

VSCC English Department's Best Essays 2011-12

English Composition at VSCC: Expository Writing and Researched Argument

Introduction

We are proud to share with you this eighth edition of the *VSCC English Department's Best Essays*. This publication is the result of many hours of hard work on the part of students and faculty. Each year, instructors in the English Department encourage students who have demonstrated excellence in their writing to submit an essay to the committee; that committee of Vol State faculty then works collaboratively to choose superior student work for publication. The purpose of this publication is twofold: first, to showcase exemplary student writing by Vol State students, and second, to provide our faculty with helpful tools for teaching writing and critical thinking skills to our students.

The student essays published here exhibit the elements essential to high-quality college-level writing. They are separated into three categories, and one student in each category is awarded a prize for their work, which shows creativity, deep critical thought, excellent organization, and an awareness of the fundamentals of good writing.

Section 1 focuses on Expository writing, essays which are personal responses to a topic and include no research. The rhetorical modes included in this publication are narration, description, comparison, and for the first time, illustration. Essays in this section cover topics on heroism, technology, identity, relationships, and experience with nature's beauty. Our winner from this category, "Even Heroes Suffer," asks readers to reconsider their perception of what heroism is.

Section 2 includes researched essays with no more than four sources. In this category, the committee chose to include the two best submissions involving literary

analysis, a position essay on women in the gaming industry, and final research essays from English 1010 classes. The winner in this category is an insightful and well-reasoned analysis of the protagonists in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* and Henrik Ibsen's *Doll's House* through the lens of Joseph Campbell's theories of the hero's adventure.

Finally, Section 3 concludes the publication with several high-quality examples of student research essays using five or more sources. All of the essays in this category were written in English 1020 courses; most often, the essays of this length are the product of a semester's work on developing solid claims and offering valid supporting evidence for those claims. These three essays are claims of policy on issues of same-sex marriage, federal regulations affecting migratory birds, and the advising system at Volunteer State Community College. The winner in this category, "Same-Sex Marriage: The Time is Now," is an in-depth analysis of the controversy surrounding same-sex marriage which offers a clear, unified solution to the issue facing many people in the United States today.

The student essays included in this publication were submitted between the Summer 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters, and they are representative of the diversity of student writing found in composition and literature classes at Vol State. We would like to thank all of the teachers who encouraged their students to submit, and to express our sincere congratulations to those students who are published here. Our goal is to continue to grow this project so that it remains meaningful for students and faculty alike.

Renee' Eades, Associate Professor of English
On behalf of the Best Essays Committee
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SECTION 1:
EXPOSITORY WRITING

Writing Descriptive Essays

As part of the human experience, we take in and process the world around us through the use of our senses, and many times, we form opinions about objects, places, and people within our world based on the use of that sensory information. These sensory impressions are often the basis for our writing when we write a descriptive essay. The purpose of descriptive writing involves helping an audience understand more fully the subject of an essay, usually a person or place with which the audience is unfamiliar, and to create a dominant impression of that place or person.

The most explicit statement of that impression should be offered in the thesis of the descriptive essay. This thesis should show the audience the writer's plans to reveal something new or unconventional about the essay's subject. For example, a descriptive essay about an umbrella might have the following thesis: "While an umbrella is very useful in the rain, it also serves as an example of one of architecture's most useful elements—the arch." This thesis prepares the audience to look at an ordinary object in a new, more complete way, emphasizing the purpose and need for creating an essay to describe something.

Description can be used as a method of development for an entire essay, or it can be incorporated into other modes of writing, like narration, comparison/contrast, and definition to make those modes of writing more sensory experiences because descriptive papers seek to use language that creates for the audience a vivid mental picture.

Developing descriptions often means using similes and metaphors to describe something, invoking all five senses. For example, a writer may choose to describe eating a jalapeno

pepper in the following way: “Once the tongue registers the heat of the pepper, it is as if your whole mouth expands in an attempt to get away from the flames but cannot quite stay out of reach.” When an audience reads language such as this, they can understand the feeling much better than if you simply wrote, “Eating a jalapeno pepper makes your mouth hot.” At its best, descriptive writing allows readers to close their eyes and see the event, person, object, or place being described in the essay. The ultimate goal is to create an impression and to convey your attitude towards that subject by offering the most revealing and significant details and anecdotes about the subject.

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Pay careful attention to the details and examples you include: all should work towards conveying a dominant impression of the subject of your description, and they should be the most important details and examples for the reader’s understanding of that subject’s significance to you and your audience.
2. Avoid over-idealizing or demonizing the subject of a description. Present your description as being objective and realistic. Nothing is completely good or bad, so describe the subject as something REAL. Don’t forget to use sensory images, especially similes and metaphors, to draw your readers into the description.
3. When describing a person, choose the person for your description wisely. Avoid a person who will lead you to be overly sentimental, such as a family member or friend who has recently died. Choose, instead, a person who is somewhat unusual or engaging, not only to you, but to your audience.
4. Also, keep in mind that this is not a story about your experience, so remember that your purpose in describing is different from the narrative.

“The Reef”

Here we have a descriptive narrative essay that shows how sensory details can enrich a piece of writing. Since this work is organized in chronological order, the dominant rhetorical mode is narration. At the same time, this work can be considered a contrast essay to a degree. This contrast is achieved through subtle references to a much different reality than that of the peaceful reef. First, the narrator indicates, “Even though this was not work, I still entered the water the same as we were taught in dive school.” Then, toward the end of the narrative, the author points out that the peacefulness and beauty of the reef allow him to forget the troubles that war can bring. This contrast highlights the importance of the communion between a human being and nature. The writer tells the story without much background since it would be distracting to the unique experience of becoming one with nature. The exquisite description of life in the reef gradually pulls the reader into this sublime feeling, and it is not until the last sentence of the essay that the writer gives us a clear thesis statement, creating a perfect closing for the essay and for the experience itself.

John Anderson

Prof. Kay Grossberg

English 1010, Section 001

21 October 2011

The Reef

The day began as a typical cool Australian fall morning. The salty, crisp smell of the ocean filled the air as we arrived at the local dive charter. The familiar sight of a pier and dive boat, waiting to take us out like so many times before, was somehow different. The boat wasn't waiting to take us to work or on a mission. It was taking us out to a different place, one that we had never seen, a place to enjoy. After greeting and paying the dive charter, we grabbed our gear, loaded the boat, and got underway. The sun was peeking through the clouds as we left the pier and headed out to sea to explore Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

The boat ride to the dive site was rough, to say in the least. The direction of the seas was crossway to our heading, causing us to get tossed from side to side. As I looked out either side of the boat, all I saw was a wall of water as we rode over and between the waves. Some of the less sea-faring people could not escape their seasickness. They rode in the back with the gear, and I could almost hear them thinking, “We’re doing this for what?” while the rest of us stayed in the cabin of the boat. About an hour and a half later, the seas started to subside and the ride smoothed out. We arrived at our destination. We were at the infamous Great Barrier Reef.

As the boat dropped anchor, I looked out across the vast blue sea. I couldn’t wait to gear up and see what was waiting below us. We completed the obligatory gear checks and prepared to enter the water. I donned my dive gear and sat on the side of the boat to put my fins on. I slowly put my feet in the water, and the soothing feel of cool water engulfed my swim boots. I slid my fins on over them and stood to enter the water. Even though this was not work, I still entered the water the same as we were taught in dive school: Look left, look right, look down, look to the horizon, 1,2,3, STEP!

The cool water rushed around me as I plunged in. With a quick kick, I rose and broke the surface. I swam over to my dive buddy, and we did our in-water procedures and checked for air leaks. With our checks complete and satisfactory, we released the air in our buoyancy compensators (BC) and began to sink. Our dive experience was about to begin.

As the water rose over our facemasks, the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef came to life. The sounds of air rushing through our regulators and the exhale bubbles were all that we heard. The water was crystal clear as we descended upon this natural

work of art. Visibility was an easy two hundred feet. We eased our descent and adjusted the air in our BC to hover around ten feet from the bottom. We floated there for what seemed like an eternity, observing the vast kaleidoscope of colors that overwhelmed our senses. Almost every color of the palette was present in this underwater heaven. The bright orange and neon pink corals, the deepest shades of green, the bright blue plant life, and the multi-colored shelves of the reefs were vibrant and flowing.

We then began to explore our surroundings taking pictures and examining every aspect of the reef. The schools of rainbow-colored fish swam by as the sunlight pierced through the water, reflecting off their scales. We watched the massive schools of fish dart in and out of coral heads and creases, basking in the glory of their underwater playground. Without a warning, a grey shadow blocked the sun. We looked up to see a six-foot-long reef shark swimming within twenty feet of us. He was checking out his territory, and we were in it. Motionless, we stared at the creature which most people have only read about. The sleek flowing lines, distinctive dorsal fin, and jet-black eyes mesmerized us. It seemed as if an eternity had passed when he finally swam away, leaving us in awe. We continued to explore and gather memories of this glorious place unfolding in front of us.

Our air was starting to get low, so we all gathered for an underwater picture. Here, a bunch of Navy Divers, SEALs and Recon Marines let down their proverbial (non-existent) hair and acted like kids on a playground. We were tough guys having fun and forgetting the troubles that war can bring, basking in the underwater beauty. The Reef allowed us to be one with ourselves and with nature.

Writing Narrative Essays

Narration is frequently the first assignment in most English 1010 Composition classes but it may also be assigned in other classes or used as support in other types of essays. Although students and teachers often view narrative writing as one of the simplest forms of writing, there are actually many skills a writer needs to effectively convey meaning in this form.

The purpose of narrative writing is to tell a story with which an audience can relate or from which an audience can learn. Narratives must have both a cohesive plot and a central point of significance to be complete; you cannot have one without the other. While many narratives may use a clear thesis statement to present the main idea of the story, others are not so explicit. The thesis in any narrative, however, should reveal the purpose or reason for telling the story in the first place so that the audience can understand the story's underlying significance or relevance to their own lives.

Narratives are organized around the plot points of the story a writer is telling and developed with the most important details. Often, a writer will start the paper at the beginning of the story and tell us the story straight through. Another way of organizing a narrative is to tell the story as a series of flashbacks where the plot is interrupted in well-chosen places with commentary by the writer. Once the writer has a purpose, thesis, and method of organization, he or she can begin to develop the plot of the story. Often students can get bogged down in all the possible details they can include in their narrative. For example, if the writer is telling a story about a childhood baseball game, he may be tempted to tell his audience about the uniforms, the weather conditions of

the day, and how many people were watching the game. While all of these details help create a precise picture of that baseball game, they may not have anything to do with the point the writer is making, i.e. the writer's specific purpose. A good rule for developing narratives is to include details about emotions and thoughts of the central characters, and descriptions of the most important objects and places to give the audience clues that will lead the audience to the central purpose of the story.

When a student writes a narrative, it is important to keep in mind the fact that the reader might not be as familiar with the events and places as the writer is. Consequently, the writer should try to include details that will make the readers see the characters and events of the story as if they were watching the story play out in front of them. An audience should be able to anticipate the point the story is making and follow the plot of the story without confusion. Narrative writing, at its best, will take an audience through some chronological version of events and reveal to them something that they can learn through the experiences of others.

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Pay close attention to the assignment requirements for length when determining the timeframe for your narrative. Especially in English 1010 essays that are usually shorter in length, it sometimes helps to consider narrowing the timeframe for the body of the essay to the most significant part of a day, an hour, or even a portion of an hour. Then, student writers can employ methods of flashback or use introductory paragraphs to offer essential background information (exposition) for the narrative.

2. Prioritize when it comes to choosing the most important details, characters, and events for developing a narrative, but make those details, characters, and events vivid for your readers by employing methods of description and appealing to the five senses. Keep your audience in mind by understanding that they may not be as familiar with the people, places, and things that make up your story, so you may need to offer a little more description for those people than you would for others.
3. Don't forget to include dialogue in your narrative, but choose dialogue that reveals something about the characters or the relationships between the characters who are speaking to one another.

“Relationships, Relationships, Relationships”

This is a good example of a narrative/descriptive essay. It is limited to one event, it makes a specific, important point, and it goes on to develop that point. It includes many great appeals to the senses, enabling the reader to visualize what the writer experienced. For example, note how the writer paints a sensory picture early with phrases such as a “faint scent of sewage” followed by a “thirty-foot-high cliff.” We see the people and their lives in our mind’s eye.

Julianna Herod

Prof. Jennifer McMillion

English 1010

7 September 2011

Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

The house was small and crowded with collections of antiques, pictures, and nothing more than what most would consider junk. The plumbing in the home left a little to be desired, leaving a faint scent of sewage. On one side of the home was a view of the flawless mountains. On the other side, some might fear falling down the nearly thirty-foot-high cliff. Despite all of the unpleasant circumstances, I felt strangely comfortable and at home.

Several months before, an opportunity had come to my attention, one that my late father had really encouraged my struggling older brother to embrace. It was a mission trip to Appalachia. Knowing my father thought it was a good idea intrigued me. I quickly became inspired to jump into a mission trip that was out of my comfort zone. This trip was my ticket to becoming more grateful and maybe even gaining experience with power tools. In preparation for my journey to Appalachia, the most impoverished region in the country, my team discussed safety with the equipment, the sensitivity

needed when dealing with the family, and the importance of relationships with each other and the people we would serve. I was too lost in the talks about power tools, protective eyewear, snakes, insects, and spiders to contemplate the real meaning of the topic: “relationships, relationships, relationships.” I was too nervous about the heat, my endurance level, and the prospect of getting dirty to even consider the people I would meet in Hazard, Kentucky. I was truly unaware of how that short week would affect me and potentially change my life.

As we drove into Hazard, I looked around in amazement. It was nothing more than a deserted coal-mining town with boarded-up buildings left and right. Looking at the town gave me a sickening feeling of guilt. All I could think about was what decade this place’s economy must have come to a screeching halt, because it had. The reality of the heartache gave me a numbing feeling—as if I’d lost circulation all over. What did these people have besides each other? I would soon find out the answer: Nothing.

A steep, gravel driveway led us to what seemed to be an abandoned trailer. We had arrived at our family’s home, and it was an overwhelmingly shocking sight. This was worse than what I had prepared myself for. There were stray dogs roaming the dry, weedy yard. We could hear the chickens scrambling in their pen. Yet despite the depressing appearance of this place, there was something so happy about the beautiful mountainside and the sound of water streaming down it. We began to assess the work we would be doing. I was so nervous about the labor, yet little did I know, we would be soon spending time simply getting to know the people that inhabited this forlorn-looking place.

The blue, cloudless sky quickly grew dark, and a frightening shade of gray loomed over the mountainside. It was beginning to pour big drops of frigid rain as we loaded circular saws, drills, and peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches into our work van. Here I was, finding myself on the side of a mountain with five other volunteers, forty chickens, countless dogs, and a dirt-poor family in need. Trying to dodge the toilet in the yard that was doubling as a planter, I nearly tripped over something buried in the ground. As we all frantically ran trying to save our materials and ourselves from the rain, all I could think about was the gratitude I could see in the family's eyes.

As the rain continued, Rosetta, the grandmother we were working for, invited us into her home. Looking around the room, I tried my best to conceal my feelings of disbelief. These people lived in poverty. I had never witnessed such lack of cleanliness and need for Febreeze. "You girls come on in here outta that awful storm," she hollered in her kind accent.

After sitting there talking and laughing awhile, I found myself needing to go to the bathroom and asked Amanda, Rosetta's granddaughter, to show me the way. After struggling to get the door to the small bathroom shut, I unclipped my overalls. The shelves were jam-packed with various bottles and old figurines. The floor looked as if it might cave in with my weight. Just as I finished, Amanda called out to me. "When yer done, flursh it with the bucket." Excuse me? After withstanding the odor and the lack of toilet paper, I wasn't up for spending much more time in there. I pushed back the shower curtain revealing the bucket. I now understood. I picked up the bucket, heavy with water, and carefully poured it in the toilet. The thought of my own granite and limestone bathroom adjoined to my bedroom gave me a feeling of guilt.

As we continued to visit, Rosetta began telling me of her illnesses and lost family while removing the oxygen tubes to wipe her nose as tears rolled down her cheeks. Among other ailments, she was constantly on oxygen with her arm in a sling. The old woman's bed was in the living room in front of the ancient television set that always appeared to be playing a soap opera. She traveled no farther than the gnat-infested front porch crowded with more figurines and rocking chairs. Listening to the rain and Rosetta's soft voice was so comforting. "I sure wish I could cook yawls a right and hearty meal, but this-here arm is pinned up in this sling," she told us over and over.

The realization that this old woman wasn't much different from my grandmother was overwhelming. She treated us as if we were her own grandchildren, and I was growing more and more at home in her presence. I complimented her on her collection of paraphernalia and told her about my grandmother's spoon collection. Suddenly she called out to her granddaughter, telling her to bring the little spoons she had in her cupboard. She chose what she thought was the most prized spoon and handed it to me. Miss Rosetta insisted that I take this spoon to my grandmother and relay to her what gratitude they felt for the work we were doing. I didn't want to take anything from this woman that might bring any joy to her life, but I knew there was no arguing with her. She seemed overjoyed for me to have it.

On top of all the burdens she carried, Rosetta had grandchildren to tend to. Her daughter had abandoned her two children to her. Amanda was thirteen and Landon, seventeen. With tears in her eyes, Rosetta told me how seldom the children saw their mother. She only came around when she wasn't high, and that wasn't nearly often enough. This made me hurt for Amanda. I couldn't imagine life without a mother.

Throughout the week, I grew very close to Amanda. It didn't take long to realize what a profound impression she was having on me. Within hours of meeting me, she had given me a nickname, referred to me as her best friend, and was helping us mix concrete. Just our being there gave her playful happiness. It broke my heart to know that she considered us to be as close as sisters so quickly. She was starved for love and attention. Even though her possessions were few, she was so giving of the little things she did have. She stayed home to tend to her grandmother rather than playing soccer or singing in choir at school. She was giving up her thirteen-year-old girl priorities for her family. Amanda had dreams of leaving Hazard and becoming something more. She wanted to sing, to go to college, and to have a career. Although Amanda was younger and less educated than I was, she had taught me more than any textbook could.

Would I have put gloves on, gotten under a trailer, and had old insulation pouring at my face the week before? I probably would have thought anyone crazy who suggested such a thing. But as the week unfolded, I was changing. The work took on an entirely new meaning for me. These people's lives became real. I genuinely cared about each of them and wanted their house, which I now thought of as a loving home, to be better. I was willing to work hard toward improving their home for them and to sacrifice my hygiene for a family that made that sacrifice every day. They didn't eat three meals a day or have a new pair of jeans for school, and they didn't know any differently. After coming to this realization, these luxuries seemed far less important for my life than before.

When the last day of our work arrived, I stood there thinking back over the week with unavoidable tears, both happy and regretful, in my eyes. Amanda eagerly pitched

in to finish the work we had started that week. Sooner than any of us wanted, it was time to say goodbye for the last time. In the beginning, I thought their possessions were of such little value, and at this point, I saw their actual wealth. It was neither tangible nor concrete. They were blessed with each other and love. Seeing the rolling land, gorgeous lakes, small churches, and genuine smiles on the faces of the people in the community made me realize how blessed we all are. They had unintentionally taught me the importance of family and selflessness. Because they had nothing else, they relied on each other and God.

I had prepared for this week for months, but there was absolutely nothing that could have prepared me for the relationships I had made and goodbyes that I had to endure. The way they blessed me would last longer than the deck we built; it has changed my life.

Writing Illustrative Essays

Illustration is often taught in English 1010 Composition classes as a way to help student writers learn to support any analytical or persuasive statements they make in their essays with clear, effective examples and evidence. These essays may serve to bridge early assignments in narration or description with the later assignments in writing cause/effect, problem/solution, or other, more persuasive essays. Students coming into college may find that illustrative writing is familiar to them because it often works with the form of organization and development they might have been taught in high school or other writing classes. Nonetheless, this form of writing serves as a good example of how to make a point and then thoroughly explain oneself as a writer so that reading audiences can clearly understand the writer's point and intention.

The general purpose of illustrative writing is to inform readers that a certain phenomenon or situation exists and to develop the main points through offering real-life examples or well-researched evidence from credible sources of information. These essays show—instead of telling—readers where and how we can see these situations occurring in our lives or in the lives of people around us. Illustration essays must have a clear central point, supportive points that directly relate to the main point or thesis, and vivid examples that show—or illustrate—the point that the writer is communicating. The thesis in any illustration, then, should reveal the purpose or reason for examining this situation in the first place so that the audience can understand the essay's connection and relevance to their own lives.

Illustrative essays are organized around the author's main points or assertions, and they will often follow an emphatic or point-by-point organization. To achieve cohesiveness in the essay, writers will need to focus on specific elements of the topic that are logically related to one another. For example, in an essay that illustrates the ways that people can be seen acting selfishly on Black Friday, the writer might want to focus on what he/she sees in one store, illustrating different situations from the same location but in different areas of the store or from different types of people. It's important to keep in mind, though, that writers of illustration offer examples for several different reasons: to give readers a visual image of an abstract concept, to help readers connect to a problem that might be difficult for them to visualize or understand, or simply to let readers see the issue or situation as you have seen it through your own eyes by offering a different perspective.

When a student writes an illustrative essay, the writer must be aware of his/her audience at all times and consider what he/she hopes to accomplish with them. Irrelevant details and examples are distracting, so understanding what the audience needs in order to visualize the situation and relate to the writer's point of view is essential. An audience should be able to anticipate the point the writer is making and follow the logic of the essay without confusion. Illustrative writing, at its best, will take an audience through a situation and reveal to them something that they can learn through the experiences or knowledge of others.

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Create a thesis statement that expresses your specific point of view on a subject of interest to your intended audience. Your thesis should take into consideration the length and scope of the assignment: what is your instructor asking you to do? Consider the purpose of the assignment, whether it be persuasive or simply expository. Your thesis can provide a “roadmap” for the rest of your essay if you go the three-point route, or you may have a more generalized point of view that the body of your essay illustrates with more vivid, specific examples.
2. Pay close attention to the assignment requirements for length when determining the number of points you will cover in your illustration. You may be accustomed to a three-point thesis pattern, but you can also divide your essay into points and sub-points to make the organization clearer and more cohesive. Organize your essay point-by-point, in order of emphasis.
3. As you would do with a narrative, prioritize when it comes to choosing the most relevant details, characters, and events for illustrating your points, but make those details, characters, and events vivid for your readers by employing methods of description and appealing to the five senses. Keep your audience in mind by understanding that they may not be as familiar with the people, places, and things that make up your story, so you may need to offer a little more description for those readers than you would for others.

“Even Heroes Suffer” – Prize Winner

This illustrative essay offers a brief look into the experiences of a war veteran who lost his legs “in a warzone far from home.” Interestingly, the writer describes his interactions with others who consider him a hero, but he never discloses what happened at the front. This event belongs to his private life that he wants others to respect. Unfortunately, people try to “help” and give special treatment to their hero while he just wants to be left alone and enjoy his independence. After a good introduction and a clear thesis statement, this essay is organized logically and clearly. The writer illustrates his feelings as a child, as a man, as a war veteran who has recently returned to the United States, and his gradual process of acceptance and gaining a new independence. The examples are provided in short narratives that explain the challenges he faces, both physically and emotionally, in dealing with people’s attitudes toward his condition.

Joseph James

Prof. Kay Grossberg

English 1010, Section 018

31 October 2011

Even Heroes Suffer

When you see a person sitting in a wheelchair missing both of his legs, what do you think? Most people would think that he is a poor “disabled” man, or a poor “handicapped” man. At first glance, most people think the same about me until I tell them I lost both of my legs serving my country in a warzone far from home. That little bit of information changes everything. Their demeanor changes, they become more vocal about their varying levels of patriotism, and then they feel less afraid to discuss the former taboo subject of my injuries. I go instantly from that poor “handicapped” person to an “American Hero.” The problem with being a “hero” is the stigma that I never suffer, I never hurt, and I never feel the burden of my battlefield injuries.

I used to love the idea of people doing things for me when I was younger. I could not wait to get married so I would not have to do the dishes anymore. Now things have

changed. As a man, I prided myself on being a strong, independent person. I never needed anyone for any reason. If I did need help, it was only to move a couch. Yet after my injury, my independence died when I was forced to use a wheelchair for the first six months of my recovery. Simple tasks became painful, if not impossible to do without the help of my wife. I needed help to use the bathroom or to get a bowl for my morning cereal, and worst of all, curbs and stairs became my “kryptonite.” If a building did not have a ramp, I did not go inside.

As a veteran, I have enjoyed the times when people come up to me and thank me for my service, but as the years have gone by, I have become more cynical and irritated by how people talk to me and how they try to force help on me. One such moment came when I was wheeling myself up a ramp into a dining hall to have some lunch. A nice woman asked me if I wanted help, and I courteously declined her offer. Barely any time passed when she grabbed my wheelchair from behind and pushed me up the rest of the way. In her mind, she was just trying to help me, but in my mind, she destroyed my day. She shattered my self-worth and pulled me down to the level of an adolescent needing his mommy.

Being labeled a “Wounded Warrior” brings a great number of problems into my life. If I were labeled an “amputee,” I would not have to endure the questions and comments that I hear every day, and I certainly would not have to discuss how I got hurt as if it is a mandatory story every wounded veteran has to tell. Who would ever grill a paraplegic into relaying every detail of his altered life? I am almost required by society to tell the tale of my “heroic” actions that caused my pain or to be an ear to one’s grievances. For instance, one day I met another veteran at a local store who asked me if

I was a veteran because he noticed my prosthetic legs. I was with my family shopping when he immediately tried to relate to my problems by telling me all about his. After five minutes, I guess he expected me to relate and have sympathy for him. But I am not Lucy in the cartoon strip *Peanuts* running a therapy booth. “Injury” and “disability” are two different concepts. Just because I am disabled does not make me want to hear about the injuries and life issues of others.

My life has changed in many ways since the day I was impaired. I have met many great people along the way through recovery. I have accepted that I am no longer the same person that I was and that my limitations have changed me physically. I may not be able to run anymore, and I may not be as independent as I used to be, but I will always push myself to be more than a poor “disabled” man and a poor “handicapped” person. I want to be known as a man who has overcome obstacles and persevered. I want everyone to know that I do suffer, I do hurt, and I do feel the burden of these injuries in my life, but it has not changed who I really am on the inside.

“Being a Hipster”

This humorous essay has clear explanations and convincing, specific examples to support the thesis, making it a good example of an illustration essay. The writer’s original voice adds further credibility to his claim that he is indeed a “hipster.” In contrast to other, more serious essays, the light tone and self-deprecating humor add to the fun of reading this essay.

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22 February 2012

Being a Hipster

Being a hipster is difficult, just as difficult as trying to get a word in on the *O’Reilly Factor*. I am a hipster, and I’ve experienced all of the joys and sorrows of being part of this peculiar minority group. Hipsters are individualistic people whose duty is to dislike any concept or piece of pop culture that is mainstream to the point that almost everyone is hyped about it. What can I say? We can make annoying contradictions, and even I have come to realize this unsettling fact. However, I enjoy being a hipster because we have a unique code, a code ruling that we should never go with the flow; rather, we should swim against it. When it comes to music, television shows, religion, politics, and fashion, we adhere to a taste that changes to stay outside of the current trends.

First and foremost, it’s imperative to realize that hipsters may have to throw away the pieces of pop culture they enjoy. During my freshman year at high school, I believed that screamo, heavy metal music was the cat’s pajamas. I listened to heavy metal music religiously, especially a band called Five Finger Death Punch. After a while, though, a lot

of kids began listening to that type of music, and even the jocks tried to scream their lungs out while quoting Slipknot lyrics after they lost a game. People, like these jocks, who had no business listening to music that I enjoyed became so annoying and infuriating to me that I gave the music up entirely. It just became too mainstream to deal with; however, instead of feeling long-term anger, I actually began to feel liberated, separated from everybody else. I even quit watching *Family Guy* because everybody—family members, nerds, geeks, jocks, and teachers—quoted lines from the overrated satire incessantly. I wasn't depressed after giving it up since *American Dad* was the ideal, non-mainstream alternative. The joy one feels from being a hipster is that only a select group of elitists enjoy this “high culture”—something that only a few can truly appreciate and know that they appreciate it for the right reasons.

While being a hipster can be liberating and unique, it can bring about a great fear—the fear of losing the appreciation for the thing you love. During my sophomore year, I watched the *anime*, or Japanese cartoon, titled *Death Note*. It was possibly one of the most cognitively demanding and tragic stories I have ever experienced on the big screen. A few of my friends also appreciated the *anime*, and we had our little circle consisting of elitists discussing and enjoying “our” *anime*. Yet, many students began to catch on quickly, and they wished to see what it was like. Of course, they liked it—possibly to the point of fanaticism—which immediately turned me off to ever discussing *Death Note* again. Unfortunately, my friends had to follow in my footsteps, and we all lost a piece of ourselves in that decision. Sure, we were successful in giving up something that became adored by the fanatic public, but we had to give up something that we truly enjoyed—an anime that could not be easily replaced.

As with all people, hipsters contradict themselves. Being a hipster itself is mainstream since it tends to be a popular subculture. Shamefully, I have shopped at many of the same stores that my non-hipster friends do, such as Wal-Mart and Gap. I should make more trips to the less-mainstream alternative, Target, but it really can't beat Wal-Mart's prices. Another example can be found in my religious choices. While I am a non-denominational Christian, one could argue that I'm still part of a mainstream religion, so being non-denominational doesn't qualify as "going against the flow." At the very least, I can say that I am a conservative, since being a liberal—especially for my age group—is a popular fad. But even then, some could easily argue that being a conservative is just as mainstream and that I'm merely deluding myself when I believe that the "hipster" title is in my possession.

In summation, through all of the trials and joyous occasions, being a hipster is worthwhile. I would know because every time I shun a Justin Bieber classic, I know that I have a mind of my own, not just because he's effeminate or because he's a product of Disney, but because the quality and style of his music simply is abysmal and mainstream. Even though I am required to change my views depending on the majority's taste, at least I am part of a minority that strives to create its own distinct desires and pastimes. You may call us self-righteous hypocrites who attempt to be cool, but if everybody had the same type of interests, then this society would be rather insipid. A fellow asked me one time if I was part of the Occupy Movement, and I replied, "No, because it's too mainstream, my friend. Now, if the majority of the people are truly part of the 99%, then the Occupy Movement has a lot of ignorant, blind sheep on their hands. And since being ignorant is mainstream, I have found another reason not to be a part of the 99%."

Despite popular opinion, the majority does not and should not rule. Hipsters are here to remind everyone that popularity does not determine quality, so it's better to be yourself. After all, nothing is as anti-mainstream and individualistic as being yourself.

“The Life Lessons Learned from the Concrete Jungle”

This essay is well-organized and packed with good sensory details. The thesis offers a clear three-point construction for her essay, and the writer follows that pattern in the organization of the body paragraphs. While the writer offers specific evidence in the essay to support the thesis from the introduction, there is a slight shift off-focus once she gets to the conclusion, where she offers insight into how this life lesson has changed her. This shift could easily be remedied by connecting these insights to each of the body paragraphs and by restating the thesis idea at the beginning of the conclusion paragraph to keep the writer and reader on-track.

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27 April 2012

The Life Lessons Learned from the Concrete Jungle

Unquestioningly, the concrete jungle was a unique place for habitation. My ghetto neighborhood was comprised of rows of brown apartment buildings that led me into mysterious hallways and broken doors. Windows provided an array of sheets and towels for curtains. Colorless, cold sidewalks were my playground. Parking lots were filled with old and broken-down cars, and rotting garbage decorated the back alleys. Growing up in a lower-class, barbaric community left me feeling hopeless for a better future. I had no money, no support, and no encouragement to use my artistic, athletic and communicative gifts. A healthy family unit was nonexistent. I felt I was living in a prison without the steel bars, forgotten by society. Eventually, freedom did ring; as an adult who has but a camera-eye's view left of this dark place, I have learned some beneficial life lessons. The toughest part of living in this concrete jungle was an agonizing fear I felt

due to the lack of fatherly protection, the lack of acceptance, and the ever-present violence surrounding me.

Without my daddy's protection to keep me safe, I had a considerable amount of fear that was always at my side. My parents divorced when I was a baby, and my dad moved to another state. With my mother working full-time, my sisters and I were left alone after school and all day in the summer. With dead-bolted doors, watching our favorite shows and listening to our favorite albums, I still felt vulnerable and insecure. A perverted man known to everyone as the "rapist" would hang out in my neighborhood, and I became his prey. He stalked me. One Saturday while my mom was home, I was in my living room and screamed at the top of my lungs when I saw this pursuant with cupped hands around his face, peering in my window. My mom called the police, but for some reason, they never came. We drove to the police station to file a complaint. The police knew him well, but without enough evidence, they couldn't arrest him. It wasn't until after I moved away from the ghettos that I heard he'd been arrested for trying to kidnap my friend's little sister.

Not only did I struggle with lack of protection, I also struggled with the lack of acceptance as I wore mostly hand-me-downs. I was in the metamorphosis of puberty. I became self-conscious about the way I looked. My mom began to take us to a place where rich people met for "spiritual" guidance, yet I was shunned because I was poor. My family was their charity case, and I never felt accepted. Thankfully, after we moved, my mom stopped attending these devastating meetings.

It is no surprise, then, that the violence of the ghettos induced much fear in me. That ungodly place was surrounded with needle-pushers, pimps, and foul-smelling drunks

walking as if they had no bones to hold them up. Apartments were filled with the lingering aromas of cigarette and marijuana smoke. Teenagers lounged around looking for a high or for someone just to hold them in their arms. Immorality, fights, rapes, and robberies were the norm. I remember hearing gunshots several times outside my door. Across the walkway from me, a single woman had her basement apartment broken into and then was brutally raped.

Even though the frightful days of living in the concrete jungle are just a memory, as an adult who is becoming a believer in Jesus, I have been able to look back and see how the Lord used those experiences to help mold and shape me into the person I am today. I've become more compassionate to the less fortunate and those who fall victim to human traffickers or abusers. I've learned a lot about emotionally dysfunctional individuals and why they make the choices they do, choices which, many times, can lead to more negative dysfunction and pain and can carry on from one generation to the next. I've found ways to counsel and to bring healing to these people: spiritually, emotionally and physically. I've learned to love those who are a different race, to be thankful for my own family and for the simple things in life. In my early twenties until the present, I've been able to take time, to focus, and to spend a little money learning and using the talents that God has given me. As an adult, the biggest lesson I've learned from living in the concrete jungle is that there is hope for a better future, that hope is found in Jesus, whom I can call on all the days of my life, and that He has become my *perfect* Heavenly Father.

Writing Comparison/Contrast Essays

Examining our world in terms of comparison and contrast is one of the most common intellectual activities we do on a day-to-day basis; it's the kind of thinking on which most practical decisions are based. These may be big decisions—choosing a college, buying a car, deciding on a career—or small decisions, such as what kind of shampoo to buy or where to go for pizza. In all of these activities, we are doing mental work—logically examining the information available to us and making a decision based on that information. This decision results in our choice between two or more items or in our passing judgment on objects that are similar in some way, though not in all ways. In writing a comparison/contrast essay, we strive for the same goal except that in our writing, we explain the reasons behind our judgment to an audience outside of ourselves.

When writing comparison/contrast essays, we compare items to help our audience understand our choices or judgments. The audience comes to understand why we make the choices we do or come to a certain conclusion because we offer them the information that we have examined in order to come to that conclusion, information which they may or may not have had before reading our comparison. Many times, then, our purpose in writing is also to help people understand something with which they are not familiar. In such cases, we compare an object unfamiliar to the audience with something familiar to them, forming a basis of comparison so that they can understand the type of object we are examining even if they have not directly encountered it in their own lives. Ultimately, we write comparison/contrast essays to

share our knowledge about a subject with others and to persuade them to understand the subject in the way that we do, thus seeing our judgment as valid.

We make our judgment reasonable to our audience by deciding on specific points of comparison to ensure that we analyze our items based on the same criteria or standards for each item. For us, as writers, to set these criteria, the items we compare must be on the same level in some way; choosing items that are too different from one another makes it difficult to set standards that your audience would expect from both items. In our writing, we explain the similarities and differences between the items that we are comparing, illustrating how well those items live up to the expectations we have set for them. We pass judgment on the items, usually expressing a preference for one or noting the advantages of one over the other. This judgment is most explicitly stated in the essay's thesis, and writers support that judgment by comparing and/or contrasting the items in the essay's body paragraphs based on the criteria that we have previously set forth.

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Stick to two items for comparison and contrast because it's easier to manage.
2. Make sure that your items are comparable or are "on the same level."
3. Avoid vague thesis statements such as "There are many similarities between item A and item B." The audience cannot understand your perspective on or your judgment about those items based on this kind of thesis.
4. Understand that you may focus more on similarities *or* on differences; you do not have to treat both equally in your essay. However, even if you're focusing more on one than on the other, you should include at least one consideration of difference or similarity to show your objectivity towards the subject and your understanding of the ultimate connection between the objects you are comparing.

“Text Message Your Friends Away”

This is a comparison/contrast essay on a timely issue: text messaging vs. calling. Even though it is has a casual, light tone appropriate to the topic, it makes some serious, important points about the differences we see in behavior now that text messaging has become an ever-present part of most people’s lives. This essay is especially good considering it was written entirely in one 1.5-hour class using only the thesis and outline that the writer had prepared in advance.

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10 April 2012

Text Message Your Friends Away

Everywhere we go, it seems that people have their noses in their phones. It doesn’t matter where people are or what they are doing. We could walk into a restaurant and see a family of four sitting together, but none of them would seem interested in spending time with one another. We could walk into a library and see people browsing the Internet on their phone rather than the computers. It’s nothing but a huge distraction. One would think that because people are constantly in contact with others via text messaging, they would be considered more sociable. This is a common misconception that all smartphone companies want you to believe. Text messaging is very impersonal. Remember back to the good old days when we only had phones at home? If we went out, we had to wait until we got back to receive messages from anyone. That way we could focus on the errands we had to run or actually enjoy the company of a loved one on a dinner outing. Text messaging makes people less sociable, deteriorates their grammar skills, and can cause an addiction to the Internet. Phone calls

are much more personal and require a person's full attention so he or she can actually participate in the conversation.

Despite the common belief that sitting behind a computerized screen talking to multiple people at the same time makes you more sociable, text messaging actually encourages anti-social behavior. Let's consider a family of four sitting in a restaurant. An observer can see all of them sitting together but notices they all have their phones out at the same time. They might as well be ignoring one another entirely. The only time they put their phones away is when dinner arrives at their table. Before smartphones existed, going out to dinner with loved ones was a treat. It was not just because of the delicious food being brought, but people could enjoy an actual conversation with friends or family until the food arrived. Now every spare moment is an excuse to take out the smartphone. It used to be that the sole purpose of a telephone was to allow us to talk to people who weren't immediately nearby. Now, even when people receive a phone call on their smart phone, they will often ignore it so they can continue browsing Facebook. In contrast, phone calls are more personal and require more thought. This is why many people don't like talking on the phone. In addition, phone calls take up too much time. That is valuable time that people prefer to spend looking at pictures of other individuals on Facebook, people whom they probably don't know that well. It seems everyone prefers text messaging rather than phone calls. Heaven forbid anyone has to pay attention to someone who is talking to them. It must really put a damper on everyone's texting schedules.

Since computers arrived in numerous households, everyone has become used to having simple tasks done for them. There is no need to figure out simple arithmetic in

our heads because people just need to pull the calculator up on the computer and run for home base. The same is done for us on our smartphones. It isn't enough that text messaging exists alone; smartphones automatically correct grammatical errors, too. Laziness ensues when there is no need to think. It is not a surprise that anyone would be more likely to have a conversation via text messaging than through a live conversation. Nowadays, it seems like we have no other choice than to communicate through text messages. We need it so we won't sound like a plethora of Neanderthals during an actual verbal conversation. It is possible that phone calls cause us to be more aware of the things we say; therefore, we are probably more aware of how intelligent we sound. We are also more likely to catch ourselves making grammatical errors when we are speaking to someone rather than when we have a cellular device do all the work for us.

Finally, text messaging can easily cause an addiction to the Internet. Not only are we texting, but we are checking our Facebook accounts and updating our Twitter feeds. Being able to multi-task is what makes smartphones so fun and interesting to have. We can talk to our friends via text messaging, or we can update all our friends on where we like to eat on the weekends through Facebook. In contrast, phone calls force the people talking to be more involved in the conversation. There are no distractions, and the mind is forced to focus on the task at hand, which is enjoying basic, verbal, human contact. Even the thought of surviving a simple conversation has led people to take refuge in the screens of their "computer phones." It's hard to be intimidated when communicating through an inanimate object all the time.

Our lives have become more advanced thanks to new technology. In fact, they have become so advanced that we don't even need to think as much as we used to.

Everyone knows the saying, “Too much of a good thing can turn bad.” While it is nice to have something else do the thinking for us, we should reconsider our priorities. When confronted with the obstacle of a real conversation, actively talk and listen. We shouldn’t let ourselves fall into an anti-social coma just because the thought of a real conversation intimidates us.

**SECTION 2:
RESEARCHED ESSAYS USING
ONE TO FOUR SOURCES**

Writing Critical Analyses of Literature

Reading and writing about literature is a way for students to understand and connect not only to the immediate culture in which they live, but also to past cultural histories that have shaped the present without their knowledge. Because delving into our cultural background through reading and writing about literature can be overwhelming and, many times, intimidating, college students have a difficult time grasping the importance of these practices. Classroom discussion of literary works, their historical importance, and their relevance to our present-day world can help students to realize that literature does not exist in a vacuum; it is not static, and even though they are first-time college students, they can continue to shape the meaning and relevance of these works in our world by discussing them with others, doing research to expand the scope of their own knowledge, and writing to share their thoughts and ideas with others, making themselves a part of the ongoing discussion about literature.

When students do research to support their interpretation of literature, they enter the world of literary criticism. Whether they realize it or not, usually students are looking for critical pieces which support their own interpretation of a work of literature, yet they likely will find some that do not. At this point, students will find that classroom discussions about the role of “opinion” and “aesthetics” in literary criticism will help them not to be intimidated by so-called experts whose ideas differ greatly from their own. Another important discussion for the classroom prior to writing and research is the role of research in shaping students’ interpretations of what they read and, consequently, the importance of thoroughly citing sources to avoid the semblance of plagiarism.

Once students understand the role of research in supporting their own ideas and interpretations, they can enjoy the experience of forming their own hypotheses about the meaning of the literary works, working as detectives by looking for clues in the literature that lead the reader to a final interpretation. Each hypothesis can and will be different depending on the reader and his or her background, knowledge, and interests because we each bring to literature a wealth of experience and interests: in history, in biography, in personal exploration, in psychology, in film, etc. The most wonderful thing about literary analysis is that we can find and share ourselves and our interests with others through the act of reading and writing about literature.

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Don't be afraid to offer creative ways of interpreting the text. As long as you can find evidence in the text to support your interpretation, your ideas will always have validity. That is part of the subjective nature of literary analysis.
2. Take some time before going out to do research to jot down your own original thoughts and ideas about the literary work so it will be clear to you, before you do your research, which ideas you formed upon your own reading of the text versus the ideas that you encountered when reading others' criticism of the works. This practice will help you avoid plagiarism.
3. Literary criticism does not lose validity with the passage of time as do other forms of interpretive writing, but students should find sources published as recently as possible to ensure they are encountering the most current information, a best practice in the case of any researched essay.

“*Trifles* and *A Doll’s House*: Stories of Heroines No Longer Hidden” – **Prize Winner**

This prize-winning literary essay does an excellent job of stating a claim that brings together two characters and gives motivation for their actions. Note how the student writer supports the claim with specific evidence from the two plays, along with evidence from a powerful work of non-fiction. This is an outstanding example of setting up a thesis and organizing and supporting ideas. Note that when writing about literature, there are conventions (rules) to follow. One important convention for a student writer is to use present tense when writing about a work of fiction. However, for any events that happened before the narrative of the actual story, writers use past tense to indicate to readers the proper timing of events. Note how this writer follows convention.

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13 December 2011

Trifles and *A Doll’s House*:

Stories of Heroines No Longer Hidden

Susan Glaspell’s *Trifles* and Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* are stories of two women who find themselves trapped in the shadows of their husbands and emerge from their experiences transformed. There are many interesting similarities, as well as differences, in these stories of women who become heroines through such disparate means. Minnie Wright in Glaspell’s *Trifles* is a lady who had become invisible to her husband and to the world. For the past thirty years, Minnie has lived in poverty in a childless, unhappy marriage. Her adult life has been spent in a lonely home waiting on a husband who believed “folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet” (Glaspell 1051). Like Minnie, Nora Helmer in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* is also married, but unlike Minnie, she is younger and has three small children. Nora is

uncomfortably encased in her feminine roles. She envisions herself as an adult, while her husband, Torvald, views her as a childish “little skylark” that needs his constant direction (Ibsen 441). Minnie and Nora choose substantially different paths on their individual journeys; however, they face their fears, remove the barriers in their lives, and become their own heroes.

The external and internal conflicts experienced by Minnie and Nora cause them to reassess their lives. These conflicts become a method for self-examination; consequently, the women experience a change in their consciousness. In his book, *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell asserts one’s consciousness is transformed, “[e]ither by the trials themselves or by illuminating revelations. Trials and revelations are what it’s all about” (155). The many years of marriage and veritable captivity with the dour Mr. Wright eventually took its toll, and the joy in Minnie has evaporated. Before she married Mr. Wright, Minnie was happy: “She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was...one of the town girls singing in the choir” (Glaspell 1055). Over time, Minnie’s perception of herself has become like that of her beloved canary—bound and helpless. During a violent episode, it seems that Mr. Wright broke the canary’s neck, and in doing so, metaphorically killed his wife’s spirit. This event brought the silence Mr. Wright so desired; it also created an internal conflict within Minnie, which generated an intense mix of emotion. The external oppression in Minnie’s life inspires her to break her bonds to Mr. Wright by breaking his neck. As her bird has expired, Minnie is inspired.

In similar fashion to Minnie, Nora Helmer’s conflict is also external, first with her papa and then in her marriage to Torvald. In sharp contrast to Minnie, Nora responds to her environment by behaving as a child. When she finds herself caught in a net

woven from her forgery and lies, the pressure causes Nora to change. She realizes her immaturity and ignorance has been detrimental to her happiness and her marriage. In a fit of emotional frustration, Nora lashes out at Torvald and declares, “[Y]ou have never understood me. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald – first by papa and then by you” (Ibsen 490). No longer able to tolerate the shadow of adulthood, Nora decides she wants to join the sphere of maturity and dance in its light. Through dramatically different means, the pressures and conflicts experienced by Minnie and Nora transform their consciousness and lead them to claim new identities for themselves.

According to Joseph Campbell, Glaspell’s Minnie and Ibsen’s Nora are both examples of heroes. In Ibsen’s play, Nora deliberately chooses to leave her family to step out into the unknown. Campbell argues this type of hero is the one who “sets out responsibly and intentionally to perform the deed” (158). Nora clearly explains to her husband, Torvald, the reason she is leaving. She stands before him and declares, “There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself – you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself” (Ibsen 491). Unlike Nora, Minnie makes the determination that Mr. Wright should be the one to leave the marriage. The night Minnie took her fate into her own hands is largely unknown; however, she demonstrates the other type of hero, in which, according to Campbell, sometimes “there are adventures into which you are thrown... You didn’t intend it, but you’re in it now” (158). Minnie and Nora set out in different directions on a similar quest. However, their net result is the same in that they each achieve the opportunity to begin anew.

Minnie’s and Nora’s husbands are the catalyst in each woman’s heroic journey. They married distinctively different, yet consistent men who play important roles in each

quest. Joseph Campbell believes “the adventure that the hero is ready for is the one he gets. The adventure is symbolically a manifestation of his character. Even the landscape and the conditions of the environment match his readiness” (158). Neither woman’s joy is a factor to their husbands. During their marriage, it does not appear to others that Minnie’s happiness “made much difference to John [Wright]” (Glaspell 1051). In contrast to Minnie, Nora’s husband Torvald outwardly loves her, but he does not trust her. Torvald feels Nora has “[n]o religion, no morality, no sense of duty” (Ibsen 488). Neither Mr. Wright nor Torvald are concerned with their spouse as a partner in the marriage. Minnie and Nora find themselves able to move only within the confines of their husband’s approved parameters. Without their husband’s influence and the external pressures they exert, Minnie and Nora might not have become heroes to themselves.

As a result of their learning experiences, Minnie and Nora are forever changed. The death of Minnie’s canary awakens in her the desire to live again. Nora understands her immaturity stifles her as a wife and mother. Campbell asserts, “The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there is something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to members of his society” (152). These women refuse to allow further erosion of their person. Instead, they choose to take the reins of their lives, by whatever means necessary, in the hope of obtaining a better future. Minnie and Nora lose their innocence as they depart their old lives and enter their individual journeys.

According to Joseph Campbell, one does not have to agree with Minnie or Nora’s actions for them to be heroes. Campbell believes whether the adventure is right

or wrong is secondary: “That’s a judgment from the other side, but it doesn’t destroy the intrinsic heroism of the deed performed” (156). Both characters experience epiphanies and, through a change in consciousness, take control of their lives. Once invisible in their worlds, Minnie and Nora choose to emerge from feminine obscurity and claim their place in society.

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“Recipe for Disaster: Love”

The strongest element of this essay is the driving idea, the essential framework on which the discussion takes place. In every aspect of this paper, even the title, the author’s focus is evident. The challenge of writing is that it is not a task carried out simply by following a formula; there are authorial decisions to be made at every step in the process. This author made the choice to compare a literary tradition to a recipe and never wavered from that direction. Because of that, the reader naturally relaxes, feeling confidence in the author’s ability to lead the way. Notice how his ingredients (his thesis) set up his evidence in lines from the poems. Reading the work of an author who has made clear, conscious decisions is like flying in a jet with an experienced and decorated pilot at the helm. When an author does not make those decisions, it’s like riding in a twin-engine puddle jumper. This writer is clearly experienced.

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23 April 2012

Recipe for Disaster: Love

The Courtly Love Tradition is a peculiar thing. It calls for a mixture of just the right ingredients, in the perfect proportions. Like directions on a recipe card, it is extremely well-balanced, yet open for small improvisation so originality can be attained. First, a woman beyond mortal grace must exist, being entirely unattainable; second, against all odds, she must be attained by truest love; and third, tragedy must strike, snuffing out her life like winter takes the most colorful of flowers. Francesco Petrarch’s poems “Sometimes She’d Comb Her Yellow Braids Out Loose” and “Those Eyes I Raved About In Ardent Rhyme” work together to infuse their individual elements into a single entrée of Courtly Love Tradition.

As the author, Petrarch had the full ability to create, mix, and design the story that his poems tell. As the recipe tells us, his first element had to be a beautiful woman, unattainable, and full of grace. His muse, his Calliope, was known to be Laura. From these two poems, we can deduce that the descriptions of the two women in the poems are of the same woman: presumably, Laura. In “Sometimes She’d Comb Her Yellow Braids Out Loose,” Laura is described as having golden hair with which even the breeze rushes to flirt (lines 1-2). In the same poem, Laura is ardently described “like a goddess walking/ [. . .] when she spoke, I divined the angels talking” (9, 12). In “Those Eyes I Raved About In Ardent Rhyme,” her eyes, arms, hands, feet, and “loving face” are said to have “split [the poet’s] soul in two” (lines 1-3). From these descriptions, Laura is perfect by all accounts. Her beauty and her grace cannot be rivaled. Ingredient one is definitely existent.

Ingredient two, the attainment of the beautiful woman and the true love, is sorely lacking in the combined story of the two poems. Laura is never actually said to have been in love with Petrarch. Instead, it says in “Sometimes She’d Comb Her Yellow Braids Out Loose,” “Her bow’s gone slack, her arrow’s in my side” (14). This line implies less about Laura’s love, and more about Petrarch’s infatuation with Laura. In the same poem, Petrarch says, “My soul dry kindling, waiting for her flame,/ and could I help it I was set ablaze?” (7-8). Again, from these lines, Laura’s affections remain unknown. However, Petrarch’s infatuation seems to be described as burning and intense. Overall, ingredient two is lacking in the poet’s claiming the beautiful maid; however, Petrarch’s affection for her is increasingly evident.

Ingredient three—tragedy—is ever-present in the second of these poems, “Those Eyes I Raved About in Ardent Rhyme.” Laura’s death is hinted about here. Petrarch says, “That angel smile whose flash made me surmise/ the very earth had turned to Paradise,/ have come to dust: no life, no sense. Undone” (6-8). Laura has died, and as such, her beauty has diminished, gone into the earth to never be seen again. But the real tragedy seems to be Petrarch being left alive. He laments, “And I live on, in sorrow and self-scorn/ [. . .] Let there be no more love songs!/ [. . .] My lyre itself dissolved in so much weeping” (“Those Eyes I Raved” 9, 12, 14). The sadness in the poem comes not in the form of a lover’s death, but in the lover left behind. Petrarch is alive and in agony. And so, the third ingredient is present, though it is shadowed by the sadness of life.

Petrarch’s poems retain a parallel to the Courtly Love Tradition, but overall, the ingredients are not present for the poems to be completely authentic to the formula. There is infatuation, a beautiful and unattainable woman, and there is devastation; however, Laura becomes not a lover but, instead, the victim of a voyeur. The true tragedy is also not in the death of a lover but in the life of the one who loves from afar. There is no theme of everlasting, unyielding love in “Sometimes She’d Comb Her Yellow Braids Out Loose” and “Those Eyes I Raved About In Ardent Rhyme,” but instead a theme of unrequited infatuation.

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Writing Claims of Fact

As active participants in our world community, we come into contact with the conditions of the world around us every day—through interacting with the people around us, watching the news on television, reading a newspaper, or even attending the performance of a drama. These experiences and the knowledge that we gain from them can often make us want to share our knowledge with others, a responsibility many of the world’s citizens take seriously. Oftentimes, that responsibility leads to a desire to write in order to share our own knowledge—and the knowledge of reliable authorities—with others in our world. This desire results in our writing claims of fact.

Writers of claims of fact seek to offer factual information about past, present, or future societal conditions that involve specific communities or interest groups. Many times, our purpose in writing claims of fact is to discuss our reasons for disagreeing with some widely held belief, or because we endeavor to inform our audience about a condition in our society with which the audience is unfamiliar. For instance, we may write a claim of fact to explain why we see a condition in our society as a problem for a minority group by illustrating how that group of people is negatively affected by the beliefs and actions of the majority. On the other hand, we may write a claim of fact to explain how a specific group benefits from a program that has recently been implemented by our community. Thus, a claim of fact does not have to focus only on the negative, but instead it focuses on simply offering information to an audience who does not have ready access to all the facts and, as a result, may be mistaken in their beliefs.

To strengthen our argument, we support claims of fact with factual information such as firsthand experiences, examples, statistics, and information from other reliable authorities whom the audience would be able to verify through their own research. Our argument is made sound by giving irrefutable evidence for the claims that we make, which are often inferences based on the factual evidence we have gathered. We typically can prove claims of fact without a doubt although there may at times be exceptions to the fact. The thesis statement should offer a comprehensive explanation of our attitude towards the issue on which the essay focuses. When writing a claim of fact, we should always write with a specific audience in mind, addressing those people or groups who would have a vested interest in the issue and how that issue is viewed by the community, or world, around them.

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Be sure to offer evidence that is sufficient for proving your point, information that is relevant to the issue at hand. Depending on how complex or controversial your claim is, you may need to offer more data if the claim is difficult to prove or less if your audience would be easily convinced.
2. Always question the reliability of your sources because some may be misleading in the way they present themselves. Look for other sources who use your authorities' information instead of assuming the source is reliable. Since not all sources are reliable, it is up to you as the writer and researcher to determine the credibility and authority of your sources.
3. Balance information gleaned from sources with your own statement of factual information. Avoid reliance on the sources to make your argument for you; instead, offer inferences based on your interpretation and understanding of the facts.

“Video Games Should Respect Women”

Although most researched essays use a formal tone, this student uses her informal voice and specific personal examples, along with database articles, to convince her reader to agree with her position about the influence women players should have on the makers of video games. In this essay, the use of “I” is not only acceptable but useful in making a case for more respectful treatment of women by the video-game industry. The writer does a nice job of integrating her sources to create a well-written essay on an interesting social topic.

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8 November 2011

Video Games Should Respect Women

As a woman and long-time gamer, I have spent many years tolerating what I very often see in the video games I play: women being depicted unrealistically. It is common to see female characters depicted as extremely voluptuous and wearing small bits of clothing. All my life I’ve tolerated this, but lately, when I see one of these characters, I have to roll my eyes as my respect for the developers who made the game drops. Game designers should definitely tone down their depictions of women and show some respect.

In May of 2011, a somewhat decent action-adventure game was released called *Two Worlds 2*. This game features a handsome and realistic male hero all geared up in proper adventuring attire for long treks across the vast Africa-inspired landscape. So far so good. But then in the beginning of the game, we see his sister who is held captive by the evil villain. I had to roll my eyes and sigh when I saw she was wearing a dress that was slit all the way down the front. It got worse. Our hero soon meets Cassara, the

Dragon Queen, whose bust size is quite grotesque, and her gown basically lacks a bodice as it is slit on all sides so that we all know what she would look like if nude. Even her face has a weird shape stretching beyond the threshold of what is ideal and natural. I felt I was looking at a badly rendered, cartoon-like, 3D computer model made by immature computer geeks standing next to an impressive, photo-realistic male character clothed head to toe.

A lot of game developers at work today are young males who, ignorantly, don't even believe women play video games. Many women gamers, however, are asking why these female characters must be dressed this way. According to "Female Gamers Wanted" by Greg Sandoval, "Tammy Yap, a game programmer for six years, once asked that of a colleague—after all, the skimpy clothing and exaggerated body parts might offend some women, she told him. His response: 'What difference does it make? Women don't play video games'" (E1). A very immature and inaccurate appraisal. Another article, "Video-Game Industry Seeks a Woman's Touch" by Matt Slagle, states, "The Entertainment Software Association reports about 40 percent of gamers are women" (G1). I'm sure a lot of that 40 percent are gamers like me: women fond of all genres and themes, eager for more adventure and challenges but forced to tolerate the negative female stereotypes found in most of these games.

I have a complaint that may be unique, however. Why are only the women depicted halfway or completely naked and not the male characters? Can't these games be at least equally discriminant? For example, in *Two Worlds 2* there is a scene that gently hints that the main character makes love to a supporting character. Afterward, when it is

over and the dialogue continues, the female is shown walking around the room completely nude—and the male hero is completely clothed. He even has his boots on!

A lot of games today give players the opportunity to change the appearance and clothing of the playable characters. I like this aspect until the occasions when I decide to play a female character and find that I'm not even given a choice of how promiscuous my character looks because clothes with coverage are not even available. This problem can be found in games like *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel*, which features female characters who, I'm sure, make it hard for any real girl or woman to relate. Everyone knows that the game industry is only catering to the people who mainly play games: young males. But perhaps if they toned down their female characters a bit and appealed a little bit more to female gamers, then it might help the industry to gain more sales and a wider range of customers. Perhaps it is time for game developers to develop a sense of marketing rather than just to express *their* idea of beauty. All successful commercial artists know that they must sometimes bend their style to suit the taste of a paying customer.

But it happens that there are quite a lot of female gamers, and if this negative depiction of what women should look like and act like continues, it could have a negative impact on young girls. In the article, "Video Games Send Girls 'Unhealthy' Messages," it is stated that "[a]lmost half of the top-selling U.S. console video games contain 'unhealthy' messages for girls, including body images, provocative sexuality, and violent behavior, according to a study [...]" (6C). The example of prostitutes and violence toward them found in the *Grand Theft Auto* series has already been used many times. You play as a male mafia member and are placed in a large city resembling New

York; then, you are given the freedom to do as you wish, including visiting strip clubs, using the services of prostitutes, and/or killing them.

Having said all of that, I have to say that few games out there have stolen my heart and still have it. *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is one of the best-selling titles of recent video games. It is obviously enjoyed by many. And I salute Bethesda, the developers behind it, for making this game a masterpiece all around. This game features playable women of ten different races, from human to orc, and they are all very believable—at least in bodily proportions. Also, a realistic and sensible array of costumes is available to change and mix as the player pleases. While playing this game, a female gamer can now gag at the ugly monster she is battling rather than at her own heroine.

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Writing Cause/Effect Essays

Oftentimes we find ourselves in a situation, wondering how we got there, why certain events have happened, or what the results of our own actions will be. These are situations where we examine issues of cause and effect. We consider whose actions were responsible for the situation, why the person or group acted as they did, and what consequences result from those actions. In a similar respect, when writing a cause and effect essay, we are working to determine and explain reasons for behaviors, actions, or beliefs and the consequences of situations that arise because of those behaviors, actions, or beliefs.

When searching for reasons why something happened or why a situation exists, we usually find a variety of causes that are interconnected, albeit by a remote connection at times. Our purpose when writing a cause/effect essay, then, is to unravel the mystery of the causal relationship between events or happenings first for ourselves, and then for our audience. We write to explain what did or might occur, and why. Because it is not likely that a situation is the result of only a few causes—nor will there be only a few people affected by a situation or decision that is worthy of our writing—we must be sure to narrow our focus so that our subject is manageable based on the assignment's requirements. A cause/effect essay must thoroughly and reasonably discuss each cause and explain the logical connection between those causes in order to illustrate their effects on a certain person or group. Similarly, since one particular action (cause) may result in effects on any number of people in a number of ways, we need to narrow our subject for our writing to a few effects, while still recognizing the ongoing possibilities for other consequences. Any time we find a number of apparent causes or effects, then, we should

weigh them against one another and assign each a level of importance so that when we write, we may choose the most closely related causes and effects and create a thesis statement that clearly explains to our audience the connection between the most relevant causes and effects.

Another way to keep your essay focused is to consider who would and who would not agree with you; then, consider why. If there is widespread disagreement over causes or effects, you might need to go a bit further in your examination of causes and effects in order to be clear and accurate in your interpretation of the situation while also treating others' opinions fairly. Once you have determined who your audience is and on what level they will agree with you, develop your subject by describing the event or situation for which you are explaining causes and effects, offering information on who is responsible for the situation and why, what beliefs they hold, what types of decisions they have made to cause the situation, when these decisions occurred, and where those people who are affected can be found. Organize your information into paragraphs by setting a goal for each paragraph: answer one question per paragraph, and order your paragraphs to offer cause(s) before effect(s).

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Beware of confusing coincidence with cause. There always needs to be a logical, explainable relationship between your causes and effects, and you'll need to be able to discuss that relationship in your essay.
2. Do not oversimplify causes by failing to recognize their full number and complexity. Show in your writing that you recognize that the causes you are

outlining there are not the only ones although they are the most important to your argument or your point of view.

3. Do not assume that because one thing preceded another, they are directly or causally related. Cause and effect depends not only on a timeline of when things happened, but also on how and why those actions are related.

“Bitter Harvest: The Dangers of Genetically Modified Corn”

This student addresses an issue that concerns many Americans: What do we eat, and how does it affect us? His essay is written in a strong academic voice, and he supports his clear claim throughout the essay. Note the variety of sources: a documentary film, a scholarly journal, and a popular periodical. This is an example of a cause/effect essay where the student sets up the problem and supports his claim with ample, documented evidence. When summarizing source information, it is important to use identifying signal phrases to lead into the summarized information, and avoid ending your paragraph with source information. Try to add a sentence of your own analysis or evaluation that supports your claim. Note how the writer concludes his essay in one final sentence that makes his reader want to find out more about this intriguing subject.

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1 May 2012

Bitter Harvest: The Dangers of Genetically Modified Corn

The genetic engineering of plants and animals has been a subject of fierce debate in recent years. Proponents of this new science contend that it is no different from what man has been doing since the dawn of civilization: changing the natural environment to make it more hospitable to human life. Critics counter that there are unforeseeable and possibly devastating consequences to be reaped by altering the balance of the ecosystem, as well as certain economic and legal factors which could have a major impact on world trade in the years to come. Corn, in particular, has become a crucial part of the American diet, and while all genetically modified (GM) foods have potential downsides, it is genetically modified corn that stands to do the most damage if these dangers are manifested. As the evidence will demonstrate, GM corn has a negative impact on the

U.S. economy, sets a dangerous legal precedent in regards to property rights in the United States, is potentially hazardous to human health, and may cause irreversible damage to the ecosystem.

To properly understand the subject of GM corn, a little history is in order. Director Deborah Koons explores the history of GM food extensively in her 2004 documentary *The Future of Food*. Koons relates that since the 1970s, the scientific community has been keenly aware that genetic engineering would soon become a major concern to both the environment and the human race. Many biologists were gravely concerned with the potential damage that could be caused by unrestricted applications of genetic research. According to the film, various panels of top researchers met to discuss how the scientific community and the various governments should deal with this issue, the result being a legal and professional moratorium on public applications of gene science, confining genetic experiments to the laboratory (Koons).

While the modification of genes was confined to the lab, the breeding of animals and plants for desired characteristics has been going on for as long as recorded history. However, before the early twentieth century there had been no precedent for the patenting of organisms. In his article “Is Changing Patent Infringement Liability the Appropriate Mechanism for Allocating the Cost of Pollen Drift?” author Tim Van Pelt notes that “[b]efore 1930, plants were not patentable because of the general belief that they were products of nature and could not be adequately described to meet patent laws’ written description requirement. In order to reward ‘plant breeders and their contributions to agriculture and horticulture,’ Congress passed the Plant Patent Act (PPA) of 1930” (575-76).

In the 1970s, the U.S. Congress expanded this protection with the Plant Variety Protection Act. Van Pelt notes that while this law did expand patent protection to the seeds produced through reproduction of the plant, an exemption was kept in place in order to keep farmers from being held liable for reproducing a patented plant after their initial purchase of seed (576). Throughout the eighties and early nineties, Congress continued to allow patents for more and more biological applications. With major advances being made in gene modification, these laws also served to reduce restrictions on the uses of genetic modifications produced in the lab.

By the early nineties, engineered plants intended for human consumption were beginning to hit the market. However, as no applicable labeling laws existed at the time, the public was not always informed of what they were getting. The earliest example of a real public outcry against genetically modified foods came with the introduction of the Flavr Savr tomato (Koons). While the public's reaction certainly played a part in its failure, the Flavr Savr was ultimately pulled from the market because it bruised too easily and consumers found the taste unappealing. It was not until the scandal involving Taco Bell's use of genetically modified corn, which at the time had not been approved for human consumption, when GM foods became a major subject of public debate (Koons).

With the introduction of genetically modified corn intended for human consumption, the risks of GM foods took on a much grander scale. While America's primary crop of choice has traditionally been wheat, in recent decades the proliferation of uses for corn, from animal feed to corn oil and the corn-syrup now used as a sweetener in almost all processed food products, has caused both the consumption of and the demand for corn products to skyrocket in the United States. According to the

documentary film *The Future of Foods*, the U.S. exports large amounts of corn to foreign markets, with exports to Europe alone totaling approximately three-hundred million dollars annually (Koons).

Recent bans and moratoriums on GM corn around the world, most notably in the countries of the European Union, have had a depressing effect on many U.S. farming concerns. When this economic impact is coupled with the unpredictability of cross-pollination, the potential for economic collapse in the U.S. corn market becomes a real possibility. Many countries take the specter of GM food much more seriously than the United States, begging the question: At what point will one of these countries stop buying *non*-GM corn from us because they can no longer have any confidence that it has not been polluted by cross-pollination?

The tendency of plant species to cross-pollinate has led to complicated legal questions regarding the property rights of farm owners and the reasonable limits to which the patent holder can assert domain over successive generations of seed. Van Pelt describes these complicated laws:

In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court paved the way for utility patent protection for plants. The Court upheld genetically engineered bacteria as patentable . . . since it was a new and useful manufacture or composition of matter. Five years later, the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences interpreted [this ruling] as supporting the proposition that plants are patentable life forms under [utility patent law] and upheld claims in a patent application directed at a corn plant. In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed that plants are patentable subject matter . . . [and further

commented that] because of the heightened requirements for obtaining a patent, “utility patent holders receive greater rights of exclusion than holders of a PVP certificate. Most notably, there are no exemptions for research or saving seed under a utility patent.” (576-77)

What this all amounts to is that farmers who purchased genetically modified seed were not allowed to use new seed produced by the harvested plants without first paying for a new license. In addition, if farmers were found to have patented seed growing on their land, they could be sued for violating the seed producer's patent, even if the seed was blown by the wind or fell off a passing truck. The documentary *The Future of Foods* states that in many lawsuits brought against private farmers, most notably by the Monsanto Corporation, courts in both the U.S. and Canada have ruled again and again that the burden of proof is on the farmer to prove that they were not intentionally violating the patent (Koons).

Along with the threats to property rights sparked by GM food, many researchers have expressed grave concerns over the potential health problems that may be caused by GM food. In his article “Today's Synthetic Foods: Shrinking Our Brains, Testicles, and Livers?,” Conrad Miller reports, “On May 19 [2009], the American Academy of Environmental Medicine advised . . . '[S]everal animal studies indicate serious health risks associated with GM food consumption' including infertility, immune problems, accelerated aging, insulin regulation and changes in major organs and the gastrointestinal system.’ Their conclusion was that 'there is more than a casual association between GM foods and adverse health effects. There is causation'” (27). Miller goes on to reference studies purporting to show a link between GM foods and negatives effects, such as

stunted organs and organ damage, in rats and the production of a cancer-promoting growth factor in cows.

Though much research has been done overseas, until recent years there has been a shocking lack of thorough scientific research into the potential dangers of GM foods in the United States. *The Future of Foods* illustrates how GM food manufacturers have even used the power of their patent rights in order to prevent such studies, suing researchers who wish to examine their crops in the laboratory (Koons). As a result, many of the studies that *are* done are conducted through organizations which are friendly to Monsanto and other large GM concerns.

Indeed, Monsanto has ingratiated itself deep into the Washington establishment, in particular the EPA and the Department of Agriculture. Even an incomplete list—compiled by the makers of *The Future of Food* and naming only a few of the Monsanto employees who have served or are currently serving on one of the federal agencies tasked with regulating and overseeing Monsanto—is suggestive of the amount of power that this corporation holds in Washington. Linda J. Fisher, former Vice President of Government and Public Affairs for Monsanto Corporation, went on to become the Deputy Director of the Environmental Protection Agency. Michael A. Friedman, M.D, former acting commissioner of the United States Food and Drug Administration, became senior vice-president for clinical affairs at a pharmaceutical division of Monsanto Corporation. Margaret Miller, former chemical laboratory supervisor for Monsanto, became Deputy Director of Human Food Safety and Consultative Services in the United States Food and Drug Administration (Koons).

In the end, this lack of oversight may be the gravest danger represented by GM foods, the result being that we simply don't know what the real dangers are. While researchers are producing some usable data, the real bulk of the testing has yet to be done and the consequences to the environment may be impossible to predict until it is already too late to prevent them. Experts point out that corn, in particular, has an exceptional facility for spreading beyond its man-made borders and mixing genes with a wide variety of compatible plants and grasses (Koons). In releasing these genetic chimeras into the environment, corporate scientists may well have opened Pandora's Box, and while there is now a strong movement growing in the United States against the proliferation of genetically modified foods, the damage may already have been done.

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Writing Problem/Solution and Claims of Policy

Problem/solution essays and claims of policy make recommendations. These recommendations call for a specific solution to a specific problem. Because students must establish that a problem exists or will exist before making recommendations or discuss causes and effects of a problem first, this writing assignment may be assigned later in a semester since students will need to understand the other rhetorical modes that build to the problem/solution or claim of policy essay.

Currently in the VSCC English Department, English 1010 instructors assign the substantive research essay as a means for assessing students' abilities in writing a focused, well-researched position essay. This project is often the culmination of everything these students have learned throughout the semester: focusing a topic, creating a thesis, organizing points logically to support that thesis, and supporting the main ideas with examples and researched evidence. The problem/solution essay is a reasonable assignment since it requires students to have a broader perspective on the issue than purely personal experiences. It is also perfectly designed for the SEEK assessment, which focuses on expanding students' problem-solving abilities. The skills students learn while writing this essay can then carry over into the work they will do in their other college courses, and if required of them, in English 1020.

For the Claim of Policy assignment, English 1020 instructors may have students focus on a single issue about which they feel passionate, such as "creating a living working wage for workers," "providing affordable health care for all Americans," or "establishing a daycare center on VSCC's college campus for students with childcare

needs.” English instructors may ask students to build shorter argumentative essays—a claim of fact, a claim of value, and a claim of cause—to establish a problem, and the student will end the course by writing a longer argumentative essay, a claim of policy that offers solutions to the problem. Some instructors may begin the course with an I-Search paper that allows students to explore their interests as they begin to shape their research for a claim of policy. However, other VSCC English 1020 teachers take an opposite approach, asking students to write shorter claims of fact, definition, value, cause, and policy covering a variety of topics—one topic for each claim type. All of these methods can yield strong claims of policy.

Students can write successful claims of policy by clearly establishing a specific problem, discussing the problem’s causes or effects, offering an evaluation of the problem, and providing a solution to the problem. As is the case in writing successful arguments, the claim of policy should also provide a clearly focused persuasive thesis that identifies the problem and solution, well-supported reasons backed by relevant and sufficient evidence, a counter-argument, and an appeal to an audience’s pathos, logos, and ethos.

Quick Tips for Students:

1. Note that policy claims are recognizable because they tend to use the words “should” and “should not,” but students need to also recognize when the words are implied. For example, “Support Our Troops” is a declarative bumper sticker that is a policy claim because the understood larger statement is, “We should support our troops.”

2. Writers of policy claims often have problems coming up with specific solutions for the problem, and many times, it is because those writers have failed to narrow their audience to a specific group of people. Consider your options when it comes to audience; in other words, determine who will be responsible for carrying out the actions you propose in your solution and what level of responsibility you are assigning to each group of people in that audience.
3. Don't forget to familiarize yourself with as many options as possible before suggesting a plan of action. Also consider research on solutions that have been implemented and how and why they have been unsuccessful in other places. This knowledge will help you improve your counterargument.

“Academic Stress: The Unseen Villain”

Effectively using source material is often a challenge for student writers. This problem/solution essay demonstrates an appropriate balance: the author uses valid observations from experts to support the claim while never losing a sense of her own voice and control of the message. The introduction is strong, the thesis is clear, and the organization is sound. This writer might have strengthened the message with the use of more specific description (i.e., “fast food” does not create as vivid of an image as “burgers and fries” or “greasy pizza, corndogs, and carbonated sugar-water”), but her style is nonetheless solid and quite readable. Perhaps most important, the author presents a problem and then proposes possible solutions which are realistic; the essay never claims to have the ultimate answer, just workable suggestions. Thus, in several ways, this paper shows us the power of balance in effective writing.

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23 April 2012

Academic Stress: The Unseen Villain

Stress levels in college students increase dramatically toward the end of the semester as finals approach and cram time begins. Work, papers, and studying like crazy can create an atmosphere that seems almost impossible in which to succeed. What most students never stop to think about at this point are the causes of the stress they are experiencing and the negative results that could come out of it. The workload of a college student can be overwhelming. Lifestyle changes, the struggle to maintain good grades, and poor time management skills all tend to lead to physical and mental exhaustion and lower scores for the student. These effects can be minimized if students choose to become involved in stress- or time- management courses and begin to make an effort to do stress-relieving exercises.

College is a whole new world that brings about many changes to the lives of students. Everything from changes in sleeping and eating habits to the increased workload is usually a drastic change. Sleeping less and studying more can disrupt sleep cycles and inhibit normal thought processes. In regard to a poll taken of more than two thousand college students at forty different colleges and universities, Sara Lipka, writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, states, “Trouble sleeping, as well as thinking or concentrating, afflicted more than half of the students polled” (par. 3). Eating habits also tend to change in college because fast food and snack foods have a convenience factor that makes them more appealing to the typical busy student. Usually, a student’s full schedule basically includes classes, studying, and squeezing in a meal or a few hours of sleep between assignments and reviews. This kind of schedule does not allow for a healthy lifestyle and could lead to some health problems, both physical and mental. The stress of keeping track of it all weighs heavily on the mind and body, causing even more stress. The cycle could go on and on.

The desire to maintain A’s and B’s in difficult college courses can also be a major stressor. In order to achieve the goal of getting high grades, students usually engage in constant studying, never fully letting their minds rest. All spare time is spent with an open book and notepad, trying to cram in as much information as possible so as to save time for the other four subjects left to tackle. Stress, in times like these, builds up quickly in a busy college student’s life. That overwhelming feeling is always there to remind us of all the work that is left to do and the short amount of time in which to get it done. Ranjita Misra, PhD, and Michelle McKean report in their study titled “College Students’ Academic Stress and Its Relation to Their Anxiety, Time Management, And Leisure

Satisfaction” that a major part of academic stress is the perception by students of the extremely large amount of information there is to learn and the inadequate time available to retain it all (41). This negative outlook on the likelihood of success is what college students’ academic stress feeds on, and their anxiety levels increase based on this perception of certain failure.

Another contributor to the stress of maintaining good grades is the way in which a lot of students use their time for studying. Multiple difficult subjects can really throw off the balance of a study schedule. Students can very easily feel overwhelmed trying to keep up with their studies, especially when the topics are difficult to grasp. Students get so focused on what there is to do that many of them never stop to think about the ways in which they go about it. Misra and McKean, in an article in the *American Journal of Health Studies*, explain their thoughts on previous research on this very topic:

Effective time management strategies increase academic performance and are frequently suggested by academic assistance personnel as aids to enhance achievement for college students. Productive study methods are characterized by “time management” and “strategic studying.” Although programs emphasize starting large tasks well before due dates, breaking down large tasks into small ones, and doing small tasks on a regular schedule, students regularly ignore these techniques and find themselves in great distress before exams. (41-42)

Many students struggle with time management and the stress that so often stems from it. When academics begin to cause this much stress, especially close to finals, it is time to start looking at the outcomes of all of this tension.

Stress in academics can cause more problems than most might think. Common academic stressors such as lifestyle changes, striving to maintain good grades, and poor time management skills all tend to lead toward two major effects: lower grades and even some health issues. Moderate levels of stress are healthy because they promote motivation, but too much stress can have some pretty bad effects on students in particular. Several experts in the field explain this in a study that showed the relationship between stressors in college students' lives and perceived stress from the point of view of the students on their actual academic performances: "Although an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability, too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems and may affect the academic achievement of students" (Rafidah, et al. 37). As stress continues to pile up, it begins to show in both academics and the student's mental and physical health, more and more, until something is done about it. In academics, it takes effect as a lack of concentration and jumbled thoughts. Stress like this can make it almost impossible to get school work done due to the combination of worry over assignments and fear of failure. As for mental and physical health, stress can be an ongoing, chronic issue that can be difficult to manage in severe forms. Mental and physical exhaustion are some of the more obvious outcomes of stress, but ask most students the week before final exams about their experiences, and they will probably complain of muscle tension and headaches. It may not seem like anything to worry about, but stress can severely affect people of all ages, especially college students who are working towards the highly valued goal of a degree.

Fortunately, there are several ways to help relieve stress and its symptoms. One solution that is most recommended by experts is taking courses that help students

manage their stress and time in a way that is conducive to a busy college schedule of classes and studying. Taking advantage of these classes can be an effective way to incorporate stress-reduction techniques into a daily routine. The experts of *Research in Higher Education* say, “[S]tudents who take advantage of study skills and time management courses should be able to more effectively manage many of the academic stresses that are characteristic of college life” (Struthers, Perry, Menec 590). Adding an extra hour to the list of classes can only help those who suffer from academic stress.

Another way to reduce stress levels, and an activity that can actually be pretty fun, is to find a physical activity to do in place of eating junk food and watching television in your spare time. Yoga and jogging are just a couple of examples of the many exercises that could be incorporated into that crazy college schedule. Take thirty minutes each day to take a walk around campus or join a yoga class and use that time to clear your mind. The whole point is to not think about school, which may actually help students improve their overall mindset when it is time to get back to work.

In order for any stress-reduction method to work properly, a new mindset should be applied to school and studies in general. C. Ward Struthers and his colleagues say, “When a student feels that he or she cannot improve his or her future performance, then he or she is likely to experience stress, motivational deficits, and attenuated performance” (589), meaning that a negative mindset is only going to bring negative results. A positive outlook on the purpose of a student’s education toward the ultimate goal of obtaining a degree and a job he or she dreams of having will keep the student motivated and focused on reaching his or her goals. The struggles faced through the

course of this student's education will be well worth it once those dreams become reality.

Despite the change in lifestyle, success over academic stress can be achieved with better time management skills, an extra time- or stress- management course, and a few minutes of exercise each day. With these changes, stressed-out students can be back on track toward obtaining their goals in no time. If no changes are made, stress will only accumulate and weigh even more heavily on students' academic outcomes and could ultimately lead to failure. Academic stress can lead to so many struggles in the life of a college student, but by incorporating a few changes, success can be obtained and desired goals can be met.

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Outline

- I. Introduction
 - A. Grab attention and offer context: the problem of stress for college students
 - B. Thesis: Lifestyle changes, maintaining good grades, and poor time management skills all tend to lead to physical and mental exhaustion and lower scores in the classroom.
- II. Lifestyle Changes
 - A. Sleeping less and studying more
 - 1. Disrupts sleep cycles
 - 2. Inhibits normal thought processes
 - B. Eating habits change in college
 - 1. Fast food is more convenient in a busy schedule of studying and classes
- III. Maintaining good grades
 - A. Multiple difficult classes make it harder to keep As and Bs.
 - 1. Usually no spare time due to studying
 - a. Never a moments rest for the mind.
 - B. So much work in so little time
 - 1. Negative outlook on this makes it even harder to do well.
- IV. Poor time management
 - A. Multiple difficult subjects can throw off the balance of a study schedule.
 - 1. Students get so busy in all of the studying that they never stop to think about the ways they spend the time.
 - B. When academic stress gets this bad, it is time to look at its effects.
- V. Effects
 - A. Stress can cause more problems than most think.
 - 1. Moderate stress is good, but too much can be harmful to students' bodies and grades.
 - B. In academics, stress is seen as lack of focus and jumbled thoughts.
 - 1. Makes school work seem almost impossible
 - a. Worry over assignments and fear of failure on the mind constantly
 - C. Mental and physical health
 - 1. Exhaustion
 - 2. Muscle tension
 - 3. Headaches
- VI. Solutions: stress management courses
 - A. Stress and time management courses are usually available classes
 - 1. Classes on campus fit into the typical college schedule of classes and studying.
- VII. Solutions: Physical activity
 - A. Take up jogging or yoga in spare time instead of watching television and eating junk.
 - B. This can actually be fun!
- VIII. Conclusion
 - A. A new, positive mindset is needed for any stress-reduction to work.
 - B. With just a few changes, anyone can be ready to succeed.

SECTION 3:
RESEARCHED ESSAYS USING
FIVE OR MORE SOURCES

“Same-Sex Marriage – The Time Is Now” – **Prize Winner**

When selecting a topic suitable for ENGL 1020 Argumentative Composition, the best subjects for argument are ones that are most timely. Although this topic is familiar, the exceptional development through specific illustrations combined with strong research and clear organization help to create this excellently written argument. This writer also nicely links the introductory and conclusion paragraphs with a personal anecdote that helps readers connect to the topic through use of pathos and which also provides unity to the essay.

Titus Seibold

Prof. Betty Mandeville

English 1020

23 April 2012

Same-Sex Marriage – The Time Is Now

In February 2007, Lisa Pond was enjoying her life with her domestic partner, Janice Langbehn, and their three children. Lisa and Janice had been together for eighteen years. Unexpectedly, Lisa suffered a life-threatening illness while on vacation in Florida. After Lisa was transported to a trauma center, Janice was refused access and visitation with Lisa until shortly before she died. Janice only gained visitation rights when a Catholic priest, who had been called in to perform last rites for Lisa, intervened. This is just one example of the obstacles that gay couples face when they attempt to take advantage of the same rights that a legally married heterosexual couple has available to them. While this may seem like an isolated incident, unfortunately this type of situation occurs far too frequently.

As of March 2012, six states and the District of Columbia recognized same-sex marriage and an additional five states recognized civil unions. However, thirty-nine

states still do not recognize any form of state-recognized partnership for gay couples (“Defining Marriage”). With the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, the U.S. Congress put into law a bill which did not require any individual state to recognize a gay marriage that occurred in a different state. Basically, the federal government ensured that a marriage of a gay couple would not be considered legal. There are many different areas where a gay couple, no matter how long they have been together, is denied the civil rights that are available to a heterosexual couple. Among these areas that will be discussed are tax laws, employee benefits, adoption, medical care and hospital visitation, and intestacy or estate laws. Many written discussions on the subject of gay marriage have focused primarily on the moral issues associated with gay marriage and civil unions. While moral issues cannot be ignored, this discussion will focus solely on the denial of civil rights between gay couples, who are unable to legally marry, and heterosexual couples who are legally married. The time has come for gay couples to be able to have the same civil rights available to heterosexual couples by legally having the right to marry nationwide.

The legal dictionary found at www.duhaime.org defines “civil union” as “a formal union between two people, of the same or different genders which results in, but falls short of, marriage-like rights and obligations.” The definition of “marriage” is not as clear-cut as the definition of “civil union.” *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines “marriage” in two different ways. First, it defines “marriage” as “a consensual and contractual relationship” between a two people of the opposite sex. In 2003, Merriam-Webster added to the definition that marriage is a union of two people of the same sex

in a union similar to a traditional marriage. To confuse things even further, the Defense of Marriage Act defines marriage and spouse as follows:

In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word 'marriage' means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word 'spouse' refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.

All discussions of the civil rights of either a gay couple or a heterosexual couple must begin with taking into consideration the commonly used definitions of the couples themselves.

In American society, there are many ways in which same-sex couples are treated differently than married heterosexual couples. The ways in which tax laws treat same-sex couples will be the first to be discussed because it is the area that can have the most wide-ranging effects on a couple. The first item in which a same-sex couple runs into a discriminatory situation in regards to their federal taxes is in determining their filing status. Filing status is of great importance because it can determine exactly how a couple's income, deductions, and exclusions will be treated by the Internal Revenue Service. A married couple has an option of either filing jointly or separately depending upon which category will be most beneficial to them. A same-sex couple, however, does not have any choice in the matter. The partners in a same-sex relationship are deemed to be "tax strangers to each other" (Kratzke). For this reason, the only option available to a same-sex couple is for each partner to choose the single filing status. In some

situations, one of the members of the same-sex couple may be entitled to a filing status of head of household if there are children involved in the relationship.

The main problem with the failure to be able to file a joint return, however, is that a same-sex couple does not have the ability to choose a filing status most favorable to their situation. Opponents of same-sex marriage would state that those individuals would not have to deal with the so-called “marriage penalty” as they would if they were filing a joint return (Kratzke). This penalty arises when a couple each has approximately the same amount of income and their tax rate becomes greater than if they were to file individual returns. However, when there is a wide disparity in the income of each member of the relationship, the marriage penalty does not apply. By not allowing a same-sex couple to choose a filing category of greatest benefit to them, this couple can be penalized solely because of the choices available to them under the tax code.

In addition to the filing category, the way income and exclusions are handled is quite different. A married couple has the ability to combine their income as well as combine all of their deductions in a manner that will give them the lowest possible taxable income (Kratzke). A same-sex couple, however, can only utilize their own individual income and deductions in attempting to lower their taxable income. This treatment of deductions can be extremely problematic for a same-sex couple, especially with certain deductions that only apply after an expense in excess of a certain percentage of income has been met. For example, medical deductions can only be taken if they exceed 7.5% of the taxpayer’s income (United States, Dept. of Treasury). Once again, a married couple has an opportunity to manipulate their taxes by combining their deductions. Both filing status and income and deduction treatment provide clear

examples of why same-sex couples should be allowed to marry and use the same tax advantages as heterosexual couples.

Following up on the tax treatment of same-sex couples is the treatment they receive through employee benefits. Employee benefits should be divided into those that are provided by private employers and those that are guaranteed by the federal government. Providing employee benefits to same-sex couples is a relatively recent development. The first instance of a company providing equitable benefits to both same-sex couples and married couples was Lotus in 1990 (Barkacs). Since that time, many individual companies have made the decision to offer employee benefits equitably to all couples. However, conflicting state laws are making it more difficult for same-sex couples to maintain the benefits they have received. Because some states allow same-sex marriage but many do not, companies are finding themselves confused as to just how to administer their employer-provided benefits. In fact, because Massachusetts allows same-sex marriage, some companies are requiring same-sex couples to be married to maintain benefits they have had previously. Kimberly Blanton wrote in the *Boston Globe*, “The businesses say that if gays and lesbians can now be legally married, then they should no longer be entitled to special health benefits not available to unmarried, opposite-sex couples” (qtd. in Barkacs). The some states have it, some states don’t policy towards same-sex marriage has just muddled the issue of how to administer employee benefits for these couples in question. In the case of employee benefits guaranteed by the federal government, the issue is quite clear. Even prior to the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act, employee rights under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) excluded unpaid medical leave for the serious health condition of an unmarried spouse. In fact,

the FMLA, also known as Public Law 103-3, as enacted on February 5, 1993, specifically stated that leave could be approved “in order to care for the spouse, or a son, daughter, or parent, of the employee, if such spouse, son, daughter, or parent has a serious health condition.” Since the federal government does not recognize same-sex marriage, the federal guarantee under the FMLA does not extend to same-sex couples. Fortunately, the FMLA does not prohibit an employer from providing a leave benefit more generous than that provided by the FMLA. On the other hand, though, this does leave a same-sex couple’s right to medical leave entirely to the discretion of their employer, setting up a playing field that is uneven and does not have the same rules for everyone.

The next area where same-sex couples face problems that a married couple does not face is in the area of adoption. Once again, laws, rules, and regulations vary widely from state-to-state pertaining to adoption by same-sex couples. Since some states allow same-sex couples adoption rights and others do not, problems escalate when a couple adopts a child in a state that allows same-sex and ultimately moves to a state that does not allow same-sex adoption. Normally, the Full Faith and Credit Clause found in Article IV of the U.S. Constitution would require each state to honor judgments made in other states, to include adoptions (Olson). However, the court systems and state laws have made the enforcement of the Full Faith and Credit Clause difficult when dealing with same-sex adoptions. There have been differing court opinions as to whether one state should be required to honor same-sex adoptions if such an adoption would violate public policy in their own state. In the case of *Russell v. Bridgens*, the Supreme Court of Nebraska ruled that the state of Nebraska must honor any same-sex adoption that is done in accordance with the laws of the state where the adoption was adjudged.

However, the Florida Supreme Court has ruled that the state of Florida only has to honor adoptions from states whose adoption policies are similar Florida's statutes (Olson). The mixed messages that are being sent from court rulings and state mandates throughout the United States make it difficult for a same-sex couple to anticipate what will happen if they should relocate to a state with policies substantially different from their own. Until all states honor same-sex marriage and honor same-sex adoption, problems will continue to arise and the stable situation needed for the adopted children will be at risk.

As detailed in the beginning of this paper, the medical rights of a same-sex couple, including hospital visitation rights, are anything but consistent. Even when a same-sex couple has made their wishes known as to who should make decisions concerning medical care if they should become incapacitated, those wishes are not necessarily supported by the individual states. Varying jurisdictions do make allowances for domestic partners in the decision-making process (Murphy). However, those allowances are limited and even in states that do have policies in place allowing same-sex involvement in the medical process, none of these policies are able to cover every possible circumstance. A same-sex couple can take a preventive step by having in place a medical power-of-attorney to give their partner the legal right to make medical decisions on their behalf. However, Timothy Murphy in *The Hastings Center Report* states that "family members entitled to make decisions might cede the right to make decisions to the same-sex partner under these circumstances, but then again, they are not required to do so."

A major step forward was taken in September 2011, when the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Department of Health and Human Services published new policies pertaining to a patient's visitation rights in hospitals which participate in Medicare and Medicaid programs. Officially, the change was made to the Conditions of Participation for Hospitals (42 CFR Part 482) which in dealing with a patient's rights states in part:

The hospital must inform a patient of these rights together with the other rights communicated to the patient upon admission as currently required by regulation. The hospital must also specifically inform the patient of his or her right to receive visitors, including same-sex domestic partners and friends. The hospital may not restrict these rights based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. (Stepanian)

Unfortunately, these new provisions do not apply to hospitals that do not participate in the government programs. In those cases, the same-sex couple must still rely on state laws or individual hospital policies to allow the same access to their partners as married couples receive. Until same-sex marriage is the law of the land, same-sex couples will not receive the equitable treatment that they deserve. As Kathleen Sebelius, Health and Human Services Secretary, so elegantly stated, "Couples take a vow to be with each other in sickness and in health and it is unacceptable that, in the past, some same-sex partners were denied the right to visit their loved ones in time of need" (qtd. in United States, Dept. of Health). The next step is to allow same-sex marriages nationwide so that this type of failure of access is in the past and not in the future.

Finally, same-sex couples face discriminatory action not only in life, but also in death. Ensuring that each partner in a same-sex relationship has a valid will is more important than for a couple in a traditional marriage. In a traditional marriage, certain legal safeguards are in place for those instances when one of the parties to the marriage dies intestate, or without a will. However, due to the large number of states that do not recognize same-sex marriages as a legal right, in many situations these couples must rely on the court system to allow them to receive the same rights and protection that would be in place if they were legally married. In some instances, the courts could use prior court decisions to allow for property to pass down to the surviving partner in relationship that is not recognized by the state. In the Mississippi court case of *Miller v. Lucks*, the Mississippi Supreme Court considered the rights of inheritance for a marriage that was not valid under state law, and found that:

To permit one of the parties to such a marriage to inherit property in this state from the other does no violence to the purpose of Sections 263 of our Constitution and 459 of the Code of 1942. What we are requested to do is simply to recognize this marriage to the extent only of permitting one of the parties thereto to inherit from the other property in Mississippi, and to that extent it must and will be recognized. (Hemmerle)

While in this situation, the Supreme Court of Mississippi did rule in favor of property passed from one partner to another in an invalid marriage, there is no guarantee that future court cases would rule in the same manner. The easiest solution to ensuring equitable passage of estate property in a same-sex relationship is through legal validation of the marriage. Once same-sex marriage is validated in every state, the estate laws in

place will no longer have to be challenged in court to provide these couples with their rightful inheritance.

While it seems that marriage could be viewed as a contractual arrangement between two individuals, same-sex couples are constantly fighting for their rights to be treated as a married couple in the same manner as a heterosexual couple in a traditional marriage. The opponents of same-sex marriages are many as evidenced by the fact that thirty-eight states have either constitutional amendments or state laws defining marriage as being between one man and one woman (“Defining Marriage”). While opponents may often make claims that no marriage is needed for same-sex couples to maintain their constitutional rights, the evidence presented does show a vastly different outcome for couples in a traditional marriage and for couples in a same-sex relationship that is not recognized legally. Additionally, many of the objections to same sex marriages are either religious or cultural, and the opponents to same-sex marriages are not concerned with the equality of civil rights between the varying parties (Barkacs). The Declaration of Independence espouses that each individual has the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” but unfortunately each individual does not actually have those rights readily available to them. Some segments of society, however, have shown a greater move toward equality than others. As of 2008, more than 7,400 companies, including 211 of the Fortune 500 companies, offered equal benefits to both married couples and to same-sex couples (Barkacs). Good business sense may have been the main force behind those decisions, but the main point is that equality in benefits did not erode the profitability of those companies just as allowing same-sex marriages would not change

the civil rights available to everyone else, it would just broaden those rights to include a greater number of individuals.

If same-sex marriage had been available nationwide in 2007, Lisa Pond and Janice Langbehn would have been able to spend their last days and moments together without having to be concerned with legal restrictions. If same-sex marriage was available today, couples like Lisa and Janice would not have to fight for their civil rights in areas such as tax laws, employee benefits, adoption, medical care and hospital visitation, and inheritance. Until same-sex marriage is available to every gay individual in every state and territory of the United States, there will continue to be inequality of rights for its citizens. There can be no doubt that when it comes to the issue of same-sex marriage, the time is now.

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“The Issue of the Federal Government, Migratory Birds, and Land Owners”

In this essay, organized in four parts, the writer takes on the issue of the relationship between the federal government and wildlife, in particular migratory birds. This essay is a good example of balanced focus, with fair representation of both sides of the issue, documented in MLA style. Part one presents the background of bird annihilation in the 19th Century by hat-makers and hunters and makes a claim of policy that “it is in the interest of the nation as a whole that the federal government be instrumental in enforcing laws that protect migratory birds and their habitats.” Part two explains the laws Congress enacted to protect birds in the twentieth century and the constitutional basis for those laws. Part three addresses the claims of private landowners that the federal laws unfairly restrict their rights and interests. The writer’s final argument and conclusion are based on expert testimony from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and environmentalists. As any good researcher does, the writer draws on a variety of sources from Thigpen Library databases such as CQ Researcher Online, Expanded Academic ASAP, and the Points of View Reference Center, as well as U.S. government sources like The National Audubon Society website, and printed books. While good research is used, there are some places where the writer relies on his own knowledge to make a point; however, it’s important for student writers to remember that sources lend credibility to your writing. On the whole, the essay demonstrates the many facets of good researched writing that are necessary in order to present a credible, authoritative claim.

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English 1020

27 March 2012

The Issue of the Federal Government, Migratory Birds, and Land Owners

It is an enjoyable seasonal experience to hear sounds of passing Canadian Geese on their migratory routes south, or to view an occasional Red-Tailed Hawk scoping with stoic precision the ground below in its hunt for prey. The presence of migratory birds is something we might take for granted when spring returns the sounds of many arriving avian travelers. Unbeknownst to most casual admirers of birds, there is a network of laws and management being implemented behind the scenes which keep the population and health of various species maintained. This activity has come about over the last 100

years due to continued value and esteem placed upon migratory birds by a large percentage of the public. The initial interest in such birds was as a resource for many products in America, i.e. food or feathers in hats; only later was it for aesthetic reasons, including the appreciation of migratory birds as fellow inhabitants living harmoniously with nature. The U.S. Government has taken a special interest in the resource management role, thereby ensuring the public's interest is collectively represented, by implementing federal laws to protect migratory birds and their habitats. Article VI of the Constitution has been the basis for laws developed to set aside acreage and to administrate private land use—both of which are imperative to avian long-term survival. This strategy of resource management by government agencies has raised opposition among land owners who perceive that the federal government is in violation of their individual constitutional rights. Although land owners claim outside authorities have no jurisdiction to direct how they may use their own land, it is in the best interest of the nation as a whole that the federal government be instrumental in enforcing laws that protect migratory birds and their habitats.

In the early history of America, the conservation of migratory birds—or other wildlife for that matter—did not exist. Every natural resource was used with disregard to either abundance or sustainability: forests were cleared for agriculture; wildlife was hunted for marketable hides; and scores of migratory birds fell victim to the fashion trends of ladies' feathered hats, highly coveted by the wealthy. One extreme example of such early attitudes toward migratory birds is the sad extinction of the Passenger Pigeon, which was once the most abundant bird species to have ever existed in North America. Jay H. Withgott and Scott R. Brennan, authors of *Environment: The Science behind the*

Stories, explain how the Passenger Pigeon's story illustrates the repercussions of unmanaged wildlife: "In the early 1800's, ornithologist Alexander Wilson watched a flock of 2 billion birds 240 miles long take 5 hours to fly over. . . people began cutting the forest [and] the birds made easy targets for market hunters, who gunned down thousands at a time" (126). Withgott and Brennan also mention that the population of this bird thereafter dropped so low as to be unable to reproduce, and it perished completely in captivity in 1914 (126). In 1900, the first laws were passed to protect against such atrocities as had befallen the now extinct Passenger Pigeon. The introduction of the Lacey Act helped regulate hunting and the interstate trafficking of wildlife, but the first law that specifically addressed the abusive hunting of migratory birds was the Federal Migratory Bird Law, established in 1913. The law would be replaced in 1918 by the more progressive and expansive Migratory Bird Treaty Act (126).

Such numerous laws enacted in the early 20th century to protect individual avian species were founded upon the constitutional charge of the Federal Government to hold jurisdiction over all migratory wildlife, which includes migratory birds, the power to enact being written under Article VI of the Constitution. The Wildlife Law Enforcement text states that "Congress has the power to set aside lands of territory for creation of national monuments, national parks and national refuges; this gave the government control of all wildlife in these areas" (Sigler 68). These original laws, while progressive for their time, were mostly concerned with maintaining populations of game birds for hunting. Later in the 20th century, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 would be amended July 12th 1978, to include a more ecological interpretation, along with the hunting regulation that had already been established earlier (United States). The U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service made note of these upgrades in this international agreement; however, “Public Law 95-616 also ratified a treaty with the Soviet Union specifying that both nations will take measures to protect identified ecosystems of special importance to migratory birds against pollution, detrimental alterations, and other environmental degradation” (United States). Together with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Endangered Species Act worked in tandem with other laws to create a very sound conservation plan for migratory birds. These laws protected such birds as the Bald Eagle against danger of extinction and common game species, like the Mallard Duck, from population decimations. Through these laws the Federal Government would delegate to specific agencies the responsibilities of protection and maintenance of wild avian populations on both federally-owned lands and private properties.

The series of laws passed during the 20th century were necessary as a check and balance system without which many species of migratory birds would have quickly been driven into extinction. There is also the fact that migratory wildlife—or any wildlife, in general—does not distinguish between which are federal lands and what are private properties; therefore, it is the charge of various government agencies to facilitate what is best for migratory birds regardless of whether it relates to government land or private property. In opposition to this view, private property owners complain that the federal government is infringing upon their rights, citing the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution as support for their claims (Jost). Those who oppose the interference of the federal government refer to the Fifth Amendment as the “Taking Clause” because they see the government taking or limiting their right as landowners. Kenneth Jost, author of “Property Rights: Do Government Regulations Infringe on Land Owners’ Rights?”

clarifies the opponents' position, explaining, "To support their case, advocates point to the so-called Taking Clause in the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution which reads: 'nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.' Since 1922 the U.S. Supreme Court has held that the government regulation limiting the use of property can, in exceptional circumstances, amount to a taking that requires compensation."

Private landowners also try to give validity to their case via our nation's origins by referring to the intent of the framers of the Constitution, making their plights to oppose government encroachment in line with those of Jefferson's and Hamilton's defiance of tyranny.

Property owners like to refer to themselves as individual proprietors being manhandled by the government, when this actually has more to do with the use of natural resources by large corporations to produce a commodity; "timber interests have fought environmentalists and the federal government over restrictions aimed to protect birds listed as threatened or endangered species" (Jost). Jost comments upon the interest of the landowners by quoting Mark Rentz of the American Forest and Paper Association, who complains, "[Y]ou're talking about the reduction of 80% in timber sales in the Pacific Northwest in order to protect the Northern Spotted Owl." Rentz also states that such action "has caused the loss of 20,000-30,000 jobs and the closing of 200 mills" (qtd. in Jost), situations which reveal the motivation behind their opposition of government regulations. Such corporate landowners are in the business of profit and likewise want to be compensated for any restrictions that have been placed on their large-scale operations. The complication in this is that although the timber corporation

may own the land, the federal government has jurisdiction over the Northern Spotted Owl; therefore, the nation as a whole has a voice in the fate of this bird and its habitat.

While it is hard to justify the loss of jobs to loggers of the Pacific Northwest, it is also inconsistent with the nature of big business to value such things which cannot be measured by monetary means. Land owners in protest of federal regulations harbor personal lucrative interests without consideration of the value of migratory birds and their habitats. Such corporate lumber companies lobby Congress against laws introduced to protect migratory birds, therefore making conservation of habitats more laborious and less effective. The National Audubon Society website mentions that this is one of the key considerations in promoting the survival of migratory birds: “In the recent past Congress had focused on rollbacks for environmental protections, often at the behest of special interest and industrial groups” (“About Audubon”). The ambiguity of laws and government agencies is exploited by the corporate logging industries, while the U.S. Forest Service is responsible for allowing the logging of migratory bird habitats. The primary cause for this unintended ramification is that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act is interpreted differently by each court that considers it with regards to logging in their specific community. As Helen M. Kim, author of “Chopping Down the Birds: Logging and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act,” states, “Disparate application from each court leads to non-uniform enforcement of the MBTA and also causes unfair and unpredictable results. For example, loggers with the apparent approval of the United States Forest Service (USFS or Forest Service) have killed thousands of birds each year and escaped prosecution” (128). This type of inconsistency in the MBTA is in need of amending to

create an understandable, easy-to-interpret form of the law which will be consistent in every court of the nation.

Another consideration, with regard to logging and its effect on migratory birds, is the process by which logging is carried out. Mechanized loggers systematically reduce acres of forest to a barren landscape of stumps in a fraction of the time a crew of lumberjacks could accomplish the same task. Such mechanical behemoths of industry cut down, debark, and chop to appropriate length in a matter of minutes the trees that have taken sometimes a hundred or more years to grow to their present height. As well, the sheer weight of such logging machines—amounting to many tons apiece—destroys the forest floor. Everywhere such machinery is used, the tracks create deep ruts in the soil, thereby making the soil more susceptible to erosion, the topsoil easily washed away by heavy rains. Needless to say, nests, eggs, and habitat of many species of birds are obliterated methodically by this type of logging.

In addition to the implications of mechanized logging and clear cutting of forest habitat, there are roads that lead to compromise between loggers and the observing of federal laws mentioned above. Proper silviculture techniques can help bridge the gaps between the interests of the two opposing objectives, thereby achieving both economic and ecological goals. The silviculture approach to forest management is the concept of cutting specific trees in the forest while allowing others to remain. The trees are selected based on the long-term sustainability of the forest with considerations of health and structure, the potential growth of new saplings, tree species diversity and distribution, and the exclusion of cutting in old growth forest that would allow for wildlife to exist. Dr. Robert S. Hansen, Penn State cooperative extension agent in forest resources, notes

that “[b]eing able to identify ecosystems is becoming more important as managers are handling larger areas. Managers are beginning to realize that managing solely at the stand level may not be adequate in maintaining the long term health and productivity of our planet” (43). Government regulations that support proper silviculture forest management would be beneficial for long-term conservation of natural resources. Considering the impact of logging in relation to its effect on surrounding ecosystems is the first step in the right direction.

Many of the arguments presented by the lumber industry that are related to jobs and the effect that the MBTA will have on those jobs are based on short-term objectives of the lumber industry. If steps are not taken to ensure long-term sustainability of the forest by managing through an ecological approach where many independent variables are considered, then jobs will not be the only thing lost for future generations. It is, therefore, essential for federal regulations to be placed upon lands for protection of migratory birds and their habitats. In his congressional testimony, Paul R. Schmidt, Assistant Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, sums it up best by saying, “Migratory birds are among nature’s most magnificent resources, and they play a significant ecological, economical, and cultural role in the United States and around the globe. Like canaries in coal mines, birds are indicators of the health and quality of our environment.” Schmidt’s testimony relates to the concept of how widespread extinction of one species could lead to the extinction of many other species, an opening of a veritable Pandora’s Box. The effect of human activities upon nature can create many unfathomable secondary effects, when invasive insects, fungi, and bacteria are permitted to easily invade and infect whole populations of plants and animals that have become

stressed due to habitat destruction. The checks-and-balances system that operates in nature is a complicated and fragile web of interconnecting components. Understanding these components, and the forest as a whole, is the responsibility of government agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that regulate private land owners with regard to their use of land.

Along with environmental implications of land use, it should also be the responsibility of our generation to consider generations to come: what they will inherit depends upon how well we have served as stewards of nature. If corporate logging is not regulated in a timely manner, there will simply be no forests or migratory birds for future generations to enjoy. The value of such considerations cannot be estimated in terms of fiscal profit; obviously, when evaluated by those future generations, the worth of wildlife will then be considered priceless. To look beyond the narrow-minded goals of the present to see how they will affect the future and to understand the ecological significance that each action is not without consequence with relation to nature: these are key concepts worthy of all our energies. The profoundly practical-thinking wildlife manager/environmentalist Aldo Leopold, author of *A Sand Country Almanac* describes his simple considerations of nature maintenance: “to keep every cog and wheel is the precaution of intelligent tinkering” (qtd. in Withgott and Brennan 34). In line with that thought, it is highly important for our generation not to be overly confident that we know the effect our actions will have upon tomorrow’s generation. Disregard for diligence we may deem irrelevant or unneeded may lead to the absence of a critical ecological link that may prove to have profound ramifications for all of mankind in the future.

Many acts of environmental degradation stem from the lack of facts about improper land use. Education of the public is, therefore, vital to migratory birds and their habitats and is an important tool in conservation efforts. As discussed earlier, public opinion has evolved since the early days of wildlife management, and today the public is becoming more aware of issues that involve evaluation of economic and ecologic aspects of nature. The laws governing land use are a reflection of people who, with active mindsets, uphold conservation and preservation, their works manifested through awareness and positive attitudes towards nature. P. Wesley Schultz, author of “Conservation Means Behavior,” describes the environmental impact of human behavior:

Most instances of deteriorating environmental conditions are caused by human behavior. Although there are certain instances of such environmental conditions developing from natural processes, most are largely the result of human activity. Drivers of this phenomenon such as climate change, loss of species, habitats, and ocean acidification rarely are the result of malicious intent, but rather the consequences of billions of humans.

Although most people do not deliberately want to harm nature or migratory birds, there are many factors at work which directly affect economic-based decisions. As long as there is a consumer society and a need for wood and paper products, forests will be cut to supply these demands. The logging companies, who are the land owners, are only responding to an economic need in society. Consequently, as the landowners argue against federal government mandates that protect migratory birds from eradication due

to economic demands, it is doubtful that logging will ever be totally under governmental control, or that the prescribed laws will save every bird. But what can be hoped for is that public opinion can be strengthened by wildlife educational programs which will result in migratory bird laws that are strongly supported by the highest percentage of the population.

The U.S. Forest Service sponsors educational activities which allow the general public to see diverse migratory birds up close, such as Red-Tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owls, and Golden Eagles. Forest service interpreters give talks explaining various natural facts and habitat requirements for such birds, along with environmental issues each species faces in increasingly adverse environments. The significance of nature center programs can be measured by the effect they have on the public since they are instrumental in guiding public concern for nature—hopefully, with the outcome of ecological awareness in directions that promote migratory bird and wildlife conservation.

The federal government has the right to administrate the specific purpose that is carried out on private property when it involves migratory birds and their habitat. We can no longer return to those early days of wildlife management, where all things wild are judged only in terms of profit. The introduction of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act has been very effective in conservation efforts to save waning populations of avian species. Although there have been discrepancies in the laws responsible for their perseverance, without the MBTA, government agencies would be helpless in achieving their objective of protecting migratory birds. Corporate logging companies that argue their rights of landownership, and the legalities that allow them to extract timber by whatever means or cost to our forest ecosystem, are operating on a slippery slope. Long-term effects of

over-logging must be evaluated ecologically together with future generational rights to enjoy the presence of migratory birds within nature. The development of an environmentally aware public, through the establishment of new societal norms, is a logical choice toward achieving sustainable goals. There are many factors that must be considered when calculating the repercussions of land use. No longer can property designated as a sanctuary for migratory birds—be it public or private lands—only be understood in terms of economic value. Aldo Leopold considered this concept long ago:

Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the aesthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture. (xviii)

We can only trust that in the future there will be mutual compromise that is reflective of man's rightful place amidst nature, for neither the capitalist nor the conservationist will desire to be credited with bequeathing unto those generations not yet born a treeless, birdless world.

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“Academic Advising at VSCC: Optimizing a Merely Functional System”

This strong example of a well-researched and effectively organized problem-solving essay covers a topic of great relevance to members of the VSCC community. While students assigned to do research papers sometimes reach automatically for broad topics that are national or international in scope, this paper demonstrates the value of tightly focused, detailed research on a local problem. Although the documentation of so many sources can sometimes be confusing or difficult, the greatest strengths of this piece are wide and careful research, logical organization, and expanded analysis backed by documented support. The writer employs a variety of sources—including administrative reports from the college, college websites, personal interviews, scholarly journal articles, emails, a blog, and even a live presentation by college administrators—to explore the weaknesses of the academic advising system at VSCC and suggest solutions. The essay provides an instructive example of how to effectively structure a problem/solution paper: define the problem in detail, explore potential solutions, and argue for the most promising solution while evaluating its potential impact. Note how the writer uses clear transitional words and phrases at the openings of paragraphs to help guide the reader through this process: “Presently ,” “A third problem,” “Another problem,” “The last aspect,” etc. This essayist clearly recognizes that the key to making a complex issue comprehensible to readers is to keep the structure of the paper simple and clear.

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Academic Advising at VSCC: Optimizing a Merely Functional System

“Helpful.” “Poor and it sucks.” “Minimal.” “Unorganized.” “Confusing.” “Really good!” What are these Volunteer State Community College (VSCC) students describing? The Portal System? The Language Center? The Financial Aid Department? No, they are relating their personal experiences with academic advising on campus, and just as these students have revealed, it has come to my attention during the course of my studies that academic advising on campus is problematic and of concern to students, as well as faculty

members. Reports from various academic sources and students' shared experiences show that VSCC's advising program deficiencies are an issue to be addressed.

Before further discussion of the problem can begin, a definition of academic advising will be useful in clarifying the issue. According to a February 2012 VSCC Advising Task Force document, academic advising is defined as follows:

A developmental process in which advisor and advisee form a dynamic, confidential relationship respectful of the student's concerns. This includes, but is not limited to, meeting graduation requirements, career counseling, and transfer options to pursue advanced educational goals. Advising should encourage students to think critically, seek out resources, and develop plans of action. Ideally, the advisor provides guidance in a collaborative partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness of potential career opportunities, and facilitating progression toward education-related goals. (5)

By this description, one can see the enormity and complexity of this crucial area of service for students in their successful completion of academic goals. But how do we know that there really is a problem with advising at VSCC?

In the spring semester of 2010, VSCC administered the ACT Advising Survey to 590 students in order to get a more accurate picture of how effective their program was in meeting its goals (Volunteer State, "ACT Advising Survey" 1). The very fact that the school implemented this survey suggests that there are problems with advising on campus. According to the administration's PowerPoint presentation, every VSCC score ranked "below the national norm for all schools and for 2 year [sic] public schools on all

63 items on the [ACT] survey” (Volunteer State, “ACT” 2). Although this fact is, in itself, disturbing, the good news is that not all areas of advising showed overwhelmingly large gaps; however, the five largest gaps between VSCC scores and the national norm fell dramatically in the faculty-based advising category (3-5). The “areas of greatest concern” were identified as “getting to know each advisee personally [by] relating to [the] student about employment, personal issues, learning styles, etc.” and “advisors taking initiative [by] informing advisees of changes in academic requirements, setting up meetings, [and] encouraging conversations about majors, activities, [and] goals” (7). The areas of deficiency correlate with four out of the seven listed goals of an academic advisor posted on the Academic Advising homepage (Volunteer State, Academic Advising). Overall, the VSCC scorecard on advising looks bad, but not hopeless, for it is still functioning.

Presently, VSCC has two separate task forces to address the results of the ACT survey and other pertinent issues concerning academic advising. On February 21, 2012, Emily Short and Terry Bubb presented advising program issues in an open meeting with faculty members. Their presentation pinpointed five distinct problems key to the advising program: first, long “wait[ing] times for students due to lack of staffing in the Advising Center”; second, the existing “walk-in system” establishes a “no relationship”-based advising; third, the “walk-in system” in the Advising Center has led to it becoming a “scheduling” department; fourth, “no formal training and development program [exists or is required] for faculty or staff advisors”; and fifth, the assignment process for faculty advisors is flawed” (Short 3). Again, the scorecard for VSCC academic advising is not looking good; however, the system as a whole must be examined if this vital area of service is to be improved.

The advising program is composed of the Advising Center staff as well as faculty members. Their duties are important, not only for students wishing to improve their lives through setting and meeting educational goals, while navigating the waters of school bureaucracy, but also for the school itself. In “Faculty-Based Advising: An Important Factor in Community College Retention,” Ronald C. McArthur relates that “inadequate academic advising emerged as the strongest negative factor in student retention, while a caring attitude of faculty and staff and high quality advising emerged among the strongest positive factors” (3). Currently at VSCC, the rate of retention for full-time students is 54%, which is quite low, and of those students, only 10% graduated despite an enrollment increase of 42.2% over the past 10 years (Volunteer State, Institutional Research). An encouraged, mentored student may decide to stay in school and thus increase the college’s rate of student retention. If the problems of academic advising are not addressed, retention rates may further diminish, government funding may decrease, and the value of the school as well as that of the student will decline.

From personal experience, I can agree with many of these findings and students’ statements. Poorly organized and executed academic advising at VSCC has affected me in the past and is presently affecting my daughter, who is also a VSCC student. My personal experience with academic advising started in the summer of 2010. At that time, I wanted to pursue a degree as a physical therapist’s assistant. The division of Allied Health had a general open advising session only one day a week. I found it very difficult to find, and then contact, any knowledgeable faculty member to assist me after this general session. In addition, getting approval for a number of course substitutions proved to be an even more daunting task. No one quite knew what actions I should take or when I should

take them. There were even some discrepancies between what different departments told me. After completing my prerequisite courses, I reevaluated my academic goals and changed my major to pre-nursing. I worked closely with an academic advisor at my chosen college of transfer, as well as with another advisor at VSCC. Registration time for spring 2012 graduation came, and my academic advisor was on a medical leave of absence. I quickly found another advisor, who informed me that I needed to revise some of my course substitutions as well as take six additional hours of classes to fulfill my graduation requirements. Increased costs were not what I had planned. My daughter, also a VSCC student, has had some of the same problems this spring 2012 semester. She learned on February 2 from the Records Department that she would not be eligible to graduate by the summer of 2012, even though she had had two different academic advisors since December who did not mention a word to her about this being a problem. These are maddening and frustrating disappointments for us both. Unfortunately, this is not a rare occurrence.

I interviewed two randomly chosen VSCC students on campus. The first student, Jessica, is a non-traditional, full-time female student, married to an active duty military service member, and a mother of four. She reported that her first advisor rarely was available and contacting her was a real problem. Jessica stated, "So, I just signed myself up for courses and I never had to go through any approval process." However, Jessica eventually changed her major to psychology. Jessica relates, "I ended up with a wonderful advisor! There really wasn't a waste of time, money or effort for me." However, another student's story contrasts hers. Corey is a first-year, full-time student with no previous college experience who works about forty hours a week. Corey

explained, “[I was] halfway through my first semester [and then] found out I was advised to take a history course that wasn’t required for my major; by then, it was too late to drop the course.” Three credit hours of history, and all the money, time and effort used in completing a course that would not transfer were lost. He said, “I regret the monetary loss the most.” This student also reported being “bounced around three times to several advisors” with the final faculty member admitting, according to Corey, “he really had no idea what classes I needed to take.” These personal testimonies support the fact that there are definite problems with the academic advising system.

After numerous searches on databases like *ERIC* and *ProQuest*, I did not find evidence of opposing viewpoints or contradictory studies. From one perspective, maybe students who reported having positive faculty-based advising experiences would not really see the need for the school to “mend” a program that appears to be working “well enough.” From another perspective, perhaps some faculty members are in disagreement, not with the fact that problems exist within the academic advising program at VSCC, but with the administration’s proposed methods to implement change, taking into strong consideration the cost of faculty time and college funds involved for implementation as well as the proposed methods’ unproven effectiveness. Overall, however, the majority of students and faculty members with whom I have spoken definitely agree that the present system is not working well.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges, community colleges serve almost half of the postsecondary educational needs in the United States. New employment opportunities by 2014 will require some post-secondary education. A high school diploma is becoming almost obsolete in this twenty-first century job market.

Many members of our future workforce are people whose only possibility for higher education and better-paying jobs is through their local community college (American). Evidence shows that this student population is at a higher risk of not completing their postsecondary education (American Association). With this bigger picture in mind, by not identifying and addressing the facts surrounding deficiencies of academic advising at VSCC, we are cheating our students, our community, our state, our nation, and ourselves.

Agreement that a problem does exist is the beginning to finding solutions for a system that is operational although far from optimal. The problems with the current advising program at VSCC, as previously disclosed, are not one of functionality per se, but one of consistency in its effectiveness. Identifying and understanding the main causes for the program's inconsistency in effectiveness is fundamental to moving forward. Some factors that are negatively influencing the advising program are a rapid increase of the student body, an inadequate number of advisors, and limited student participation and awareness of the program. In addition, there is a lack of incentives for "good" faculty advising and mandatory academic advising for all students.

VSCC's academic advising problems, first, can be linked to an inadequate system for the current student body. The program is inadequate and overloaded since it was designed to handle a smaller student body of five to ten years ago. From spring of 2005 to 2010, enrollment increased from 6,571 to 8,126-- an increase of 1,557 students or 23.7% (Volunteer State, Institutional Research). By fall of 2009, researchers Christopher M. Mullin and Kent Phillippe report that community colleges nationwide experienced an enrollment surge due to our nation's economic recession. Their research further explains

that this surge in enrollment left most community college systems unprepared to serve these students adequately while at the same time becoming further handicapped by a decrease in funding (4). This fact is most evident at VSCC since the system is still functioning, yet continues to be only sporadically effective.

Despite the massive increase in student population at VSCC, the college added only eleven faculty members over the five-year period from 2005 to 2010 helping to create, according to Terry Bubb, a present faculty-to-advisee ratio of “fifty or sixty” to one (E-mail 23 Mar.). This ratio is more than twice the ideal (1/20) proposed by the National Academic Advising Association (Volunteer State, Advising Task Force 6). The walk-in system at the Advising Center is also having trouble during peak times of registration with the current full-time advising staff. Therefore, it is not difficult to see how this insufficient number of advising personnel is a cause for students not to receive consistent, adequate and effective advising, as well as why faculty members are feeling overwhelmed with this duty while maintaining a full course-load with more students per class.

A third factor negatively affecting academic advising is that there are no tangible incentive measures in place to encourage “good” or “improved” faculty advising. E. G. Creamer and D. W. Scott reviewed results from nation-wide studies on systems of academic advising rewards and recognition and concluded that “[t]he failure of most institutions [in] conduct[ing] systematic evaluations of advisors is explained by a number of factors. The most potent reason, however, is probably that the traditional reward structure often blocks the ability to reward faculty who are genuinely committed to advising” (qtd. in Cuseo 39). Additionally, a study by W. R. Habley and W. H. Habley

reports that “less than one-third of campuses recognize and reward faculty for advising and, among those that do, advising is typically rewarded by giving it only minor consideration in promotion and tenure decisions” (qtd. in Cueseo 39). Presently at VSCC, academic advising is not a separate criterion for the consideration of tenure status, but is lumped in with the “Service/Outreach” section of the *Faculty Performance Evaluation* (Bubb E-mail Interview 23 Mar. 2012). In addition, no concrete reward/compensation is given to faculty for making efforts to increase their advising skills through more experience or training than what is offered in a three-hour seminar by the college. While many faculty members may perceive the basic intrinsic value of helping students is reward enough, in and of itself, for the most part, the lack of concrete rewards or incentives aids in keeping faculty motivation at a status quo level, thus perpetuating an inconsistent system of advising.

The last aspect causing inconsistent effectiveness in the advising program is the lack of mandatory academic advising for students and limited student participation. “Over the past several years,” according to the Advising Task Force, “academic advising has been a voluntary activity in which students and advisors would engage” (Volunteer State, Advising Task Force 4). In 2006, the school did begin mandatory advising and orientation for all new students, yet these steps are not adequate for such an enlarged, diverse student body in a commuter-college setting. Because there is a majority of continuing students who are not required to utilize or become informed about academic advising, there is a lack of knowledge and awareness about what services are available and how and when to use them. Additionally, students who are informed often amplify

the problem by not taking action to participate in the process, either failing to respond to emails or contact their advisors on a regular basis or simply forgetting to get advised.

Considering all of the aforementioned factors, which influence VSCC's functioning yet inconsistent academic advising program, this program reminds me of a city that experiences growth too rapidly. Little attention has been paid to the need for infrastructural improvements. The once sufficient highways are congested with traffic. The sanitation workers now struggle to keep city areas clean, for there are too few workers and limited funding to accomplish the job. As with academic advising, the city is still functioning, yet the situation is far from optimal. The question now is what measures should be taken to tackle these identified areas in order to increase consistency and effectiveness.

The Advising Task Force has thoroughly identified most of the problems with academic advising at VSCC, as previously cited. A twenty-six member task force, composed of faculty and staff, has proposed and developed implementation and evaluation strategies to address many of these issues. According to Terry Bubb, some interventions are already operative, like mandatory advising and face-to-face orientation for "all new freshman students, new transfers, and new certificate students," while others are in the planning stage, such as the use of the "Quick Question Advisor" (Bubb E-mail 23 Mar. 2012; Volunteer State, Advising Task Force 6, 12). The enormity and complexity of covering all needed improvements of the system is too broad a scope for this paper. However, the problems of an inadequate number of faculty advisors for the student body, the lack of tangible incentive measures for effective faculty advising, and limited

student knowledge and participation in the advising program appear to be issues that would benefit from additional solutions.

The importance of faculty-based advising at VSCC is in no way being overlooked. Measures are being taken to remedy the fact that there are not enough trained, available faculty members to meet the student body needs at present. According to the Advising Task Force's February 2012 proposal, "the budget for this project spans a five (5) year timeframe and incrementally increases staffing and resources devoted to advising" (13). The problem is what the college does, in the meantime, with an already stretched budget. Terry Bubb, director of The Advising Center, has just recently developed a pilot program utilizing the college's existing resource of adjunct professors; implementation began in the spring 2012 semester. As Mr. Bubb explains, "We have been concerned with high full-time faculty/adviser ratios, and this might be a way to lower the ratios thus caus[ing] more students to be able to receive top-notch advising assistance" (E-mail 16 April 2012). The funds for this trial study were set aside from the Advising Center's budget as recompense for these adjuncts' services. Prior to being assigned thirty student advisees, each of the adjunct professors completed two three-hour advising training sessions and worked as "GAP" advisors during a peak registration time in order to gain more experience (Bubb E-mail 16 April). Furthermore, Terry Bubb elucidates his hypothesis for this study:

[B]ecause these ninety students will receive direct, regular, personal communication from an advisor, they will be more likely to both register early for summer/fall semesters and will more likely actually re-enroll the following semester compared to students who did not receive the same

personalized attention. I believe that some of these students will actually meet with their assigned adjunct advisor (because of the personal communication they receive) who ordinarily would not have met with an advisor. (Email 16 April)

Using preexisting resources until the newly budgeted faculty/ staff hires and training are implemented is a creative and prudent solution, utilizing what is available to create changes in the system. The goal for academic advising at VSCC is aiming to transform a functional system to a desirable one by pooling the human and physical resources already available.

Another important problem of academic advising needing attention is the lack of incentive measures to increase the consistency of “good” faculty advising. Dr. Joe Cuseo, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Marymount College, insists that “evaluating the effectiveness of academic advisors and advisement programs sends a strong and explicit message to all members of the college community that advising is an important professional responsibility; conversely, failure to do so tacitly communicates the message that this student service is not highly valued by the institution” (1). At VSCC, I believe the faculty does understand the importance of academic advising, but incentives to take action and really become adept at advising are missing. In addition, Linda Darling-Hammond of the Rand Corporation’s higher education research team declares that “[i]f there’s one thing social science research has found consistently and unambiguously... it’s that people will do more of whatever they are evaluated on doing. What is measured will increase, and what is not measured will decrease” (qtd. in Cuseo 1).

One proposal, discussed by the Advising Task Force, was the need to make academic advising a separate section on faculty evaluation forms (Short 7; Bubb e-mail 23 March). Dyersburg State Community College, a Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) school, has already taken this action to improve effectiveness and accountability of their faculty. Beloit College, a small liberal arts college in Wisconsin, took four main actions to improve their faculty's advising skills, one of which was to list academic advising not as "service to the school," but to place it in its own category of teaching when being considered for professor evaluation and tenure status. Beloit also launched a campaign disseminating information to increase faculty members' awareness and to aid in changing their perceptions of what academic advising actually is—influential teaching (June). Some faculty members at VSCC believe that the faculty evaluation form, as it exists, with academic advising lumped in under "Service/Outreach" to the college, is an acceptable way to measure and provide incentive for "good" advising performance. However, how can this vital part of the advising system increase in consistency of effectiveness if inadequacies in performance ratings are not substantially weighted as part of the whole evaluation? Inconsistency will continue if there are no real significant gains for a faculty member besides an altruistic, intrinsic reward of helping another human being. Again, the errors of the system are not one of function, but of inconsistent effectiveness. These two solutions would help to increase consistency and effectiveness in faculty advising by realistically raising the bar.

A third identified problem deals with the student population. Since advising is "a developmental process in which advisor and advisee form a dynamic, confidential relationship," students need to be informed and reminded of their responsibilities in this

process (Volunteer State, Academic Advising). One solution could begin with the adoption of mandatory academic advising for all students, not just new freshman, new transfers, and new certificate students. Another solution would be to begin an awareness campaign for the students already enrolled. Heather Harper of the Retention Support Services is responsible for the large and conspicuous “Be Advised” and “Register Early” signs displayed near or in key campus buildings. I suggest that the college use an awareness campaign slogan that will stick in a person’s mind, like “Be wise and get advised.” For example, the college could post this slogan on placards around campus, or post it on the Vol State “Current Student” page with guides leading to the “Academic Advising” page or on each student’s D2L homepage. It might also be good to have the faculty make beginning of class announcements about the importance of every student being academically advised. In addition, maybe some more user-friendly organization on the Academic Advising page could be added, perhaps with ordered steps as I have seen on other college websites. One existing tool rarely used or known of by students is the “Advising Newsletter.” Could this newsletter not be printed and distributed around campus like the student publications, or could the publisher simply make sure that each department office has one? From my personal experience, many of the students in my classes do not know where to find the resources for class registration or advising. Making them aware of where to go, for what, and when would be a step in the right direction for increasing awareness and stressing the importance of their role in this advising equation.

Many faculty and staff believe that some of the proposed measures by the Advising Task Force, like the purchase of Degree Works software system, are too extreme

at this time and/or unnecessarily expensive (Short). The solutions that have been presented are neither costly nor extreme. They simply take current resources to a new or higher level of functioning. The problems with the academic advising system at VSCC are at a crucial point where changes must be made in order for the system to survive and thrive for the long term. As my *Biology 1010 Laboratory Manual* points out, “The key to survival in a changing environment is not resistance to change, but meeting change with change” (Volunteer State, Dept. of Biology 1). Just as biological systems must evolve or die, so must our human organizational systems in order to survive and function optimally.

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