Culturescope Resources: Personal Interest Project

How to Create a Fantastic Personal Interest Project
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1. What IS a Personal Interest Project?
• Using appropriate methodologies, a student spends three terms researching a focussed topic that is of interest to him/her, can be connected to Society and Culture through the course concepts and which includes a cross-cultural perspective.

2. What does doing the PIP do for a student?
• Learn invaluable research skills
• On completion, an exhilarating sense of achievement
• becomes a genuine 'expert' on the chosen topic
• Real independent learning occurs — especially important if the student goes on to tertiary study.

3. What's in a PIP?
• The introduction (500 words)
  A brief description of what the topic is about, why it was chosen, and how it contributes to a better understanding of Society and Culture. It explains and justifies the choice of methodologies and specifies the cross-cultural component.
• The Log (500 words)
  A summary of the student's diary, which shows the sequential development of the project
• Central Material (2,500 — 5,000 words)
  Containing description and analysis of the research carried out in investigation of the focus question or hypothesis. May include photos, tables or graphs, but these must be labeled and incorporated into the text through discussion. Must contain a cross-cultural perspective.
• Conclusion (500 words)
  What has the student learned from doing the PIP?
• Resource List
  with annotated references

4. Getting started: possible sources of ideas
• Family/personal world
• An issue the student already feels strongly about
• Social issues arising from S&C or other classes
• Social issues arising from films, novels, TV documentaries, magazines
• Class discussions
• Inspiration from past PIPs and ex-S&C students
• Inspirational people in the student's life
• Interests and hobbies
• Future career ideas

5. Cross-cultural?
• The student must show some knowledge and understanding of viewpoints other than their own
• The topic needs to reflect a perspective different from the immediate culture of the student (over space and/or time)
• For example: generation, socioeconomic group, gender, ethnicity or location
• The cross-cultural perspective needs to be integrated into the central material of the project
Examples:
— Comparing marriage rituals in two different cultures (ethnicity, location)
— Researching the similarities and differences in mother daughter relationship between the student, student's mother and student's grandmother (generation)
— Examining the different approaches to communication exhibited by males and females (gender)

6. What about structure?
• Make sure all the essential elements are there: Log, Introduction, Central Material, Conclusion, Annotated Resource List
• Using a 'chapter' format for the Central Material can help students organise their information and set short term progress goals.

7. The 'chunk' approach
One of the most important strategies a student can apply to the process of putting a PIP together is to view the project as something that can be broken into smaller chunks.
A PIP can seem insurmountable unless the student realises that small chunks (like arranging and carrying out an interview) can be achieved in a realistic time frame.
Of course, time management skills help immeasurably to achieve the ultimate goal of assembling all the chunks into an integrated whole.

8. Why are S&C 'Concepts' so important?
• The smooth, effective use of concepts distinguishes the PIP as a professional piece of Society and Culture work
• Concepts make the important connection between the student's research and the subject Society and Culture
• The use of concepts indicates understanding of the social world i.e. social and cultural literacy.

9. The teacher's role
• Help with topic choice and refinement of question/changes of direction or topic
• Monitor and encourage 'chunk' progress
• Provide instruction in research methodologies
• Provide instruction and advice about referencing of secondary sources
• Help the student believe in his/her ability to complete the PIP
• Provide ladders to scale 'brick walls'

10. What are the features of a good PIP?
• Well-conveyed passion for the topic
• Clear focus and direction
• Integrated flow of different aspects (including cross-cultural perspective) and methodologies
• Originality, or a fresh approach to a 'preloved' topic
• Thorough, ethical and appropriate research methodologies applied — primary supported by secondary
• Comfortable incorporation of S&C concepts
• Logical conclusions reached
• Someone reading the PIP feels that the student has undertaken a genuine 'learning journey'