

On Ramps Summer Assignment: Current Events

Introduction: Students enrolled in UT OnRamps courses are expected to be “an informed citizenry,” to be aware of and well-versed in controversies occurring at the local, state, national, and even international level. Therefore, the summer’s assignment is designed to help you develop a greater sense of current events.

The assignment: Specifically, you will be asked to study the news, whether by reading credible news sources, like a major newspaper (*Houston Chronicle*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*), or by watching a syndicated news program from a major news network (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, CNN).

Note: you should not search for random news articles, but select a credible venue like those listed above. *BuzzFeed*, independent Youtube news features, *The Daily Grind*, etc, are not considered credible news sources.

From those news sources, you will select and report on major news stories that deal with **controversies*** being discussed and debated in the public forum. Typical news features dealing with controversies might fall into one of the categories listed below:

*See Terms to Know on page 2.

- Politics: National, State, or Local
- Society (not pop culture)
- Education: National, State, or Local
- Healthcare: (non-COVID-related)
- Business & Finance
- Science & Technology
- World Events
- Environment
- Social Justice
- COVID-19

Frequency: In total, you will report on nine (9) separate news stories. The stories do not have to be linked in any way; however, if you choose to follow one particular news event, you may. Since the understanding of current events is ongoing, we encourage you to spread your analysis of the news throughout the summer. Report on nine separate news days: three in June, three in July, and the other three from any month, including August.

Product: Once you have studied the news story, complete the form [linked here](#). There is a sample response provided for you, as well as places for you to record your own responses.

Submission: You will upload this document to Canvas on Thursday, August 18.

Terms to Know: We will use each of these terms all year long. Be very comfortable using them!

- **Controversy:** The University of Texas curriculum defines “controversy” as something that people discuss and debate in a public forum or setting.
- **Stakeholders:** The people who have a “stake” in the controversy. Consider: Who are they? What do they have to gain or lose in the outcome of the controversy? Are they affected by the outcome in some other way?
 - **Values:** What does the stakeholder care about? Values can include:
 - **Interests:** What “stake” does your stakeholder have in the controversy? Consider: What do they have to gain or lose in the outcome of the controversy?
 - **Beliefs:** What religious and/or scientific beliefs does your stakeholder hold? How do their experiences shape their beliefs about the issue?
- **Venue:** The network, newspaper, or magazine where an article is published
- **Stasis Theory:** the point in a controversy where people start to disagree. There are four levels to this:

*Note: Move through these levels in order. Most of the time, the point of stasis is closer to the bottom.

- **Questions of Fact:** Do people disagree about the answers to any of the following questions? If not, move onto the next category of questions.
 - Did something happen?
 - What are the facts?
 - Is there a problem/issue?
 - How did it begin and what are its causes?
 - What changed to create the problem/issue?
 - Can it be changed?
- **Questions of Definition:** Do people disagree about the answers to any of the following questions? If not, move onto the next category of questions.
 - What is the nature of the problem/issue?
 - What exactly is the problem/issue?
 - What kind of a problem/issue is it?
 - To what larger class of things or events does it belong?
 - What are its parts, and how are they related?
- **Questions of Quality:** Do people disagree about the answers to any of the following questions? If not, move onto the next category of questions.
 - Is it a good thing or a bad thing?
 - How serious is the problem/issue?
 - Whom might it affect (stakeholders)?
 - What happens if we don't do anything?
 - What are the costs of solving the problem/issue?
- **Questions of Policy & Procedure:** Do people disagree about the answers to any of the following questions? If not, move onto the next category of questions.
 - Should action be taken?
 - Who should be involved in helping to solve the problem/address the issue?
 - What should be done about this problem?
 - What needs to happen to solve this problem/address this issue?