PHIL 330: European Enlightenment
Term Paper / Research Project

Students were required to select a topic from among the principal course themes and, preferably, one affiliated with their major field of study (e.g., chemistry, economics, religion, political science). This project was conceived less as an argumentative, or thesis-driven work intended to contribute something new to our understanding of the Enlightenment period than as a “voyage of discovery,” and invitation to experience what Richard Feynman called “the joy of finding things out” and coming to understand their own field of study in better historical context and relief.

Where disputes or controversies were identified, either in the source material or in the interpretive secondary literature, students were encouraged to probe the opposing viewpoints. Many did, but this was not required.

A minimum of four sources was required, and the student’s facility in identifying quality sources and their appropriate use and documentation within the paper was a key point of evaluation and I worked with students individually over the length of the semester to help them refine their research and citation skills.

Concept clarification and analysis, explanation of how and why various concepts gained, retained or lost their currency, and contrasting viewpoints were emphasized as features of the assignment that would make for success in this project.

Papers ranged from 8 to 12 pages generally, with several outliers in both directions (a short one of approx. 6 pages, and one that reached to 26).