To: Professor Dave Toomey
From: Sabrina Taylor
Date: February 20, 2019
Subject: Final Project Documentation Plan

I.   Summary

The purpose of this documentation plan is to introduce and outline my final project for this course, which is going to focus on the relationship between technology and culture through <u>artificial intelligence and the establishment of new types of institutionalized racism</u> that this kind of technology gives room for. In this documentation plan, I will set up the background context that is necessary for understanding the purpose of this paper, which is ultimately to tackle a very new and increasingly dangerous issue of digital discrimination. After this, I will layout the proposed content and scope of this research paper, as well as the tentative schedule for completing this project. Finally, I will conclude my documentation plan with any final thoughts and hopes that I have for this long-term assignment.

II.   Project Description

<u>Background</u>

As of right now, the intersection of technology and discrimination is such a new concept that it is difficult to have fully-fleshed discussions on the impact of algorithms and how they mirror the same kind of discrimination that exists in the "real world", or outside of the technological world. Because it has only been in the last decade or so that companies and institutions have begun heavily relying on data and information to be stored primarily digitally, our world today is only beginning to scratch the surface of the impact that this kind of reliance on code and algorithms has on certain systems, especially in a large-scale institutional sense.

<u>Purpose</u>

The purpose of this research paper is to begin, or continue expanding on, a new discussion of social injustice that surrounds the digital sphere which has consumed our

lives in many ways. Inevitably, our dependence on technology for so many systems and structures that make up our daily lives has begun to advance in a way that seemingly has allowed it to make very complex decisions through the use of algorithms behind the machines that we are interacting with on a daily basis. In particular, these new complex tasks that companies and institutions are now relying on technology for have given room for discrimination across race, gender, and other minority groups. While it is easy to assume that these machines are simply robots that cannot form any subjective opinions because they do not have minds of their own, the answer is much more complex than this. The purpose of my research paper is to get to the deeper-rooted issues that lie behind the coding and algorithms which make up many of the machines we rely on heavily today, such as with our criminal justice system or with everyday tasks such as facial recognition. While it is not the machines themselves that develop inherent biases about other individuals based on factors such as race or gender, it is their programmers which are human beings with inherent biases and opinions that are creating these machines and making up their internal process.

III. Project Overview

Content & Scope

It is difficult to discuss the content and scope of this paper as of right now because I have not yet begun the research element of this project, so this is a very bare-bones outline of the kind of content that will be covered in this assignment. With this research paper, generally, I am very invested in analyzing recent cases of minority discrimination (such as through race or gender) that has been the fault of technology or particular coding algorithms.

In particular, I am very interested in a topic that I was introduced to through an article I read a few months back which helped to form my thoughts on this paper's essential problem, and ultimately inspired this research paper completely. In a New York Times opinion piece by Michelle Alexander titled *The Newest Jim Crow*, Alexander introduces the term "e-carceration" as a dangerous system of criminal justice reform that still plays

heavily into racial disparities and institutionalized forms of racism. Alexander introduces the new concept of "risk assessment" algorithms which recommend to judges whether a person who's been arrested should be released. In this article, Alexander acknowledges that many technological devices "appear colorblind on the surface but they are based on factors that are not only highly correlated with race and class, but are also significantly influenced by pervasive bias in the criminal justice system." In this sense, I am interested in focusing my paper on this kind of issue of the codes that make up important software systems within our government and state institutions, and how these codes have led to new forms of digital discrimination that are not as apparent because of the technological aspect that prevents accountability from being held. In my conclusion for this research paper, I plan to offer solutions for "hacktivism" and reform against these dangerous digital mechanisms and combat social injustice in the digital sphere.

Project Timeline

The tentative schedule for this research paper is as follows:

Task	Projected Deadline
Complete Documentation Plan	February 21, 2019
Begin Researching Project	February 21 - March 1, 2019
Draft First Third of Paper	March 1 - March 18, 2019
Meet with Professor Toomey to Check-in on Progress	~ March 18, 2019
Draft Second Third	March 18 - April 18, 2019
Progress Report to Toomey	April 18, 2019
Complete Final Third	April 18 - May 8, 2019
Project Presentation	April 30, 2019
Submit Final Project	May 8, 2019

IV. Conclusion

I am so genuinely excited to begin to fully flesh-out this research paper and begin to better understand the way that technology and culture intersect through this very new issue of institutionalized racism in the digital world. However, by the same token, I am afraid and unsure of how much concrete information I will be able to find on this subject due to the fact that it is an issue we are currently living in, and therefore, are still experiencing and have not yet researched yet in its entirety. My hope for this research paper is to bridge the gap between that which we already know and that which is still speculated surrounding this discussion of racism in the e-world, in a way that I can introduce readers of this paper to a very real and important issue, while at the same time opening the discussion and leaving room for more work and research to be done on the topic in the future. I hope to help readers ultimately understand that although it is very easy and convenient to assume that computer are mechanisms for neutrality and objectivity, we must keep in mind that they still operate under the control of human beings with inherent biases.