Instructions for the Cited Prospectus
Plants and Civilizations Term Project

See the handout on term project guidelines on Canvas for detailed information about the term paper assignment, the grading rubric we will use and our expectations. For this assignment (Cited Prospectus) use the guide below to generate your proposal.

Remember, the goal of this paper is to research one (or more) aspect(s) (i.e., history, biology or human culture) of your chosen plant, then analyze the information, synthesize a novel and interesting thesis, and convince the reader of your argument.

The prospectus outlines the research you have already conducted and explains the overall structure of your paper’s argument. Your prospectus needs to be specific and should include many if not all of the sources you plan on using in your paper. A complete prospectus will follow this outline:

a) **Proposed title:** Make the focus of your paper clear

b) **Research question:** This is the question you are going to answer with your thesis, which examines the interesting aspect(s) of your focal plant. Selecting a strong question is critical to the success of your paper. Make sure that you are not asking a question that can be answered with a simple fact; your question must instead be answered with a well supported and developed opinion.

c) **Proposed thesis statement:** The thesis is a succinct and direct explanation of your conclusions. A successful thesis is focused, debatable and interesting. It answers your research question and provides the argument for your paper. See the project handout and links on Canvas for more information about thesis statements.

d) **Background section:** The information here allows the reader to become familiar with your chosen plant. This section explains why your topic is interesting to a general audience and how it is relevant to your thesis. Make sure to include in-text citations in this section.

e) **Research and information section:** This section should outline your argument, citing the relevant lines of evidence you have found in your research. The outline should be structured in the way that best supports your thesis statement. Your outline’s structure is dependent on your thesis statement, there’s no one universal structure that will work for everyone’s papers. Make sure to include in-text citations in this section.

f) **Reference list:** All information used in the above sections must be cited in-text using APA guidelines and the complete citation must be included in the reference list section. All references must be credible, peer-reviewed scholarly articles. Prospectus assignments without in-text citations and references will receive a 0 for the entire assignment.

**Important Note:** This assignment is designed to give us the ability to work with you and make sure your project is feasible. The more effort you put in now the less work you will have later, and the more we will be able to help you refine your ideas. You may change your paper topic after you complete this assignment – you might find that your initial ideas just aren’t solid enough for a good paper. But unless you complete this assignment you won’t know this, and if you put this off until the last minute you won’t find this out until it is too late. An example of a strong prospectus is presented below.
a) **Title:** A desire for pain? The rapid spread and adoption of the chili in world cuisine.

b) **Research Question:** How has the human desire for pain contributed to the historical spread and current distribution of the spicy chili pepper?

c) **Thesis statement:** The rapid dispersal and current world-wide distribution of the chili pepper is the result of an innately human desire for painful, but safe, sensory experiences.

d) **Background:** Chilies were domesticated at least 8,000 years ago in Central America (Perry et al., 2007). Chilies were valued for their heat (or pungency), and Europeans began importing them with the return of Columbus from the New World. Soon after this, the chili was transported around the world and incorporated into the cuisines of many cultures (Toussaint-Samat, 1992).

e) **Research and Information:**

**Chilies provide little nutrition**

The biological need for carbohydrates and proteins most likely drove the domestication and development of staple crops such as legumes and cereal grains (Kislev and Bar-Yosef, 1988); however, the motivation behind the production of crops which do not provide necessary nutrients is not well understood (but see Sherman and Billing, 1999). Since spices do not satisfy biological need, their current worldwide usage may be a result of cultural desires.

**Chilies are spicy**

The fruits of this species produce capsaicin, a plant secondary compound that stimulates heat-sensitive nerve cells in many animals (Tewksbury and Nabhan, 2001). Chili peppers are “hot” because this deters rodents from feeding on the fruits, but birds are insensitive to these compounds (2001). Birds are better dispersers of the seeds, so this is advantageous to the plant (2001).

**Chilies have spread around the world**

It is difficult to imagine Asian or North African cuisine without this spice even though it is not native to these parts of the world. This rapid dispersal and incorporation of the chili is quite different than the slower and more limited adoption of other new world food species such as potato or tomato (McGee, 2004; Hobhouse, 2005).

**Chilies have spread due to an innate desire for novelty**

The reason for this spread is an innate human desire for exciting, but safe, sensory experiences (Rozin and Schiller, 1980). The burn induced by capsaicin consumption was a desirable and novel sensory effect, similar to that produced by pepper (*Piper nigrum*) (Green and Hayes, 2004; Affeltranger et al., 2007). However, chilies could be easily produced as a crop in many parts of the world and were thus much less expensive than pepper produced in India (Hobhouse, 2005).
f) References:


