

STEP 2

From Topic to a Research Question

Here is another idea for moving from topics of interest to a research question. In one *TfC* class the students decided that the topic they were most interested in exploring was the extent of hunger in their county. We gave the students some readings and talked about developing a research question that would allow us to both focus on what we cared about *and* complete a project in the time we had available. We placed the students in teams and had each team draft their own research questions and then make an argument for why their question was the one the class should explore this year. The students then voted to decide which question the class focus on.

Here is the work product from one group in that class:

Possible research question: “What is the relationship between a person's family size and their willingness to get food stamps?”

Argument that this question is the one the class should focus on this year: “We chose this question after reading many of the personal stories written about people who are hungry. Many of the stories that we read were about individuals who had many young children that needed to be fed. It is difficult to acknowledge that you need food stamps. However, when your children are also facing hunger, it's even more difficult to ignore your hungry children. It seems as though many individuals, especially mothers, are getting food stamps in order to feed children. This relationship definitely caught our attention. We think that as a whole any relationships that include a "person's willingness to get food stamps" is definitely something we should focus on.

(Note: While there are certainly some grammatical issues in the example above, but the thinking that the students have done is impressive. The students narrowed their focus

appropriately and identified an important relationship from which a question emerged that would be feasible for the class to research. This kind of thinking and doing is goal in this step.)

