

## Project 2: Conceptual Analysis in the Commons

Write a 750-word essay analyzing a significant concept in a field of your choice *situated in/around Ithaca Commons*—for instance, something social, economic, technological, environmental, etc. It could relate to a business or org, some community or history, a street corner... Apply that concept while developing 3-4 other perspectives through fieldwork online and in the street. The concept may be an emergent or controversial idea, theory, or approach, and you must have at least three images and scholarly references that help you define and analyze the concept, using the Articles & Full Text online resources (found on Cornell Library's [homepage](#)).

Use Birch's article on culturally competent care as a guide: note how she defines and contextualizes the concept, describes its origins and recent developments, and concludes by summarizing and indicating future paths of inquiry. Also use Borges' essay as a model for concise yet expansive thought.

You obviously cannot provide the same depth of Birch's analysis in 750 words, but you can analyze and describe your concept with an eye for its "struggle," its conceptual drama, its significance in the world.

To find a concept to analyze, focus on a debate over an idea, method, or finding in your field. Disciplinary knowledge emerges from conceptual arguments that define different schools, methods and subfields.

*You don't want to argue for or against the concept you select: rather, you want to analyze it, take it apart, look at it from several different perspectives, to better understand the struggle or debate that defines its importance in your field. Find articles that reveal different perspectives and insights about your concept. If you argue for anything, it's the value of seeing the concept in a new way—or analyzing how others are arguing over it.*

You could also focus on a concept directly connected to the graphic novel you'll be writing about later, following its concerns into science, art, history, philosophy.... In short, you can use this essay to start researching the terrain of a provisional research topic.

Wikipedia, textbooks, and other general sources often present the "winners" of conceptual debates as simple facts rather than complex and contested accomplishments. As Horton contends, good essays stage the struggle of thinking. Use the Library's Articles & Full Text resources to find relevant scholarly articles.

Conceptually, focus on writing an opening thesis statement that *does something*, that communicates your concept's "what" and "why," its core issue and wider significance. Again, use Birch and Borges as tutor texts.

Stylistically, focus on composing tight sentences: minimize "to be" verbs, passive voice, and prepositional phrases. Use complex sentences to drive complex thought, not in order to add supplemental adjectives or additional prepositional phrases that are sequentially constructed in such a way of writing so as to extend and stretch the appearance of thinking rather than actually and simply thinking, for instance.

Also focus on word choice: strive for clarity and fine distinctions. Debates about your concept can make its edges blur: to capture its stakes within the field, distinguish the different ways scholars have used the concept and the claims they make while doing so.

Drafts due: Thursday, 2/16

Final due: Tuesday, 2/21