance**

| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| --- | --- |
| Pro 1: Standardized tests offer an objective measurement of education. | Con 1: Standardized tests only determine which students are good at taking tests. |
| Pro 2: Standardized tests help students in marginalized groups. | Con 2: Standardized tests are racist, classist, and sexist. |
| Pro 3: Standardized tests scores are good indicators of college and job success. | Con 3: Standardized tests scores are not predictors of future success. |
| Pro 4: Standardized tests are useful metrics for teacher evaluations. | Con 4: Standardized tests are unfair metrics for teacher evaluations. |

* **Discussion Questions**

1. Do you think standardized tests improve education? Why or why not?
2. Think of the standardized tests you have taken. Did they accurately reflect your knowledge of the topics being tested?
3. If standardized tests were eliminated, how do you think students should be assessed and graded?

* **Take Action**

1. Analyze [Matthew Pietrafetta’s](https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/views/2020/08/24/defense-standardized-tests-opinion) defense of standardized tests.”
2. Explore the standardized testing debate with the [Glossary of Education Reform](https://www.edglossary.org/standardized-test/).
3. Consider the con opinion of former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education and historian [Diane Ravitch](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/02/01/need-to-know-about-standardized-testing/).
4. Evaluate [FairTest](https://fairtest.org/get-involved-opting-out/" \t "_blank)’s “testing is not teaching” campaign for opting out of standardized tests.
5. **Is Cancel Culture Constructive for Society?**

<https://www.britannica.com/procon/cancel-culture-debate>

* **Pros and Cons at a Glance**

| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| --- | --- |
| Pro 1: Cancel culture allows marginalized people to seek accountability where the justice system fails. | Con 1: Cancel culture is online bullying, often inciting violence and threats that are worse than the supposed offense being called out. |
| Pro 2: Cancel culture gives a voice to disenfranchised or less powerful people. | Con 2: Cancel culture is not productive and does not bring about social change. |
| Pro 3: Cancel culture is simply a new form of boycott, a cherished tactic in the civil rights movement, to spur social change. | Con 3: Cancel culture is a slippery slope that spurs intolerance as people systematically exclude anyone who disagrees with their views. |

* **Discussion Questions**

1. Is cancel culture good for society? Why or why not?
2. What are the most productive ways to interact with someone who has opinions different from your own or who has said something offensive?
3. Does cancel culture undermine a person’s right to free speech?
4. Did cancel culture arise from digital addiction?

* **Take Action**

1. Examine [Osita Nwanevu’s argument](https://newrepublic.com/article/155141/cancel-culture-con-dave-chappelle-shane-gillis) that cancel culture is about women and minorities gaining power.
2. Consult [Merriam Webster’s](https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/cancel-culture-words-were-watching) dictionary explanation of cancel culture.
3. Consider [Sam Biddle’s apology](https://www.yahoo.com/news/journalist-apologizes-for--hasjustinelandedyet-twitter-uproar-after-pr-exec-s-aids-joke-164616178.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAFjnoMzM9ve5OAw1A838YqxurzB6Uqjy3gs2hHyum_XgkTzKM8OFdY7fVDaa5cPLqWmnFQP6-CBD_M5cc7iyTemRrS4HxtxR1pLPS0xox8gDfrPZN--dYj2fipMTzzUk4IhITw1QecKPOl784eIX-qLNWaWq9HAwNA1sCdEmn1Vd) for causing the canceling of Justine Sacco for her ill-considered tweet.
4. **Can Alternative Energy Effectively Replace Fossil Fuels?**

<https://www.britannica.com/procon/alternative-energy-debate#ref-table-2255604>

* **Pros and Cons at a Glance**

| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| --- | --- |
| Pro 1: Alternative energies not only can but must replace fossil fuels if we want to continue living on Earth. | Con 1: Natural gas, a fossil fuel, is an appropriate and necessary bridge fuel to meet net-zero emissions goals. |
| Pro 2: Many countries are already operating on significant renewable energy sources. | Con 2: The idea that renewable energies will fill the energy needs of large countries anytime soon is ridiculous and hinders realistic change for the better. |
| Pro 3: Nuclear energy, a low-carbon source of alternative energy, is the quickest way to end dependence on fossil fuels. | Con 3: Nuclear energy is too dangerous and ineffective to be a serious solution to global warming. |

* **Discussion Questions**

1. Should alternative energies be given priority over fossil-fuel energies? Why or why not?
2. Consider the pros and cons of individual alternative energies including nuclear, solar, wind, and others. Which are best to use? Explain your answers.
3. Compare and contrast nuclear energy to renewable energies. Which do you think should be used? Explain your answer.

* **Take Action**

1. Consider the [Natural Resources Defense Council](https://www.nrdc.org/stories/renewable-energy-clean-facts)’s article on renewable energies.
2. Explore [TED Talks](https://www.ted.com/search?cat=videos&q=alternative+energy) on alternative energies.
3. Analyze the data from the [Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/01/15/renewable-energy-is-growing-fast-in-the-u-s-but-fossil-fuels-still-dominate/) about the dominance of fossil fuels.
4. **Should Obesity Be Treated as a Disease?**

<https://www.britannica.com/procon/obesity-debate>

* **Pros and Cons at a Glance**

| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| --- | --- |
| Pro 1: Obesity is medically defined as a disease. | Con 1: Medicalizing obesity discourages people from taking responsibility for unhealthy choices. |
| Pro 2: Obesity is a disease that even increases the risk for other diseases. | Con 2: Obesity alone is not an indicator of ill health. |
| Pro 3: Treating obesity as a disease has social value by lowering the stigma associated with being “fat.” | Con 3: Treating obesity as a disease has had an unintended consequence — the irresponsible glorification of unhealthiness. |

* **Discussion Questions**

1. Should obesity be treated as a disease? Why or why not?
2. Should obesity be treated with medication? Why or why not?
3. How can we treat obesity socially? Consider transportation seat sizes, meal portions, and clothing size availability, among other factors that make navigating the world difficult for some. Explain your answer.

* **Take Action**

1. Consider the pro position of the [Obesity Society](https://www.obesity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Jastreboff_et_al-2019-Obesity.pdf).
2. Explore the topic of obesity at the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/health-topics/obesity#tab=tab_1) (WHO) website.
3. Analyze the con position of [Dr. D.L. Katz](https://www.nature.com/articles/508S57a).