**Research Planning, Evaluating Sources**

**Planning your research**: As you seek more information for your Alternative Spring Break proposals, you will need to go more in depth to answer first your own questions about the places and people involved and then your audience’s questions.

Before you look for your sources, you need to come up with an initial list of research questions. As you research, you will answer them, and more questions will probably crop up. It’s cyclical, not linear, and deciding when you have enough information is hard—more often decided by external deadlines as intellectual satiety.

Of course, early on you should consider your **Audience**: what do they already/need to know? What will they consider reliable sources? etc. (This is what your audience analysis form is for.)

Consider **purpose**: yours and your audience’s. Inform? Persuade? Both?

**Example**: In the case of my sample proposal for the ASB project, bringing solar power to a Hopi reservation. I’d need to get a sense of the basics I need to know before I can refine the research for the people I’d need to persuade—the SJSU administrators, the solar power engineer I’d like to visit, the relevant solar power experts at SJSU, etc. (See my sample Audience Analysis form for details.) Below are some examples of questions I’m still working on:

* Where is this reservation, exactly?
* Where would we stay while there?
* What fun things are there to do there? (Hopi art/crafts, horses, hiking
* ?)
* Where can I find out more about Debby Tewa, more in-depth info. on her work, especially? (I’ve already found some professional profiles, but all are pretty brief.)
* How can I contact Debby Tewa directly?
* What is the current situation with solar power on her reservation and in the area?
* If we can’t actually install solar panels, what else could we do for service learning?
* Is there any connection still with Sandia (solar company she once worked for)?
* Does she currently work with groups of students? Has she ever?
* Would Sandia be interested in donating goods/personnel?
* What SJSU professor/researchers could lead the group?
* Would the SJSU Engineers Without Borders club be willing to help?
* Would we need official SJSU approval, maybe through the Study Abroad Office?
* What Native American history and fiction should I include in this class?

**Consider your sources—how to judge what you find**

* **Where?** Judge sources based on where they are posted/published.
* **Who?**Judge sources based on who wrote them. Credentials, credibility, possible bias
* **What?** Judge sources based on internal clues
  + Credible-sounding data, cited correctly
  + An even, professional tone; doesn’t abuse opponents; any passion in their rhetoric is justified by the material and reasonably controlled
  + The information offered/cited seems to be supported by other sources, fits general consensus among experts in the field
* **Why?** Consider why the writer is writing: to inform, to sell, to persuade, to move the audience to action. What does the site/author have to gain? Look for possible conflict of interest, bias.
* **When?** Look at the dates. Usually recent is better, though older sources can provide perspective (e.g. a source about solar power on Native American reservations from the 70s would be interesting, though the technology would probably be more primitive).
* **Other:**How relevant is it to your needs? Can you/your audience handle the jargon? Is the level of discourse too elementary?