**GCAP 633 Assignment 3 Thesis and Arguments Rationale**

(Video Transcription)

Hi everyone. I want to create a short video on the topic of thesis and arguments. Please don’t run screaming with your fingers in your ears, because whether you like it or not you are going have to understand this concept as you move through our program. So, I’m trying to do some things in this course to start moving in the direction of understanding what it means to articulate a clear thesis statement and build an argument in support of that thesis statement. You will have seen examples when you looked through the professional writing e-book that I created, and in particular, the chapter that talks about how to build an argument and how to integrate literature in support of that argument.

In this course, you have dual pieces of information that you are bringing into creating a thesis statement for your cultural interview paper. You are taking what you learned in the literature, as background information for meeting with the person who is your cultural informant in this interview, and then the story that you received from this person. What I want you to do, as you step back and finalize this paper, is to think about the bottom line message that you want to give. That is the thesis statement. You want it to not be simply descriptive. A descriptive statement is something like “Sam came to Canada in 2013, and he has now successfully acculturated to Canadian culture.” There is no argument in there. It is just a statement of fact. What I want you to do for your thesis statement is to come up with a particular position that you want to argue. So your **thesis statement** might be something more like “**Sam’s multiple marginalization within his culture of origin has had a considerable impact on his experience of acculturation within Canadian culture**.” That is an arguable statement. It is something for which you have to build a case.

You may then have to provide some evidence of what Sam’s multiple marginalization was within his country of origin. What I want you to do, if that is your first key argument, is then to ask yourself, “What is it that I learned from this story from Sam, and what are the foundational principles or ideas from the literature that I can draw on to make sense out of that experience. You may draw on the literature about multiple nondominant identities or intersectionality to explore how much more complicated it is, when you listen to Sam’s story, if he already experienced that kind of multiple marginalization in the culture that he came from and then came into a host culture where there is another whole layer of being a newcomer and the challenges that come along with that. Then you may have another argument that you want to make: “Sam’s success at acculturating into Canadian culture came, in part, from connecting up with others who shared some portions of his nondominant identities.” That again is an argument. You may pull on some of the literature in the course that talks about the importance of social support or other kinds of opportunities that come from bringing clients together from nondominant populations so that they can share their challenges and hear each other’s stories. At the same time, you may integrate some reflections from Sam about what his experience was like and how he found those experiences of connecting with people who shared similar experiences. Your next point might be something about internalization of cultural oppression, and you may draw on some of the professional literature to support that idea. You may use that literature to make sense of some of the things that you hear from Sam about the way in which he still carries lingering hesitation about sharing openly certain aspects of his personal cultural identity, because of his experiences of marginalization and the discourses that he may have internalized around that.

I hope you are getting the picture that the paper is really about figuring out what it is that you want to argue. Think about your instructor reading this. You are taking a position. You are arguing (in the academic sense of the word) a particular position, and you are providing a series of key points in the paper that support the position. Each key point is then supported by what you found in the professional literature, in your own research or in the material that you pulled on from the course, and integrating in the ideas that you received from Sam, as the person that you interviewed. I hope this is helping to make sense out of this requirement.

I now want to step back to explain a little bit more about why you really need to work on this skill set. One of the things that distinguishes professional writers, and people in graduate education, from others is this ability to articulate a thesis statement and make a solid argument. You will encounter the demand to do that in many places in your career. If you have to write an assessment report at some point, you will need to make a statement about what you believe the outcomes of that assessment are. And that is an arguable assertion. So you need to then be able to back it up with this piece of evidence, and that piece of evidence, and this piece of evidence. That is what this skill set is about. Another example is your work with individual clients. The thesis and argument process is teaching you how to think. When you get into an individual session with a client, that client may just talk for an hour, sometimes, and part of what you need to be able to do is synthesize that information and think “OK, the client made this point, this point, and this point; what is really the bottom line here? What is the message they are sending me through this conversation that we have just had?” In this case, you are almost creating an argument in reverse: They are giving you their argument, and part of your role is to help synthesize that into what is kind like a thesis statement: “This is what’s going on and why it’s going on, or this is what’s going on and how the client would like it to be different.”

When you move into 691, the Methods of Inquiry course, in the fall, you have to write a literature review that is grounded in this whole idea of thesis and argument. I’m really trying to prime you now to start taking this seriously and thinking about it, because students often struggle when they get into that course if they still have not grasped what we mean by writing in a professional way, which is really about having a voice. In undergraduate education, you could get away with repeating what the instructor told you, and wanted to hear, and with providing descriptive information about various topics. However, you cannot get away with that in grad school, because this is when your voice matters. This is when what matters is (a) what you think as a person and (b) how effective you are at deciding this is the position that you want to take and argue, based on the body of literature that you have been reviewing. That is the task that you are going to be faced with in 691, so if I were you I would take feedback that you get from the process of writing a thesis and argument in this course, think about a topic that you’re interested in for 691, and start doing some research and reading about that topic. Find out what there is in the literature. Find out what different people are saying. And think about what it is that you actually think is important and what you would like to argue. You may want to go into 691 with a sense of the background literature on a topic you are interested in so that you are able to articulate a clear thesis statement, which means (a) it needs to be arguable; (b) there needs to be a possibility that someone could have a counterargument; and (c) the arguments that you create need to support that thesis statement in a way that would be strong enough to stand as a reasonable argument even when counterarguments are presented. If you think about that ahead of time, and start to really work towards that, you will be really well prepared for that course.

That’s my blurb on thesis and arguments. I hope you find it helpful. I know it is not an easy shift to make in terms of your thinking and your writing skills, depending on the background that you come from. But I really want you to think about this as an opportunity to begin to have a voice. That’s what your thesis statement is. It’s your voice. It’s your lens that you are putting on the information that you have gathered, the listening that you have done, and the thinking that you have done about the body of literature that is out there. I’m going to put a little caveat on that, however: It is your professional voice! So this is not an opportunity to just pick a random topic and to talk about the far-reaching influence of aliens on the way in which the brains work, for example. This is an invitation to position yourself within the body of professional and academic literature and to make a statement about something that you feel is important within that body of academic literature. Maybe it is shifting the lens slightly. Maybe it is picking up one part of an argument that is already out there in the literature and adding to it in some way. Maybe it is simply thinking about the way in which a particular model, or a particular theory, or a particular conceptual framework might apply to different population. It can be any of those things. However, there must be something new or original in the way that you position it. That’s your challenge. That is where you are headed in this program. I want you to be clear on that now, because it carries through with 691, and you will be ultimately tested on that in 695, the course-based exit, or your thesis.

So now is the time to start building the skills and to take seriously the opportunities for learning that we are offering you. I also want to make sense out of why we are asking you to do this, so I’m hoping that it does makes sense to you. I am so grateful for the training that I had in being able to articulate clearly my position on things and being able to make a substantive argument in support of various positions, because that has served me really well throughout my academic career. The fact that I have done so much writing this area makes me not the best person to argue with, because I have a lot of practice at presenting a thesis statement and following through on a clear argument in support of my position. That is just an advantage of building that skill. Fortunately I am not a very argumentative person, so I don’t take up that role very often. However, I have that skill set in my background now when I need it. It is not about becoming an antagonistic person who thinks they know everything, because that is not at all where we are headed. It is about becoming a critical thinker, being able to clearly state what it is that you are trying to say, being able to listen and integrate information from other people, and putting that together in some meaningful way so that people actually want to listen to what you have to say. OK, that’s enough rattling. I hope this is helpful. Good luck finishing off your paper.