

Project 1 | Assignment 1

Our class is designed to help you transition from the kinds of writing you did in high school to the more sophisticated writing you will do in college, writing that is less formulaic, more complex, and more demanding than writing you've previously approached. One way to describe the difference between high school and college-level writing is to say that college writing—typically fashioned as reasonable argument—is differently *intellectual*, that it approaches its subjects more knowingly, its writers more agentive and attentive to their readers. In high school, you were likely expected to produce a product (the five-paragraph essay, for instance) that could easily be evaluated according to a quite simplistic template. Now, you will be expected to make choices in style, structure, and approach that allow you to carry out your interests as a smart writer. There will be new rules of the game to follow, and fresh constraints to consider, but generally college writing offers you greater independence to persuade readers inventively and responsively.

For **Thursday, August 20**, I would like you to read Gerald Graff's "Hidden Intellectualism," a discourse on the subject of intellectual life as it is found both in and outside of school. "Hidden Intellectualism" is a chapter from Graff's *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*, a book-long critique of traditional schooling. Graff is interested in curricular reform, proposing modes for engaging students in relevant, thoughtful conversations about important subjects over which smart people disagree—a way of relieving the tedium of high school (and college) that comes from conceiving of students as information-gatherers rather than rhetorical beings.

The chapter asks us to alter our typical understanding of "intellectual life" as the elite prospect of the few in favor of a fundamental reevaluation of a broad-based, democratically-oriented conception of smart thinking as already the province of anyone who participates in extended discussions, disputes, and debates that matter to communities. Since "intellectual" is a key term in our course, it's useful for us to reclaim what has become a politically spoiled word for our own uses. Graff can help point us in that direction.

Before your Reading Group meets, please consider these questions:

1. How does Graff define the term "intellectualism?" (What does his definition include, and what does it exclude?)
2. Graff points to his own and others' instances of what he calls "saturation of life by argument." Where, when, and with whom have you experienced a "saturation of life by argument?"
3. Often, we think of disagreement as an inevitably uncomfortable affair punctuated by hard feelings, selfishness, and general unease. But Graff thinks of disagreement differently and offers explicit and implicit characterizations of controversy as it operates in social and public settings. What new value for the role of controversy does Graff envision?