

WRT 150
A Guide to First-Year
Writing at Grand Valley
State University

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First-Year Writing at Grand Valley

Introduction

Welcome to the Department of Writing's first-year writing program at Grand Valley State University. Our courses will improve your writing, critical thinking, collaboration, and information literacy skills. The goal of this book, *A Guide to First-Year Writing at Grand Valley State University*, is just that—to guide you in this class. From here on, we will just call this book the Guide. As a community of writers, we have worked to create a Guide that invites you into our community and celebrates student writing at all stages. We hope you will make extensive use of this Guide, both in class and on your own, to succeed in our required first-year writing course, Writing 150 (“WRT 150” in the Grand Valley catalog).

Our Department of Writing strives to create a consistent program for all students who take WRT 150. Our professors teach WRT 150 using their own preferred teaching methods, but important elements remain consistent across all sections. We have standardized foundational elements like course objectives, grading criteria, grading methods, and departmental policies—all of which you will find explained in this book. Each semester every WRT 150 teacher meets once a week with other teachers to discuss these course goals and expectations as they apply to particular students' papers. At the end of the term, these groups of teachers read final portfolios of the work that students produce in WRT 150 and assign each portfolio a grade. As a result, at Grand Valley, you can compare your grade at the end of your first-year writing experience fairly with the grade of every other student on campus who has taken WRT 150.

This Guide tells you more about our shared course expectations for WRT 150. At the beginning, we provide brief descriptions of the other courses that you might take before taking WRT 150, just in case you wish to reconsider your choice of the right place to start your college writing experience. Then we provide a much more detailed guide to WRT 150. First, we provide course policies. Next, to help you understand how to prepare your work for portfolio grading, we include our WRT 150 portfolio submission guidelines. Then we provide descriptions of our grading standards—the

same descriptions that we use when we grade your portfolios. After the grading descriptions, we offer further information about keys to success in WRT 150. We also provide information about support that we offer to help you succeed. After that discussion, we include several A level portfolios from last year's WRT 150 students to guide your revisions and spur classroom discussion of the grading expectations.

Other Course Options

As you know by now, you decide which writing course you should take first at Grand Valley, after considering information about our departmental requirements and consulting with advisors during orientation. You have these three choices:

- ESL 098 is for second-language students making a transition to standard written English.
- WRT 098 is for students who need more practice and instruction to develop fluency and fullness in their writing.
- WRT 150 is for students who write fluently and are ready to begin college-level academic writing, including writing with sources.

About 85 percent of students who enter Grand Valley place themselves into WRT 150. If you are reading this Guide, you have already made that choice. Just in case you would like to consider your choice one more time, here are brief descriptions of your other options. If you have doubts about the course you have chosen, talk about your concerns with your professor as soon as possible. Your professor may also assign a quick writing task during the first week of the course, in part to help you make that decision.

ESL 098

Specialists in second language learning teach ESL 098, offered by the Department of English. It is the best starting place for students for whom English language provides more difficulty than writing itself. In particular, students who are highly successful writers in another language but who

have difficulty writing in English should take ESL 098 rather than WRT 098.

WRT 098

WRT 098 focuses on raising students' confidence in their writing, assisting them in gaining agency and control over their writing and education, and encouraging them to value a lifelong engagement with writing and reading. Students write to learn as well as to communicate, and they learn more about the practice of writing, particularly writing in college. The course invites spontaneity and discovery, seeking to develop in students the kinds of habits and writing strategies that will enable them to succeed in WRT 150 and beyond.

WRT 098 emphasizes immersion, invention, and revision. Students write continually, generating new drafts all semester long. Students learn invention strategies to get papers started, learn to keep the writing process going to produce a substantial volume of writing, and develop positive attitudes toward writing. WRT 098 features peer workshop groups led by trained writing consultants from The Fred Meijer Center for Writing (the "Writing Center"), so that students learn not only the benefits of seeking assistance from the Writing Center but also the value of thoughtful peer review.

Students in WRT 098 receive a preliminary introduction to college-level research skills, using the Internet and the more advanced research materials available through Grand Valley's library and the library's online resources. WRT 098 also introduces students to using computers in ways that WRT 150 will require. Students who need more help with these more technical aspects of college writing may also want to start in WRT 098.

Overview of WRT 150

As the single writing course required of all Grand Valley students, WRT 150 focuses on academic writing, including writing informed by scholarly research. Teachers assume that you are ready to read, summarize, and analyze a wide variety of college-level published material. They also assume that you have experience with narrative, descriptive, and argumentative writing. In most WRT 150 classes, you first write four or five papers, at least one of which integrates material from highly credible sources that you

find in the course of doing significant academic research. In most cases, these papers will be four to eight pages long in normal academic format. From among these papers, you will pick three, including at least one that demonstrates your ability to find and integrate source material effectively, to include in your final portfolio for grading. Then, you will spend a considerable amount of time revising and improving your three portfolio papers.

In WRT 150, you encounter challenging reading material—whether you find it in assigned readings or in your own research materials—and you practice discussing, summarizing, and analyzing that material. You also work on improving writing processes that can help you complete new kinds of writing tasks and rise to new levels of writing ability—processes that move effectively from prewriting, inventing, planning, and drafting to revising, consulting, editing, and finishing.

In most sections, half of your WRT 150 class meetings take place in a computer classroom. Each computer is connected to the internet and the Grand Valley network. The Grand Valley network includes personal storage space on the campus server and special access to research sources maintained by Grand Valley's library system. WRT 150 teachers assume that you have a basic familiarity with computers, word processors, web browsers, and email.

By the end of WRT 150, as an experienced college writer you should be able to:

Prewrite, Invent, and Plan

- Read and understand material written for college audiences.
- Develop clearly focused written summaries, analyses, and paraphrases that demonstrate an understanding of the material you

have read.

- Develop ideas using a variety of prewriting techniques, which may include brainstorming, freewriting, journal-keeping, consulting with others, conducting library research, and analyzing your audiences.

Revise, Develop, and Shape

- Develop writing from early, writer-oriented drafts to later, reader-oriented drafts.
- Produce effective writing for a variety of purposes, such as narrating, explaining, exploring, and persuading.
- Demonstrate the ability to focus your writing on supportable themes, claims, or theories.
- Support your focus using well-selected details that are suggestive, accurate, and relevant.
- Consult with peer reviewers and other readers to assess the further needs of your drafts.
- Revise writing with particular audiences in mind, including academic audiences.
- Conduct effective, significant scholarly research.
- Integrate facts and opinions from a variety of sources into your own writing.

Refine, Edit, and Finish

- Include words, facts, and ideas from research sources in ways that fully credit the original source and avoid plagiarism.
- Control the main features of a specific documentation style (like MLA or APA).
- Refine your sentence structures to produce an effective style and voice.
- Edit writing so that academic audiences can read the writing without having their attention and understanding diverted by problems in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and format.

In addition to requiring WRT 150, Grand Valley supports the development of your writing ability in other courses. Many General Education courses also focus on developing your writing in specific academic areas.

After building that foundation, you will take two courses in disciplines of interest to you specifically designated as Supplemental Writing Skills courses. You may also take further writing courses, and many of your college courses will involve extensive writing. Thus, WRT 150 is not the end of your college writing instruction. Instead, it seeks to supply you with an important foundation for further development.

Finally, WRT 150 is also part of your General Education Foundation, and like all General Education courses, we work to improve intellectual skills that you will use in later courses and in your life after college. Of course, we focus mainly on improving your skill in Written Communication, but we also strive to work on your Collaboration skills. Your teacher should offer at least some teaching and feedback related to your ability to collaborate

University and Writing Department Policies

well with others, mostly in working together as peer reviewers to improve the quality of everyone's writing.

WRT 150 sections can have many differences in terms of assignments, daily routines, and instruction. We want all teachers to teach in the ways that best suit their abilities and the needs of their particular students. Nevertheless, as part of our effort to ensure consistency across sections, all WRT 150 teachers adhere to the following university and departmental policies.

Required Passing Grade

You must pass WRT 150 with a grade of C or better (above C-) to satisfy Grand Valley's Writing Foundations Requirement. If you do not receive a grade of C or better, you will need to take WRT 150 again.

Learning or Physical Disabilities

If you have any special needs because of learning, physical, or any other disabilities, please contact Disability Support Resources at 616-331-2490. Any student needing academic accommodations beyond those given to the entire class needs to request assistance from DSR. Writing faculty work with DSR to accommodate students' special needs and devise a plan that is fair to all students. Furthermore, if you have a disability and think you will need assistance evacuating a classroom and/or building in an emergency situation, please make your teacher and DSR aware so that Grand Valley can develop a plan to assist you.

Attendance

Regular, timely, and full attendance is required to succeed in WRT 150. According to the Grand Valley catalog, teachers may fail students for excessive absences. In WRT 150, missing class more than four times constitutes excessive absences, and can be grounds for failing the course. Tardiness, leaving class while it is in session, and coming unprepared, or off-task behavior (like texting) may also count as an absence or partial absence ac-

ording to your teacher's policies. Your teacher should send you an email warning after the fourth absence. Excessive absence itself is the grounds for failure, so that lack of warning does not excuse any further absences, however. The warning simply provides additional clarity.

WRT 150 Goals

By the end of WRT 150, your final portfolio should demonstrate that you have achieved the program's goals and can perform each of these tasks:

Content and Development

- Offer readers a clear purpose for reading.
- Maintain a single focus throughout the entire paper.
- Present ideas and descriptions that engage a college-level audience in your discussion.
- Conduct college-level research to find credible source material for a variety of purposes.
- Present a claim or focus that is developed with discussion, details, and examples, including graphics when useful.
- Discover and integrate sufficient material from outside sources to demonstrate your abilities in college level writing, research, and thinking.

Organization

- Establish an overall pattern for a paper to follow.
- Progress from one point, idea, or scene to another in a coherent, logical way.
- Construct paragraphs that are generally well-organized within the overall pattern of a paper.
- Lead readers through the order of your discussion in obvious and helpful ways.

Style

- Craft sentences with purposefully chosen words and phrases.
- Structure sentences effectively to be clear, logical, and readable.
- Use a variety of sentence structures for good reasons.
- Maintain an overall voice in each paper that is appropriate for its

purpose, genre, and audiences.

Mechanics

- Adopt a format that is acceptable and appropriate for academic writing.
- Refer to outside sources that are introduced, integrated, and documented.
- Attend carefully to grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage in final, edited writing.
- Use with care a standard academic style guide, such as the MLA or APA style guides.

WRT 150 Portfolio Guidelines

Portfolio Grading

We determine all final grades in WRT 150 by evaluating a final portfolio containing three of your papers. Your own teacher's portfolio grading group grades your portfolio. We use this method so that our grading can be as fair and accurate as possible. Our teachers work very hard to make sure that this method gives you the fairest result.

Your teacher's portfolio grading group (usually four to six teachers) reads and discusses samples of writing from their classes throughout the semester to agree about standards for A, B, C, and D papers. Their standards begin with those established by the Writing Department and set forth more specifically further on in this Guide, at pages 14-23. Through their discussions, the groups work to fit those standards more specifically to your assignments and the work done by your class.

At the end of the semester, your teacher and one other teacher from the portfolio grading group will read and grade your portfolio. If they disagree about the grade, a third teacher in that group reads your portfolio and decides which reader, your teacher or the other teacher, has come closest to the standards that the portfolio group has agreed upon during the semester. Agreement between two or more teachers determines your letter grade in the class. For example, if your portfolio receives a B from the first two readers, you receive a B on your portfolio. If your portfolio receives an A from one reader, a B from another, and an A from a third reader, you receive an A on your portfolio. By using this method, we seek to arrive at a "community" grade based on the quality of your writing rather than a grade based solely on one teacher's preferences or on your teacher's personal opinion of you.

Once the portfolio grading group arrives at a letter grade, your teacher also has the option of adding a "plus" or "minus" to the final letter grade based on other aspects of your work, such as attendance, class participation, effective peer-review, and completion of reading assignments. Teachers should

not raise or lower your grade any further than a plus or minus, which ensures the highest degree of fairness based on the quality of your work.

The portfolios are graded after class is over, so the portfolios are not returned. For those reasons, we do not write comments on the papers or the portfolios. Teachers do often write very brief notes about grades of D so that students receiving this grade may ask about the reasons for that grade.

If you have any questions about the grade that you receive, ask your teacher to discuss your grade with you.

Semester-long Evaluation

The fact that you earn your grade with your final portfolio does not mean that the evaluation of your writing should be a mystery. First, you should learn how to apply the grading criteria to your own writing. Your teacher should read your writing throughout the semester and respond to it with comments and suggestions for revision. Many teachers will have you read, comment on, and evaluate other students' work. For most students, a grade is not necessary for early drafts because the proper focus is on what the paper could become, not on what it is. But if you want a grade on an assignment and your teacher has not given one, just ask. Teachers will be able to tell you where they think the paper falls within the range of A to D. Your teacher will probably tell you what the portfolio group has been saying about writing like yours.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that all grade estimates—whether they are by you, your teacher, or your classmates—are just that: estimates. Ultimately, the grade will depend on the entire portfolio in its final form, something nobody will be able to review carefully until the end of the term. Mainly what you need to do is just keep on working. If the teacher says your paper is probably a low B or a C, your next question should be: “What could I work on in this paper that would improve it?” Improve your work until the very last day, and you will receive the best grade available to you. Meanwhile, you should also seek to improve your own judgment of your own grade, using the grading criteria. The most successful and satisfied WRT 150 students do not need the teacher to tell them what grade they are getting; they already have a fairly good idea themselves.

Midterm Evaluation

Grand Valley requires midterm grade reports for first-year students and some upper-level students. Midterm grades are available on the web but not recorded on your official transcript. Midterm grades in WRT 150 can only assess the overall quality of your work in the class up to that point and your prospects for doing better. Such assessments have no direct bearing on your final grade. For a full explanation of your midterm grade, please consult with your teacher.

Your Final Portfolio

Evaluation Procedures

Many professionals use portfolios to show other people what they are capable of producing. Your WRT 150 portfolio represents your own end-of-semester writing capabilities. The portfolio includes three fully revised and polished papers, including at least one that integrates outside sources and accurately credits the ideas and language drawn from those sources. Together, these three pieces of writing produce your final letter grade.

The three papers in your portfolio represent your abilities as a college-level academic writer, so you should select and revise them with care. For example, you probably do not want three very short papers, since that would fail to show your ability to write a longer paper. Ask your teacher and peer reviewers about your selections if you are not sure. Your teacher and the other students should help you make good choices about what goes in the final portfolio. Also, read the full portfolios published in this book, and, together with your teacher and classmates, try to learn from them what makes a WRT 150 portfolio successful.

So that your teacher has time to check all work for any problems, we strictly enforce your teachers' requirements for turning in earlier versions of work that you intend to place in your portfolio. All papers in your portfolio must have been assigned for the class and seen by your teacher in draft form before final submission.

Submission Guidelines

Your portfolio is due to your teacher by the end of the last class before finals week, unless your teacher's syllabus sets a different deadline. Electronic portfolios will be prepared and submitted according to instructions that you will receive in class and that are repeated in the Draft Portfolio Management System. If your portfolio is late, you may fail the course.

Your final portfolio will consist of three final papers. These instructions apply unless your teacher gives you other special instructions. Margins should be one inch all the way around the page and lines should be double-spaced. Fonts should be common or default types (Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman, etc.), and the point-size should be close to standard typeface (11 or 12 points). If your teacher has special instructions for the form or format of your papers, the portfolio grading groups will honor those instructions.

In addition to requiring you to submit earlier drafts, your teacher is entitled to set further requirements before your portfolio will be eligible for grading. Common requirements are that you submit papers on time in response to individual assignments, submit substantial revisions, use particular formats, or submit papers at a specific length or level of editing care. If you do not meet your teacher's specific requirements, your teacher may refuse to submit your portfolio for grading, in which case you will fail the course. Such requirements should be set out clearly in your teacher's syllabus, assignments, or other written instructions.

The portfolio grading groups do not comment on portfolios, so portfolios are not returned. You should keep copies of your work and wait for grade reports to see your course grades. If there are questions about your grade, you should speak with your teacher. The Department may keep your portfolio and use it for studies of our teaching and its results, but we will not publish the contents of your writing without your permission.

Evaluation Criteria—Characteristics of A, B, C, and D Papers

We provide the general characteristics of A, B, and C portfolios for you here so that you can identify precisely how your work is evaluated. Characteristics that cause portfolios to fall below the standard for a passing grade are presented as characteristics of D papers. Factors that can cause you to

receive an F for the course are listed at the end of the grading criteria. Your teacher, with the help of the teacher's portfolio grading group, will develop more specific understandings of these criteria to apply to your exact assignments and portfolios; in doing so, however, all of them will be seeking to apply the general characteristics below accurately and fairly to your work.

Our approach does mean that we do not reward effort unless it produces results. We want to ensure that what counts as A, B, C, D, or F will be roughly the same for every student in every section, based on achievement.

Characteristics of A Papers

Content and Research

- The portfolio consistently engages the interest of intelligent and sophisticated college-level readers.
- Papers effectively address and engage their likely and intended audiences.
- Papers succeed at accomplishing challenging purposes.
- Each paper maintains a consistent focus on the main claim or goal for the paper.
- Each paper develops its focus with significant and interesting discussion, details, and examples, including graphics when useful.
- The portfolio clearly demonstrates the writer's information literacy and ability to use college-level academic research as a significant means to develop the writer's ideas.
- The portfolio clearly demonstrates the writer's ability to introduce and integrate material from relevant outside sources in ways that advance the purposes for the writing and meet the expectations of intelligent and sophisticated college-level readers.

Organization

- Titles and opening sections of papers inform readers appropriately of the topic, purpose, and focus of the paper in ways that motivate readers to look forward to reading further.

- Paragraphs are purposefully organized and substantially developed with supporting evidence, examples, and reasoning.
- Paragraphs break information into parts that contribute to a greater understanding of the whole.
- Readers can easily see how the order in which information appears supports the focus and purpose of the papers.
- The papers lead readers through the order of the discussion in ways that are explicit, clear, and purposeful, including effective transition devices when needed.
- Readers can see a meaningful pattern in the order of the information as a whole.
- Closing sections give readers a satisfied sense that the purpose of the writing has been achieved.

Style

- Word choice is precise, interesting, and appropriate to the writing task and audience.
- Language is mature and purposefully controlled.
- Sentences are clear, logical, enjoyable, and easily understood by college-level readers.
- Sentences often make active statements and use efficient and effective modification.
- Sentence structure varies according to the content, purpose, and audience.
- A consistent voice complements each papers' purposes, fits its genres, and appeals to its likely and intended readers.
- Information and quotations from sources are integrated skillfully into the writer's own sentences and paragraphs.

Mechanics

- Format is consistent with the detailed requirements of an applicable style guide, such as the MLA or APA style guides.
- References to outside sources are cited and documented according to the appropriate style guide carefully enough that readers can easily identify the sources that have been quoted or referenced.

- Problems in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or usage do not interfere with communication.
- Editing shows respectful and effective attention to the desire of readers to read without being interrupted by unexpected errors or problems with documentation and format.

Characteristics of B Papers

Content and Research

- The portfolio connects with the interest of intelligent and sophisticated college-level readers.
- Papers clearly address the expectations of their likely and intended audiences.
- Papers accomplish interesting purposes or make strong attempts to accomplish challenging purposes.
- Each paper maintains a consistent, single focus.
- Each paper develops a focus with fitting and relevant discussions, details, and examples, including graphics when useful.
- The portfolio demonstrates the writer's ability to use college-level academic research clearly and purposefully to develop the writer's ideas and improve the papers in which research is used.
- The portfolio demonstrates the writer's ability to introduce and integrate material from relevant outside sources in ways that enhance the accomplishment of goals and purposes.

Organization

- Titles and opening sections of papers are well-chosen and appropriate to the topic and focus of the papers.
- Paragraphs are clearly organized and adequately developed with supporting evidence, examples, and reasoning, though some paragraphs may lack richness of detail or evidence.
- Paragraphs break information into parts that make sense and assist effective reading.
- Readers can identify the focus of each paper and follow it through the entire discussion.
- Readers can identify how the order in which information appears supports the focus and purpose of the papers.
- Overall patterns in the order of presentation make sense.
- Transitions between and within paragraphs advance the writer's ideas.
- Closing sections give readers a clear sense that the writer is ending the discussion at a good place.

Style

- Word choice is generally appropriate to the writing task and audience.
- Language is generally mature and purposefully controlled.
- Sentences are generally clear, logical, and readable.
- Sentences typically make active statements, extended by efficient and effective modification.
- Sentences vary in structure and only occasionally are choppy, rambling, or repetitive.
- The voice in each paper is consistent and appropriate for the writer's purpose and the audience.
- Information and quotations from sources make sense within the writer's own sentences and paragraphs.

Mechanics

- Format is appropriate and generally follows the requirements of an assigned style guide, such as the MLA or APA style guides.
- References to outside sources are cited and documented according to the appropriate style guide carefully enough that readers can determine when source material has been used and find the sources.
- Problems in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or usage rarely interfere with communication.
- Editing shows diligent and informed attention to the desire of readers to read without being interrupted by unexpected errors.

Characteristics of C Papers

Content and Research

- The portfolio makes sense to intelligent and sophisticated college-level readers, though it may not consistently hold their interest.
- The portfolio presents ideas and descriptions with readers in mind.
- Papers appear to aim at accomplishing purposes.
- Each paper generally maintains a single focus, though the focus may be on a topic or an event rather than an idea, claim or goal.
- Each paper generally develops a focus with details, examples, and discussions, including graphics when useful.
- The portfolio demonstrates the writer's ability to use relevant college-level academic research as a means to develop a topic.
- The portfolio demonstrates the writer's ability to include material from outside sources within the general requirements of an applicable style guide.

Organization

- Titles and openings generally match the topic and focus.
- Paragraphs make sense and usually use some evidence or detailed examples to support points.
- Papers generally establish an overall organizational pattern for readers to follow.
- Each paper develops a basic focus, with few paragraphs appearing to be out of sequence or off-track.
- Transitions from one section and idea to another are evident and make sense.

Style

- Most words appear to be well chosen and fit the purpose and audience for the particular paper.
- Most of the time sentences are not short and choppy, long and rambling, or vague and wordy.
- Sentences are generally readable and make sense.
- Sentences sometimes feature the efficient and effective uses of modifying clauses and phrases.

- The writer's voice is consistent and appropriate, usually fitting the writer's purpose, genre, and audience.
- Information and quoted language from sources is clearly presented as source material.

Mechanics

- Format choices are generally appropriate for the purposes of the papers.
- References to outside sources are generally cited and documented, if not always in the appropriate style; readers can determine when source material has been quoted or referenced, and instances of unreferenced source material are few, unimportant, and clearly not intentional.
- Mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or usage do not generally interfere with either the writer's credibility or the reader's ability to read the text easily.
- Editing shows adequate attention to the desire of readers to read without being interrupted by unexpected errors.

D Portfolios

Regardless of writing ability, portfolios will receive the grade of D if, as a whole, the portfolio fails to demonstrate that the student understands how to conduct college-level research as well as how to integrate the results of such research into purposeful writing without committing plagiarism. Otherwise, D portfolios rarely have similar characteristics. The lists below present the danger signals that help predict when a portfolio does not demonstrate competence. **The main key to avoiding a D is to meet the criteria for at least a C.**

Content & Research

- Topics, purposes, claims, or focuses are so simplistic and obvious that they do not engage the interest of college-educated readers.
- Papers have no apparent and appropriate audiences.
- Papers have no clear purposes.
- At least one paper is clearly fictional.
- Papers lack a single focus.
- Ideas are stated, but they are not developed with details, examples, and discussions.
- Language and material from sources are consistently presented in ways that are very hard to follow.
- Unintentional, careless misuse of source material would amount to plagiarism had it been intentional.
- The portfolio shows weak research and information literacy abilities, such as the use of very few sources, little variety of sources, or little obvious effort to conduct scholarly or professional research.
- Sources do not support and may even contradict the views that the writer attributes to them.

Organization

- Openings and endings are missing, misleading, or overly general.
- Readers cannot readily see the focus of the papers.
- Paragraphs frequently seem unrelated to each other or repetitive.
- Paragraphs do not develop logically from start to finish, or they break in illogical places.
- Paragraphs often end without developing broad, general statements with evidence and reasoning.

- Transitions between and within paragraphs are weak, ineffective, or misleading.
- The papers do not establish clear patterns for readers to follow.

Style

- Sentences often are short and choppy, long and rambling, or vague and wordy.
- Disordered sentence parts, poor phrasing, and poor word choices make reading difficult.
- Sentences often disregard the normal rules of standard written English in ways that make ideas hard to understand.
- The voice often appears inappropriate for the writer's purpose, genre, and audience.

Mechanics

- Format, including any use of graphics, is extremely careless or entirely disregards the basic requirements of applicable style guides.
- Language or material from outside sources is not clearly cited.
- Documentation style is generally wrong according to the assigned style guide, often in ways that interfere with readers' abilities to find the source material and locate the referenced portions of the sources.
- Instances of misused source material show careless inattention to important requirements for quoting, paraphrasing, and citing, raising questions of possible plagiarism.
- Many errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, word choice, and usage make reading difficult, or they strongly limit the writer's credibility.

F Grades

The grade of F in WRT 150 is reserved for the following circumstances:

- The student did not turn in a portfolio by the last day of class (or the due date set by the teacher's syllabus, if the teacher chooses another due date).
- The portfolio did not have three papers in it that qualified for the portfolio under this Guide and the teacher's syllabus.
- The student violated course policies set by this Guide or the teacher's syllabus (for example, an attendance policy), if the information made clear that the violation would result in a grade of F.
- The student violated other policies of Grand Valley State University that clearly state that the violation could result in a grade of F.
- The student clearly committed plagiarism, as described by Grand Valley's Student Code, this Guide, and the teacher's syllabus.
- The portfolio clearly demonstrates a complete indifference to earning any higher grade.

Grade Appeals

If for any reason you need to appeal your final grade, please consult the Student Code for the applicable procedures. Your first contact should be with the teacher of your class. Appeals from your teacher's decision to the Department of Writing should be supported by a written appeal explaining how your portfolio displays the characteristics of the grade that you are seeking. Your written appeal itself should display most characteristics of the grade that you seek. Appeals to the Director of WRT 150 may be forwarded by e-mail at wrtdept@gvsu.edu or delivered to the Department of Writing directed to the attention of the Director of WRT 150.

From Process to Product: How We Write

Writing as a Process

When we think of writers, we might imagine people who possess some magical talent that allows them to sit down and instantly put their thoughts into writing. But researchers have concluded that expert writers do not simply sit down and “put it in writing” in one magical step. Rather, successful expert writers work through a complex series of steps, or “process.” Different writers follow different steps depending on their needs and personal preferences, but in general expert writers experience writing as a process that unfolds over time, not as a “one and done” burst of inspiration.

For instance, when faced with the need to communicate to an audience, expert writers begin by exploring their own knowledge, feelings, and beliefs and then considering the knowledge, feelings, and beliefs of their intended readers, searching for something specific to say that needs to be said. Then they explore their communication options—the various forms available to them—before sketching out, reconsidering, revising, and polishing their message, making sure they are sensitive to their readers. Often, at several points during the writing process, expert writers ask friends or peers—people no more expert than they are, and often less so—to take a look at their drafted material and give advice or feedback. Finally, when satisfied with their efforts, expert writers polish the results and deliver their writing to their intended audience.

The example above illustrates five basic parts of a successful writing process:

- **Prewriting and Inventing:** generating ideas; forming questions for investigation and constructing a research plan; collecting, evaluating, and managing information; identifying possible subjects, purposes, audiences, and forms
- **Planning and Drafting:** trying out ideas and approaches; zeroing in on a single focus and a single form

- **Consulting:** talking with people about preliminary ideas, plans, and drafts; soliciting oral and written feedback from friends and colleagues concerning content, structure, audience appeal, style, and correctness
- **Revising and Shaping:** considering additions and deletions; reshaping and refocusing existing material, and editing for style, flow, and obvious error
- **Editing and Finishing:** taking authorial responsibility for the final product; editing carefully for correctness and format; and delivering the final product to its intended audience (teacher, relative, client, committee, editor, etc.)

While you will probably have a unique way of going through the steps set out above, at some point all expert writers need to find ways of addressing the concerns of each step effectively. As teachers of WRT 150, we are not merely judges of your writing. In fact, you might best view teachers as coaches whose primary goal is to help you develop processes that you will use for the writing you do in WRT 150, in future Grand Valley classes, and on the job. We help you explore your writing processes through class information, class discussions, stimulating writing assignments, and responses to your writing in progress.

Your teacher will help you explore your writing processes, but you can take control of your own processes by considering the following checklist that we have devised to help you develop expert methods.

Prewriting and Inventing:

- Use a variety of brainstorming techniques to generate, develop, and focus topics.
- Write informally in journals or notebooks as an ongoing writer's activity.
- Use writing as a tool for learning as well as communicating.
- Analyze audience as a method of planning and focusing.
- Consider purpose, style, and form in relation to audience during the planning stages.
- Weigh a variety of form and style options during the planning stages.
- Sequence and initiate your own writing process to suit immediate

purposes.

- Generate and select your own methods for developing material.
- Engage in prewriting discussions with your instructor and peers.
- Read as a writer; read published materials critically.
- Write and speak about yourself as a writer.
- Form questions for investigation and construct a research plan.
- Collect, evaluate, and manage information.
- Use basic reference materials (dictionary, encyclopedia, online search engine).
- Use research as a form of generating ideas and planning writing.
- Consider how numerical and graphic information might support your focus and purpose.

Planning and Drafting:

- Translate prewriting activities into drafts.
- Adapt your writing for specific readers, including academic ones.
- Write for broad, public, academic audiences.
- Vary diction and tone according to audience.
- Establish and maintain a focus that has a purpose.
- Maintain a consistent style throughout the different parts.
- Cultivate an appropriate and interesting voice.
- Integrate ideas and information from outside sources.
- Support ideas and observations with details, including numerical and graphic information.
- Save different versions with different filenames when you make important changes.

Consulting:

- Use feedback from peers.
- Give feedback to peers.
- Engage in revision discussions with your instructor, peers, and writing consultant.
- Survey and integrate readers' needs and interests.
- Write alternate and more fully realized new versions of earlier drafts.
- Work productively in writing groups.

Revising and Shaping:

- Write and use your own evaluations of your drafts.
- Adapt the style and voice of your language to suit your purpose and audience.
- Revise for focus, development, order, structure, balance, and emphasis.
- Align the information and reasoning in the paper with the paper's focus.
- Add, delete, change, or recast material to suit your purposes and readers.
- Establish a clear focus throughout the paper.
- Consider the full variety of readers for whom you might actually be writing.
- Revise paragraphing and sentences for greater clarity and interest.
- Achieve “closure” in later drafts; make sure the product can become a consistent whole work.

Editing and Finishing:

- Proofread all writing intended for public audiences.
- Use your word processor's editing software to help you spot possible areas for improvement.
- Refresh your editing eye and ear by using methods like reading aloud, reading sentences in reverse order, reading as if you were somebody else (like your favorite Uncle or Aunt), or putting the latest draft away for a day or two.
- Use a dictionary and handbook for editing.
- Check your documentation with a guide for your documentation style.
- Check your use of material from sources to be sure you are using source material ethically.

Responding to Peer Writing

Most teachers have students offer valuable feedback on each other's papers, for two good reasons. Peer review will increase your ability to think critically about your own writing and at the same time give you valuable feedback to help you improve your paper drafts. We also encourage students to practice peer review on their own outside of class. As you practice peer review, you should avoid closing the door with final negative or positive evaluations on students' papers. If you judge early drafts by saying "your opening is perfect" or "this is already an A paper," you encourage your peers to stop rethinking and rewriting their papers. That might feel good for a moment, but it will not help anyone to improve.

Your teacher will probably have many suggestions about how to do successful peer review. Probably the least valuable thing peers can do for each other, at least without specific teacher guidance, is trying to fix each other's sentence errors. Try to ignore even the errors that you see—at least at first—so that you can give readers feedback on their content, organization, and style. After all, those things will probably determine much more of their grade. You may not be an expert on grammar, but you are an expert on what the writing communicated to you. Give the writer the benefit of what you know best.

Information Literacy

As academic writers, we work in a world of information and opinion, so it is very common for us to refer to facts and ideas originally published in other sources, and then to quote and cite those sources in ways that carefully show where we got our information. Educators commonly refer to this ability as "information literacy." We focus on information literacy in WRT 150 for three main reasons. First, we want readers to take our writing seriously because we have done our homework because we have taken the time to find out what the best experts on the subject have already said. Second, we want to give proper credit to those who have already written on the subject; after all, we want credit for our own work, so we afford others the same courtesy. Third, we want our readers to know that credible experts agree with us. We combine those three goals into the one main goal

of writing in ways that clearly participate in ongoing scholarly and expert conversations—which is really what researched writing does, at its best.

Doing that work well starts with doing excellent research—going beyond the world of mere opinions so easily available on the Internet and learning how to find, read, and use the kind of information on which true experts rely. Grand Valley’s expert research librarians have developed “Information Literacy Core Competencies” (ILCCs) for college students, defining six main goals for college-level research.

According to the ILCCs, as a college-level researcher, you should learn to

- construct a question or problem statement,
- locate and gather information,
- evaluate sources,
- manage information,
- use information ethically, and
- communicate knowledge.

You will want to develop these abilities throughout your college career, but WRT 150 should give a strong basis in all these areas. In WRT 150 you will learn to construct research questions by developing a preliminary focus to help you manage the range of material that you might pursue. You will learn to create a plan for your search and identify the resources that will be available to help you (such as library guides, access to scholarly journals through online reference tools called “databases,” and the research librarians themselves). You will learn to evaluate sources so that you use the most appropriate and effective materials rather than just the materials that pop up first in a web search. You will learn to manage information in ways that help you keep track of what you have found and lower the stress and anxiety of conducting complicated research. Of course, as we re-emphasize in many ways in this Guide, you will learn to use information ethically by giving other writers credit for what you have learned from them and for what they have written. By learning to cite sources correctly, you learn to avoid plagiarism, honor copyright, and participate expertly in academic discussions. Finally, we want you to communicate knowledge effectively by

coming to understand the ways in which those academic discussions take place, and then by beginning to take your own place in those discussions.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of these information literacy competencies as part of an effective academic writing process. Information literacy does not always show up directly in grading criteria because it is essentially a process, not a product; yet information literacy will have a profound effect on the quality of your writing, and thus on your WRT 150 grades.

Furthermore, the benefits of information literacy go well beyond WRT 150. When you learn to include results from research into your writing effectively, you prepare yourself for success in later college work. Summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting your sources effectively shows that you truly understand them. Citing and documenting your sources correctly proves not only that you understand your sources but also that you understand how academic writing works. Perhaps most importantly for first-year writers, working with sources in the right ways helps you to avoid charges of plagiarism. When we work with research sources, we have to take unusual care to make sure that readers know exactly what we are claiming as our own thinking and writing and exactly what came from someone else. We will resist discussing research, documentation, and plagiarism at great length here because all of that needs to be addressed far more extensively in your WRT 150 class. You must, however, be alert to the importance of using research material ethically in your WRT 150 experience.

Documenting Sources

We have referred above to “documentation” of sources, which may be a new term for you. Basically, “documentation” means giving readers a very precise way to know exactly where you got your language and information and when exactly you are using language or information from your sources. For example, you might have seen books that had “footnotes” at the bottom of the page, linked to small numbers inserted into the discussion. Those footnotes “document” the source of the information.

To make that reference work easier to do (in the long run!), academic writers have created several carefully defined “documentation styles,” depending

on the field or discipline in which they are writing. Most writers in the humanities use the documentation system of the Modern Language Association (MLA style), and this is the documentation style used most often in WRT 150 classes. Writers in the social sciences usually use the documentation system of the American Psychological Association (APA style), so some WRT 150 classes use, or at least permit, APA style. Both of these styles insert a brief citation to a source inside parentheses (often starting with an author's last name), and then add a list of sources at the end that readers can identify and find quickly by using the information in the parentheses. Most of the sample essays in this book use those documentation styles. If you have not worked with documentation very much, be sure to look at those examples so that you have a better idea of how they work.

You are likely to learn several documentation styles during your college career. We understand that this variety of documentation styles means that, for college students, documentation styles do not seem “easier” to use. Instead, they can seem confusing, trivial, picky, and even cruel. Please try to keep an open mind about them. By the time you are done with college, you will settle into some familiar styles for your work, and you will come to understand all the problems these documentation styles actually solve for you—problems that, right now, you probably could not even imagine. For now, you mainly need to remember that they are meant to be used precisely, and that their accurate use is your best method to avoid charges of plagiarism.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Certainly, you understand that you cannot have someone else do your writing for you or copy a paper and turn it in as your own. Most students also quickly understand the point of the Grand Valley policy forbidding submission of the same work in two different classes (including earlier high school classes)—at least unless you have permission from both instructors. Many first-year college students believe that as long as they avoid such extremely dishonest behavior, they cannot be accused of plagiarism; unfortunately, that belief is not correct.

Plagiarism is not simply a matter of dishonest intentions. Working with research sources requires writers to understand difficult aspects of plagiarism and make skilled, positive efforts to credit sources accurately and fully.

Again, everyone knows that you cannot use the words of other writers without putting those words in quotation marks and giving the original writer credit. Many first-year students are surprised to find that, to avoid committing plagiarism, they also must do the following:

- Give credit to sources for their information and ideas as well as their words;
- Quote any exact language from the source, even if only a few words at a time, when you use that language within your own sentences;
- Avoid using the same general sentence structure used by the source, except in exact and clearly marked quotations;
- Use your documentation style precisely to make perfectly clear when you are using material from a source and when you are presenting your own words and ideas.

In WRT 150, we expect students to learn more about documentation and avoiding plagiarism as the course goes on, so we may continue to work with your drafts even if they contain sections that might commit intentional or unintentional plagiarism. If you want more information about why we do that, read the statement by the national Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) about best approaches to working with students on the concept of plagiarism, found online at <http://www.wpacouncil.org/positions/WPAplagiarism.pdf>.

Furthermore, we may not always see when you are using material from sources while we are working on your drafts. We rely on you to inform us of that. Nevertheless, by the end of the course, in your final portfolio, we will check closely for plagiarism and hold you entirely accountable for it according to the Grand Valley Student Code. Thus, you need to be sure that you understand how to document all your sources before the end of WRT 150. Be sure that you ask your teacher or consultants in the Writing Center about any instances of possible plagiarism in your work.

WRT 150 Student Resources

The Library and Online Library Resources

The goal of library-related instruction in WRT 150 is to help you become an information-literate lifelong learner who can use academic and profes-

sional research methods and sources. In order to reach this goal, you will learn how to develop and implement a research strategy, locate the resources necessary to meet your information needs, and evaluate the information that you find.

Many WRT 150 teachers work closely with Grand Valley librarians and bring librarians into class to help you learn how to use Grand Valley's libraries and online library resources. In addition, each class has a designated library liaison who will work with you on your research for WRT 150. Ask your teacher for the name of your library liaison, or feel free to ask library staff to help you find the right person. Many first-year college students do not understand that librarians in a college research library are eager and ready to offer substantial help to you, both in conducting your research and in learning how to become better researchers. Grand Valley's librarians are also faculty members who serve as part of our teaching staff. Ask for their help.

The *Knowledge Market*, found in both the Mary Idema Pew Library in Allendale and the Steelcase Library in downtown Grand Rapids, offers a wide variety of learning resources that might help you with your work. In particular, you should consider working with Research Consultants to help you improve your ability to conduct effective academic research.

Computer Classrooms

While we do use other schedules and plans, WRT 150 classes generally meet twice a week, once in a traditional classroom and once in a computer classroom. Computer classrooms are sometimes used simply for writing and revising drafts, but your instructor may introduce a range of activities—brief in-class writing exercises, peer review sessions, and research assignments, for example—to help you gain expertise in a range of writing skills and strategies.

Any Grand Valley computer that you use in a computer classroom gives you the option to save items to a personal drive (the “N” drive), also known as your network account. You can access items saved to your network account from various campus locations, such as other campus computer labs and some campus living quarters, as well as from other Grand Valley campuses. You can also retrieve items on the N drive from an

off-campus home computer. Seek assistance from Grand Valley's IT office (331-2101) for more information about file transfer.

The computer classrooms use recent versions of Microsoft Word for Windows as the primary word-processing software. This means that Microsoft Works documents, Apple Pages documents, and other documents do not open in a computer classroom unless you have saved them in a compatible format like rich-text format (.rtf), which you can do with nearly any word processing program. It also means that documents prepared in the computer classroom will not open on some other computers, especially older computers, unless you have saved them in rich-text format or another format used on that computer. Your teacher may be able to suggest other programs and methods for working on the same files both at home and in a computer classroom.

The Fred Meijer Center for Writing

Peer writing consultants work in all of the writing center locations as well as in WRT 098 and WRT 150 classes. Consultants provide helpful feedback, offer advice, model writing strategies, and ask questions in order to help students improve as writers. Essentially, the role of a consultant is to provide a well-trained pair of eyes to help writers think more critically about their own writing, and to assist writers in devising a plan for revision.

Most WRT 150 teachers use computer classrooms for consultations. In that setting, students have instant access to a consultant. Since consultants are trained across the board, they can discuss any issue that may arise while you are working through writing activities or drafting and revising your papers. For example, you might need a quick discussion about the purpose of topic sentences, a guided tour through the library's many online resources for research, or a more in-depth conference about a whole draft. Make a point to seek out your writing consultant often. When you establish a working relationship with your writing consultant, he or she will come to understand your unique writing strengths and challenges, and can offer advice that is useful for the specific purposes you have in mind for your writing projects.

Consultants also sometimes help to lead small-group discussions in WRT 150 classrooms. Small groups serve as a place to cultivate ideas, expand and clarify key elements, and devise a plan for a paper. The consultant's role in these situations is to help the group stay on track, encourage everyone's involvement in the discussion, model or prompt the group to use effective feedback strategies, and offer another perspective on your writing.

Here are some tips for making your group discussions work:

- Come prepared with specific questions or areas of your writing for which you need feedback.
- Bring enough copies of your draft for each student and the consultant to have one. This allows your readers to follow along and write comments on the papers, which you might find helpful later in your revision process.
- Solicit the advice of everyone in your group, not just the writing consultant. The more readers' ideas you have, the better idea you have about whether your writing is working.

In labs or small-group discussions, consultants are there as a resource to work through your individual writing needs. Get to know your classroom consultants early in the semester, and consider visiting them outside of class, when they are on duty in the writing center (LOH 120) or at any of the other Fred Meijer Center for Writing locations: Knowledge Market (Mary Idema Pew library - Allendale), DeVos (Steelcase Library – PEW campus), Eberhard Center 101 (PEW), CHS (4th floor library - PEW), or online (through GoogleDocs). Also, you can visit the writing center website (gvsu.edu/wc) for up-to-date information about writing services, online scheduling, and resources to assist you with the writing process.

Portfolio Grading FAQ: Questions You Might Have

1. Why is a group of Writing 150 teachers reading my papers and determining my final grade rather than just my own teacher?

A group of three to seven teachers (including your teacher) has been reading samples of your class's writing throughout the semester to discuss and agree about what is an A, B, C, D, and F paper. The goal of the instructors in the group is to set fair and accurate grading standards. The standards will develop after discussing samples from your class and other classes throughout the semester. This carefully considered agreement between two writing teachers results in more consistent and fair grades than any other method.

2. Does my teacher have any say as to what grade I get on my portfolio and what grade I receive in this class?

Yes. Your teacher will always be one of at least two portfolio readers of your work at the end of the term. If the second reader in the group agrees with your teacher about the grade for your portfolio, then that agreement will determine the grade you receive on the portfolio. If the second reader does not agree with your teacher, then a third reader will be asked to read your portfolio. If the third reader agrees with your teacher, then the grade stands. If the third reader agrees with the second reader, then your grade is based on the agreement of readers two and three. The goal is to arrive at a "community" grade rather than a grade based solely on one teacher's preferences.

3. What happens if one person in the portfolio group grades much harder than the others? Doesn't this mean I'll probably get a low grade if that person reads my portfolio?

No, not necessarily. If the second reader does not agree with your teacher, a third reader is asked to read your portfolio and decide which of the first two readers is closest to the standards that the portfolio group has agreed about during the semester. (See question #2.) The portfolio groups also

work to discourage teachers from being “hard” or “easy.” We strive to have all teachers arrive at a common understanding of what portfolios deserve which grades, grounding their judgment in our detailed grading descriptions.

4. Shouldn't each teacher grade his or her own students' work?

Each teacher does have a hand in grading their students' work, but the portfolio groups assure students that their grades are a reflection of community standards—departmental and university-wide.

5. How can the portfolio group grade my papers if they haven't seen the assignment?

Writing 150 is a course that is designed to give you practice and instruction in the various kinds of writing that you will be asked to do throughout college. All teachers design their assignments with that goal in mind. The portfolio group therefore wants to be general in their assessment of your writing. They want to look at three samples of your writing and describe the group of three as “excellent,” “good,” “average,” or “below average or failing.” The ideal is that this grade reflects what most professors would say if they picked up your portfolio and read it. We want your grade to be based on the general quality of your writing alone, not on how well the writing satisfies teacher-specific instructions.

6. My teacher said that I have to type single space, have fewer than two sentence fragments, and underline the thesis statement in every essay just to get a C. If the portfolio group doesn't know this, then what happens?

Teachers often have “minimum requirements” that they want every paper to meet. For example, some say that a paper can't be handed in more than one day late. When teachers have such requirements that may not be the same as other teachers in the portfolio group, they will enforce those requirements by making sure you meet them before you submit a portfolio to the portfolio group at the end of the term. This way, everyone who reads your portfolio will assume it has met any teacher-specific minimum requirements. If you don't meet minimum requirements that your teacher

sets, your teacher won't allow you to submit a portfolio at the end of the term.

7. Could two people in my portfolio group agree that I deserve a B and then my teacher give me a C anyway because of absences or class participation?

That should not happen. The portfolio grade is your letter grade for the semester. Typically you should not expect your grade to be adjusted by your teacher beyond a plus or a minus for the letter grade the portfolio group gives you. If your grade needs adjusting down a whole letter grade, you probably didn't meet the minimum requirements (e.g. too many absences) and you should not have been allowed to submit a portfolio in the first place, meaning you would deserve an F. If a teacher over in Biology looks up your grade in WRT 150, they should be assured that this grade basically reflects how well you write, not your attendance, your improvement, or your good (or bad) attitude—as should also be true in your Biology class.

8. Just looking at my portfolio at the end of the term doesn't show how much I've improved. Shouldn't my grade be based, at least in part, on my improvement?

We do not believe it makes sense to grade on improvement itself. Your grade in WRT 150 should be based on the quality of your writing at the end of the term. This way, what counts as A, B, C, D, or F is the same for every student, or at least as close to being the same as we can manage. Teachers can adjust grades (usually with a plus or a minus) based on your participation, improvement, or other factors. "Improvement" itself is probably impossible to measure accurately even if we wished to do so. We hope that your improvement will earn its proper reward when we decide how well you are writing by the end of the term, when you submit your portfolio.

9. I like to have grades during the semester so that I know how well I am doing. I don't want my grade at the end of the term to come as a big surprise.

We agree that you should know how you are doing, but we do not believe interim grades would be the most effective approach to that need.

Your teacher should be reading your writing throughout the semester and responding to it with comments, personal conferences, endnotes, and suggestions for revision. Most 150 classes have tutors from the Writing Center that work with you and point out strengths and weakness in your writing. And many teachers will have you read and comment on other students' work.

For most students, a grade is not necessary for early drafts because the proper focus is on what the paper could be, not on what it is. But if you want a grade on an assignment and your teacher has not given one, just ask. The teacher will be able to tell you where she thinks the paper falls within the range of A to F. The teacher will probably tell you what she and others in the portfolio group have been saying about writing like yours. Don't be surprised if the teacher says, for example, that some in the group might say C and she, or others in the group, might say B. Group members often disagree, especially early in the semester, about what is an A, B, C, or D. In the end, if you simply do the best you can with a reasonable amount of hard work, your grade at the end will be the best that you can earn.

The last thing any of us would want to do is to encourage students to stop working before they have achieved the best work they can manage. If the teacher says your paper is probably a low B or a C, your next question should be: "what could I work on in this paper that would improve it?" Your teacher should love this question and this should give you the feedback you need to feel encouraged to try making even a good paper better. In the end, if you simply do the best you can with a reasonable amount of hard work, your grade at the end will be the best that you can earn. The last thing any of us would want to do is to encourage students to stop working before they have achieved the best work they can manage.

10. It seems to me that the portfolio-grading system is all about judging final products. Aren't we supposed to be interested in the writing process?

Our composition program does stress learning strategies and skills that help you develop your own writing process. In fact, because the portfolio group grading system focuses on what you can do at the end of the semester, it

encourages and gives opportunity for every paper (except for the in-class paper) to be revised. Revision is the heart of the writing process. That is, we teach and value better writing processes because they do tend to produce better writing. In the end, we believe that grading your results keeps the best focus on learning to use writing processes effectively.

11. The portfolio group read my paper but didn't give me feedback. Why not?

The portfolio groups do their evaluation after the course is over so they are only concerned with grading. If teachers had to pause to give feedback on every portfolio, it would be impossible to finish the grading on time. Keep in mind that your teacher, your peers, and writing center consultants have given feedback on your papers throughout the term, and that your teacher's feedback has been informed by portfolio group discussion of papers from your class and others. We encourage you to do everything you can to gather feedback throughout the term, but in the end we need to focus our time and efforts entirely on evaluating the quality of the work.

12. What is supposed to be in my portfolio?

Every student should submit three papers, including at least one with citations and references that show your ability to conduct scholarly research and use its results effectively. Ask your teacher if you are not sure. Your teacher and the other students should help you make good choices about what goes in the final portfolio.

13. Can I include a paper in my portfolio from another class?

No, unless you receive permission from the teachers of both classes and make arrangements with your WRT 150 teacher about what you can use and how you can use it. Without earlier arrangements like that, all papers in your portfolio must have been assigned and seen by your WRT 150 teacher, and they must be originally created for the class you are taking. Students who secretly submit work from another class (even an earlier WRT 150 class) violate the Student Code's provisions on academic honesty and integrity, a very serious matter. The results may include failing the course and being reported to the Dean of Students for further action.

Good Writing in WRT 150

When we set out to choose portfolios to be published in this handbook, we don't try to anticipate which ones will serve as perfect models for future students. So what are we looking for when we begin the portfolio selection process? Our goal is to select writers who understand their paper's purposes, know what it is they are trying to accomplish in their work, and we look for authors who keep their audience in mind as they write. No matter what your assignment may be, the keys to good writing remain consistent—a solid sense of purpose, focus, and audience. But there are many portfolio essays that meet these requirements that are submitted for possible publication, so we try to choose pieces from writers that tackle diverse subject material. In showcasing work from previous WRT 150 students, we hope to open up classroom dialogue about the content as well as the writing. We have chosen six writers to showcase in this year's edition of the book and each has something special to offer.

MaryAnn Black begins **Portfolio One** with an analysis of *Seventeen Magazine's* "Traumarama," a column that shares teens' funny, embarrassing and cringe-worthy stories. Black questions whether the advice offered is actually helping or hurting female readers. Through academic research and her own personal experience with the magazine, she closely examines how these stories might reinforce negative perceptions on how girls view themselves. Her thoughtful inspection of the text enables MaryAnn to confidently conclude that *Seventeen's* column is rarely about empowerment and success, but rather embarrassment and humiliation. In her second piece, "Chasing the Stars," Black reminisces about her senior year astronomy class and takes readers on a stargazing voyage describing a sky filled with radiant stars ranging from dim to bright. Almost every star and constellation can be seen and sometimes even planets like Mercury, Venus and Mars can be visualized through her vivid use of detail. However, she laments how light pollution—the artificial glow that you see filling the night sky has caused skyglow and glare when viewing the celestial heavens. She points to ways light pollution can be decreased and how she has not allowed it to stop her from partaking in more sky gazing adventures. MaryAnn ends with "Apple's Transformation," a piece scrutinizing working conditions inside

Foxconn factories that manufacture smartphones, tablet computers, and other electronic devices for the technology giant. Her investigation exposes the illegal amounts of overtime, crowded working conditions, under-age workers, and improper disposal of hazardous waste and, in some cases, industrial accidents that have killed and injured workers. We quickly see Black's ability to artfully introduce and integrate material from relevant outside sources as she documents how Apple has attempted to remedy the situation so fewer Chinese workers suffer for the products we love. Mary-Ann's inquisitive nature and keen focus on creating engaging conversation makes her portfolio pleasurable to read.

In **Portfolio Two** Kayleigh Day writes about "The Real Cost of Corn" and argues how these subsidies contradict the constitutional principle of promoting the public's general welfare. She believes they benefit very few people and cause harm to the nation as a whole. Building on a clearly defined thesis, Day visibly lays out her argument presenting specific reasons for her claims. Her thesis statement holds up because she provides evidence to support it. Kayleigh noticeably demonstrates her information literacy skills in this paper by using academic evidence as a way to more fully develop her ideas. Doing that work well starts with doing excellent research—going beyond the world of mere opinions so easily available on the internet and learning how to find, read, and use the kind of information on which true experts rely upon. In "The Chains in the Education System" Day uses the film *Freedom Writers* to discuss the problems that the American public education system deals with every day—how our schools do not adequately teach inner-city children the skills necessary to overcome the issues they face. In addition to her in-depth discussion of the movie, Kayleigh weaves in interesting research regarding what determines the success or failure of an inner-city child. By refusing to provide the necessary resources to succeed, Day claims these schools create a viscous cycle for these students. Kayleigh ends her collection with "The Man with the Shiny Shoes," a personal account of battling a chronic lung disorder from childhood into young adulthood and never giving up hope despite the pain, obstacles and naysayers. Her narrative flows rhythmically since her sentences are clear, logical and easily understood by readers. Day's precise word choice as well as her mature and purposeful language makes this collection appealing to a sophisticated college-level audience.

Portfolio Three by Kelsi Malcolm commences with “Even the Strongest Fall,” a poignant coming of age story about learning important life lessons too late. Her personal approach allows her to put herself into the piece and carries the reader through to the end. This style not only creates a revelation, but brings readers closer to her and to the subject she is writing about. She clearly shows us how the death of a loved one can help one understand what it truly means to grow up and how sometimes the strongest people fall the hardest. Essays, like Malcolm’s, demonstrate how to write with a particular purpose and audience in mind. She is able to communicate successfully to her readers because she understands her purpose for writing the essay. Kelsi’s main purpose in her second essay, “Setting the Foundation,” is tackling the issue of cutting physical education classes in Michigan schools. She contends that physical activity is vital for young children, especially in the increasingly obese society we live in. In her closing remarks, Malcolm asserts that the state’s schools need to maintain physical education programs and ensure they are at a rigorous level of activity in order to set a life-long foundation for kids. In “26 New Angels” Kelsi rhetorically analyzes President Obama’s speech in response to the Sandy Hook school shooting. She closely examines how his use of words influences the audience. In an organized fashion, she breaks his speech into parts and then explains how the parts work together to create a certain effect—to address people’s fears and sorrows. Her paragraphs break information into parts that contribute to a greater understanding of the speech as a whole. Readers find Malcolm’s essays extremely attractive because she offers a clear purpose for reading and maintains a single focus throughout the entirety of each of her portfolio papers.

Clare Riley opens **Portfolio Four** with a fascinating essay that questions whether polar opposites really are the perfect match. She argues that, as a result of pop culture, we are led to believe that opposites do attract. In her text, Clare asks, is this really true? She strongly suggests via scientific evidence, real life examples, and psychological theories how untrue this statement just might be. Due to her robust supporting evidence, her paper leads readers through a discussion that is explicit, clear and purposeful. Riley, like many WRT 150 students, decided to write about a church mission trip she took to Jamaica in “All You Need is Love...” However, unlike other students, Clare uses photographs to tell her story, which have a great abil-

ity to convey emotion, mood, narrative, ideas and messages—all of which are important elements of storytelling. She develops her focus with vivid details, examples, and in this case visual graphics. We see how life-changing her visit to Westhaven Children’s Home becomes for her as she witnesses the full extent of the mental and physical disabilities of its residents. Riley closes her portfolio with a journalistic profile on the tenth annual Take Back The Night (TBTN) event at Grand Valley State University. She presents readers with a meaningful organizational pattern to follow. Her richly detailed profile takes us through a TBTN event where we see the Allendale campus come together as a community to speak out against sexual assault and domestic violence. When things are clearly laid out, like Clare’s essay is, the information is easier to talk about, easier to understand, and easier to remember. Riley’s portfolio collection is engaging to read from start to finish due to her compelling content and her ability to reach inside readers and connect with their heartstrings and their intellect.

In **Portfolio Five** Rachel Abdalla transports readers to Fort Jackson, an Army base in South Carolina. Using vibrant description and active voice, Abdalla makes you feel as though you are standing right next to her on the shooting range as she psyches herself up to fire away. Vivid writing, such as Rachel’s, contains concrete detail, which describes things that can be detected with the senses. Using such details makes her portfolio papers more persuasive, more memorable, and more effective. Next, Abdalla profiles a local mission highlighting how the organization brings the community together by using volunteers, donations, and fundraisers to provide meals, recovery programs, and housing to those who desperately need a helping hand. Again, she draws on the personal and details how the mission has helped people like her own uncle. In Rachel’s last paper she uses her experience as a National Guard medic and her Medical Diagnostic Echocardiography major to more deeply explore how energy drinks are harmful. Like her other essays, Abdalla hooks us in from the beginning as she witnesses a fellow soldier suffer from a life-threatening energy drink-induced emergency. We quickly learn how these energy drinks are portrayed as “healthy and harmless” when in reality the high amounts of caffeine can cause heart disease, heart palpitations, and even death. Rachel offers preventative measures such as banning certain energy drinks, banning the amount of the stimulants in them or caffeine, putting warning labels on the drinks, and

putting more ads out there about the deaths that have occurred relating to energy drinks so consumers are better protected. Abdalla's titles and opening paper sections inform readers of the topic, purpose, and focus of the paper in ways that motivate readers to look forward to reading further. Additionally, Rachel has attended carefully to grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage in her final, edited writing, an important last step in producing a quality portfolio.

Austin Latture begins **Portfolio Six** with an in-depth examination into why so many male high school athletes are abusing performance enhancing drugs (PEDs). Latture claims that athletes, especially football players and power lifters, are put under an obscene amount of pressure to perform well and often turn to PEDs to gain a competitive edge. He writes candidly about trying a popular anabolic steroid called Clenbuterol and how rampantly it's abused at the high school level. He warns of the consequences student athletes face being ignorant about the dangers of PEDs. Austin successfully develops his paper topic by using support and elaboration consisting of specific details and information. In his second essay, Latture makes a case for how advertisements from sportswear companies use subtleties such as word association and the placement of models in super-human poses to appeal to a range of consumers. Using Nike and Under Armour as examples, Austin suggests this recipe for success is applicable to every demographic of customer; it is simply altered to accommodate each demographically different group of people, all while remaining consistent throughout sportswear advertisements of all types. He supports this focus using well-selected details that are suggestive, accurate, and relevant. Austin's final piece is personal in nature. He reflects on how his weight became the root of many of his social and mental issues growing up. According to Latture, he blamed everything on his physical appearance. Though he had every intention of making a lifestyle change, he never actually pulls the trigger until a life-changing experience occurs. Austin believes that moment is what fuels his weight loss journey. Choosing subjects you are connected to, like Latture does, encourage student ownership of topics and texts. In this essay, we see a student writer who is able to successfully cultivate an appropriate and interesting voice in his writing. He is not only communicating the knowledge of others effectively, but taking his own place in those academic conversations as well.

We invite WRT 150 instructors and students to read and discuss these six portfolios as a way to generalize about what characterizes good writing in the first-year writing program at Grand Valley State University. As you read, notice the similarities and differences from portfolio to portfolio—the kinds of writing included, the number and types of sources cited, the length of the papers, and so on. Keep in mind that hundreds of other students wrote quality portfolios last fall and winter, and although they were probably as diverse in subject material as the essays exemplified here, all the writers understood the keys to good writing—composing with a solid sense of purpose, focus, and audience.

MaryAnn Black

A Costly Column for Teenage Readers

It's a typical lunch period at Athens High School, my friends and I are gathering around a Seventeen magazine looking at the column "Traumarama!" It was our daily routine to sit around the lunch table and discuss each story. I enjoyed reading "Traumarama!" because I thought the stories were dedicated to giving girls guidance when dealing with typical teenage problems. This column contains short stories about girls and their embarrassing moments. I could relate to this column because I was a typical teenager who also had many humiliating moments. "Traumarama!" is appealing to readers because real girls supposedly write it. There is always a small message at the end of each story on how to act in certain situations. However, is this subtle advice helping or hurting readers? Carley Moore, an English teacher at New York University, wrote an article called "Invasion of the Everygirl: Seventeen Magazine, 'Traumarama!' and the Girl Writer" which not only helped me answer that question but made me realize the massive effects this magazine has on girls. Like other girls I was unknowingly influenced by "Traumarama!" Moore's article showed me that these stories reinforce negative thoughts on how girls view themselves.

Moore analyzed every "Traumarama!" story from 1994 to 2007 and found that the stories are extremely edited and harmful for girls to read. Moore's main argument is that "'Traumarama!' stories are rarely about empowerment and triumph, but rather shame and humiliation" (1249). She explains that part of this shame and humiliation comes from Seventeen's editors. The editors take stories that girls send in and change them so they fit a typical "Traumarama!" story. Moore calls these editors the "everygirl." She explains that Seventeen capitalizes on these stories; this "'everygirl' writer represents herself as insecure and out of control, which fulfills the magazine's obligation to its advertisers who know that an insecure girl will buy more products" (1250). This editing gives girls a false sense of reality because they think what they are reading is actually true. Girls believe their peers write "Traumarama!" because Seventeen advertises that real girls actually send in their stories. Moore concluded that the stories were edited because they were never over 150 words, they had uniform word choice and similar beginnings and endings. When Moore looked at the "Trauma-

MaryAnn wrote this portfolio in the class of Professor Mary Jean Lotz.

rama!” stories from 1994 to 2007, she saw that most of these stories dealt with girls who were punished for acting “too emotional, too aggressive, too sexual, too mean, or too uncool” (1254). From her observations of the “Traumarama!” stories, she was able to derive three overlying categories. Moore’s three categories are when girls “are too much for a boy, expose too much of their bodies, or are too smart or not smart enough for the situation at hand” (1254). These categories teach girls demoralizing ways to approach situations they encounter.

The first category Moore talks about is called “too much for a boy.” Some girls may feel confident in talking to a boy they like, but “Traumarama!” portrays this confidence as being “too-much.” Teenage girls are curious about boys and relationships so it is no surprise that Moore found that most of the stories fell under the “too much for a boy” category. Moore discovered that in “Traumarama!” when a girl was confident talking to a boy the stories would end abruptly with the boy never talking to the girl again. Moore explains that in this category it teaches girls that when dealing with boys its best “to play it cool, to hide any signs of happiness or excitement, and to extinguish all signs of desire” (1258). This category of stories shows girls that they should not make any moves towards boys and that boys must instigate a relationship first, which is false. Sadly, Moore uncovered that “only five out of these 63 crush stories from 1994-1995 end positively—either the crush comes to the aid of the girl or the two become romantically involved” (1257). Unfortunately, “Traumarama!” only expounds upon girls’ feelings of self-consciousness and knocks them down.

The second most popular category Moore found was when girls were “exposing too much of their bodies.” Stories that fall under this category end with girls quickly running away from embarrassment or shame because their body is at fault. An example of this is a girl being mocked for wearing a bikini without shaving her armpits. Moore explains that in the category of “exposing too much” it shows a girls body “as a site of exposure, discomfort, disgust and even danger” (1258). In this category the editors show the reader that it is mandatory for girls to take care of their bodies, or else it could result in an embarrassing situation. This type of story also gives girls the impression that they are always being watched. This paranoia makes a typical teenage girl even more self-conscious.

The final category of stories, “too smart or not smart enough,” is about how girls need to find a balanced amount of intelligence. An example of a story in this category would be a girl feeling ashamed of getting a good grade on a test. Even though it is the smallest category, it still has a huge impact on girls. Moore stresses “girls in these stories do not feel good about being smart. They cannot because the daily embarrassments of being a girl overshadow any success they might achieve” (1261). This is by far the most impactful category because it teaches girls that they should not be too smart yet not act dumb, which is extremely confusing for the reader to comprehend. “Traumarama!” emphasizes that girls who are “too smart” or “not smart enough” will be humiliated in some sort of way.

Moore argues that all three categories have an extremely negative lesson or consequence. “Traumarama!” does not help young teenage girls when it comes to views on their body and boys. When girls read this column, it leads them to believe that they are constantly being watched, judged and ridiculed. Moore is upset that “these stories, in fact, tell girls that it is not okay to be real or imperfect” (1264). I was also disappointed by the actions of *Seventeen* magazine and how they portray girls in a negative manor. Moore made me realize that “Traumarama!” is a poorly written column that puts girls down. After reading Moore’s article I decided to look at a “Traumarama!” story to decide if any of Moore’s three categories actually apply.

This is a “Traumarama!” story from the December 2012 issue “I saw my friend pop up in FB chat, so for fun, I sent her a baitmessage that said, ‘Hey, babe, come over ;).’ She didn’t respond, so I checked our chat again. Instead of her name, I had sent it to this hot guy from school—I’d never even talked to him before! I quickly told him it was a mistake and signed off, but he must think I’m so lame!” (“Traumarama”). This story fits perfectly into Moore’s two categories of being overly into a boy and being ashamed of having intelligence. This specific story teaches girls to fear what a boy may think. The overly into a boy category is in the beginning of the story when the girl accidentally messaged a cute boy. This part of the story shows readers that it is bad to approach a boy you like. As soon as she found out she mixed up the names she was instantly humiliated and the story ends suddenly with the writer saying, “I’m so lame.” When she says, “I’m so lame” it shows that she thinks of herself as someone who lacks

intelligence. The girl in the story also fears that this cute boy thinks she is stupid. This fits in effortlessly with Moore's ashamed of having intelligence category. There is also another problem that Moore does not discuss and that is online bullying. Sending someone a bait message may seem humorous at first but I do consider that a form of bullying. This excerpt is a prime example of how "Traumarama!" creates this consistent cycle of negativity, which is a cruel cycle I have personally experienced.

Being a naïve teenager I often would turn to "Traumarama!" for advice on what to do in certain situations. I listened to the magazine's advice because I thought that was a way to fit in. "Traumarama!" gave me horrible advice on how to handle friends, boys, and my own body. By listening to "Traumarama!" I was only putting myself down and this made my confidence level plummet. During my senior year of high school I eventually grew out of the magazine and it was not until reading Moore's article that *Seventeen* once again sparked my interest. Moore's article gave me a completely different outlook on this magazine. I realized that I had experienced all three of Moore's "too much" categories. I can remember not talking to my crush because I did not want them to think I was obsessed, not answering questions in class because I did not want to seem too smart, and not wanting to go to the beach because I thought my body was not good enough. Moore's three categories of "too-muchness" played a huge role in not only "Traumarama!" stories, but in my life as well. "Traumarama!" does not make girls self-conscious- every teenager goes through these stages- but they significantly make the problem worse by offering fake stories that only criticize girls' every move.

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MaryAnn Black

Chasing the Stars

Trillions of glowing stars lit up the pitch-black sky. My star chart, which was torn on the edges from being dragged around from the millions of off-roading adventures, was held several inches away from my face. My curly, frizzy brown hair was up in a big bun on the top of my head so it would not be tossed around in the wind. I was dressed in my old high school varsity sweatshirt and pants, my normal stargazing attire. This adventure was different from all the rest. It was the first time there were constellations in the sky that I had never seen before, thanks to the crystal clear sky. I stared up at Orion, my favorite constellation, it was the brightest I had ever seen it. I sat on the hood of my car for hours brushing up on constellations I had forgotten and taking in the beauty of the stars. Everything that was bothering me that day was put on hold and for those couple of hours; it was just the stars and I. This miraculous place is West Olive, Michigan. While looking up at West Olive's sky, my love for stars grew stronger, which was something that I thought was near impossible.

Stars have not always played an important role in my life. Even though I was in an astronomy class my senior year of high school I did not think much about stars. My teacher would make the class go out and look at the stars at least once a week. As a class, everyone would agree on a time they wanted to meet up in our high school parking lot. We would usually meet up at four or five o'clock in the morning. I would stand there speechless trying to figure out who in the right mind would be up at these extreme times. I never participated in big group discussions and would usually complain about how early it was but this would soon change.

During an early class meet up my teacher pointed out a specific star that caught my eye in the constellation Orion. Betelgeuse, a yellowish red star at the upper left corner of Orion's shoulder, started my obsession with stars. This yellowish red color gave an interesting contrast compared to the other stars in Orion, which are all a light blue color. This constellation looks like a man with a shield in one hand and a club in the other. The Encyclopedia of Science and Technology by McGraw-Hill goes into detail about Orion and its Greek mythology:

Orion is pictured holding up his shield to ward off the charging Taurus, the bull. In Greek mythology, Orion met Artemis, goddess of the hunt and of the Moon. To protect her virginity, her brother Apollo sent Scorpius, the Scorpion, to attack Orion. He then tricked Artemis into shooting Orion. When Orion could not be revived, Artemis placed him in the heavens, with the scorpion eternally pursuing him ("Orion" 586).

I found this Greek mythology fascinating and ever since then I was excited to learn about stars. When reading about the different mythologies of constellations I was upset to find out that the constellations I was researching I could not see in my hometown.

I started to grow bored stargazing in my backyard because I was only seeing a few constellations. I began driving to parks around my city because it was darker there and it made it easier to see the stars. I was disappointed to find that even though I could see the stars better, I still could not see the constellations I wanted to see because of the light pollution from near by cities. Driving several miles around my city quickly turned into hundreds of miles to find certain constellations. Traverse City, Mackinaw Island, and Bent Harbor are just a few of my spontaneous weekend adventures. Driving several miles makes a huge difference when viewing stars. When looking at stars in a city where light pollution is present, only the brightest stars and constellations can be seen. The Big Dipper, Little Dipper, Orion and Cassiopeia are the only constellations that I could regularly see in my hometown. The sky looks black with only a few stars and constellations glowing. When traveling to a place where there is hardly any light pollution, like the country, the sky is filled with stars ranging from dim to bright. Almost every star and constellation can be seen and sometimes you can even see planets like Mercury, Venus and Mars. On a clear day, The Milky Way, which is our galaxy, can be seen in the country as well. It is amazing how many more stars you can see just by driving to places that are more secluded and have less light pollution.

I am not the only one who finds light pollution disappointing. Luckily, astronomers have been working to reverse light pollution damage. The International Dark-Sky Association is an organization, which is trying to protect the night sky. Bob Parks is an expert on light pollution and is an environmental writer and speaker. In his article "The Battle to Control

Light Pollution” he talks about the big impact the IDA has had on the sky. Parks acknowledges the IDA’s efforts, “Thanks to the IDA and its volunteers, more than 300 cities and towns now have lighting ordinances. The majority of outdoor lighting fixtures sold today are fully shielded and the percentage rises each year” (30). Many cities are changing their ways and helping with the light pollution movement, because volunteers from IDA have been pushing governments to change their old ways. Parks gives an example of this:

Cities such as San Jose, California, are testing remote- management systems that monitor the energy consumption of each fixture and dim or turn off lights to save energy when less lighting is appropriate. The combination of these technologies may allow cities to reduce energy consumption for outdoor lighting by 40% to 50% and at the same time dramatically reduce light pollution (31).

This helps to save energy and the night sky from light pollution.

To understand the damaging effects of light pollution one must know what it is and the different types. Alan MacRobert, who is the senior editor for the *Sky & Telescope* magazine, wrote “Despite Light Pollution, the Brightest Stars Shine Through,” which explains the definition of light pollution. He writes, “A generation ago nobody but astronomers heard the term ‘light pollution.’ Now it’s known widely. Light pollution is the artificial glow that you see filling the night sky. It’s caused mostly by waste light spilling sideways and upward from poorly designed and improperly aimed outdoor light fixtures” (MacRobert). MacRobert also touches on how light pollution affects even one of the brightest constellations, Orion: “City light pollution wipes out Orion’s dimmer parts: his head, upraised club, and outstretched arm and shield.” Stars and constellations, like Orion, can appear fainter in the night sky by two different types of light pollution, skyglow and glare. Tony Flanders, the associate editor of *Sky & Telescope* magazine, wrote “Living with Light Pollution: Don’t Let City Lights Squelch Your Love of Stargazing,” in which he explains the difference between skyglow and glare. He says that “glare refers to lights shining directly in your face—typically streetlights or your neighbor’s security lights. Severe glare makes stargazing impossible...but most people can escape it by finding a shadowed corner...or traveling to a park nearby” (62). The other type of pollution that Flanders talks about is not so easy to get away from, “Skyglow,

the diffuse glow that fills the sky itself, is harder to escape. It's caused by all the light that spills upward into the sky from sources both near and far. The glow from major cities is a serious problem for stargazers anywhere within 50 miles of the center" (62). I encounter both of these types of light pollution stargazing and this is why I have to travel far away from Metro-Detroit to get a good glimpse of the stars.

Some nights I go on my stargazing adventures alone as a peaceful time to connect with nature. Other times I drag my boyfriend or friends along for a road trip. When I am with other people, I feel the need to point out constellations and teach them everything I know. During my first semester at Grand Valley State, I took my roommate and floor mates out in the arboretum to stargaze. We laid for hours on a blanket staring at the gorgeous stars. I always point out my favorite constellations to them and teach them about the mythology. As we lay there in the field, I tell them that stars are much more than just a point in the sky. Knowing the history of how these constellations came about is half the fun of stargazing. Many people do not know that constellations were the center of Greek life. Bradley Schaefer, an astronomy and physics professor at Louisiana State University, in "The Origin of the Greek Constellations" explains the way Greeks used constellations. He explains, "Over time, the way Greeks used the constellations changed. The images started out telling stories about legendary heroes and animals. Then they became tools for calendars and navigators. Later the zodiac became a coordinate system for measuring planetary positions as part of astrology learned from the Babylonians" (6). Stars played such an important role within the Greek culture and still play a role in peoples lives today.

Towards the end of my astronomy class I finally gave stars a chance. When senior year was almost over, I persuaded my astronomy teacher to let me keep the star chart we had used in class. Now in my free time in at Grand Valley State, I often look at the star chart and reminisce about all my adventures. Even though I cannot go on as many adventures because of school, I know that as soon as the summer comes around there will be many more weekend trips. Throughout all of the places I have been to around Michigan, West Olive definitely has been the most enjoyable. I cannot get over how clear and bright the stars were. There were stars and constellations that I never thought I would be able to see because of factors

like, light pollution. Parks states, “The time it takes most of us to escape from urban areas to truly dark sites is now measured in hours, not minutes. It might be easy to give up hope” (30). Thanks to West Olive, I have not given up hope.

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Apple's Transformation

Countless American companies use outsourcing when it comes to the assembly of their products. When companies assemble their products in other countries, they cut the cost of their product, which makes it significantly cheaper for the consumer. While many people know that China is the leading assembler of American products, many people do not know that China's biggest assembling company is Foxconn. One of the biggest American companies to hire Foxconn is Apple because of their cheap labor prices and little taxes. Ever since Foxconn was hired to build Apple's iPods and iPhones, Apple has been under intense scrutiny because Foxconn has not been up to Apple's workplace standards. In the past seven years, there has been a public debate as to what actually has been going on at Foxconn factories. People were upset to find out that Foxconn was disobeying Apple's requests to take better care of their workers. Customers began to question whether they should still buy Apple products. Many avid customers of Apple have decided to do investigations on their own to find out what has been going on at Foxconn. What they found at Apple's third party vendors was extremely upsetting, but Apple and Foxconn eventually worked together to clean up their companies.

The Mail on Sunday, a British newspaper, exposed what was really going on inside the workplace of Apple's third party vendors. In June 2006, reporters from the Mail on Sunday broke the story in an article called "The Stark Reality of iPod's Chinese Factories." The article looked at the conditions of the workers at Apple's two different factories, Foxconn and Asustek. The first factory the team of reporters visited was Foxconn, located in Shenzhen. They reported that Foxconn workers live in dormitories inside the factory and are given three meals a day. The reporters said that "workers live in dormitories on the site, 100 to a room, arriving with a few possessions and a bucket to wash their clothes" ("The Stark"). The reporters took a photo of one of the dormitories and it showed a hundred cots lined up side by side with torn up sheets. It looked like a refugee camp. The Mail on Sunday received numerous complaints about military style drills during their interviews with workers. They did several interviews with workers at Shenzhen. They interviewed Zang Lan, a woman that had worked on the

Apple assembly line for a month. She told the reporters that “we have to work too hard and I am always tired. It’s like being in the army. They make us stand still for hours. If we move we are punished by being made to stand still for longer. We have to work overtime if we are told to and can only go back to the dormitories when our boss gives us permission” (qtd. in “The Stark”). The reporters also found that the average worker at Shenzhen made 53 dollars per month and worked 15-hour days (“The Stark”). The reporters were stunned that the workers had such long work hours and little pay.

The Mail on Sunday reporters then traveled to Suzhou where Apple’s third party vendor Asustek assembles the iPod. They uncovered that on average an Asustek worker makes 82 dollars a month and works twelve-hour days (“The Stark”). The reporters made it clear that it was a high security place, with barbwire and security guards surrounding the factory. The workers at Asustek make more money because Asustek does not provide food or housing for their employees. The employees of Asustek told reporters that about half of their paycheck goes towards food and housing (“The Stark”). The British reporters’ stressed that their biggest concern was the amount of money the employees made.

Once this story was released, the media went crazy, and there were all different reactions on how the workers were treated. Consumers do not like to see someone else suffering to make their product and this provoked several other newspapers, like the Daily Mirror and the BBC to do their own investigations on these factories. Just like the Mail on Sunday, they also came up with shockingly similar results on the conditions of the workers at Foxconn and Asustek. Americans are now much more aware of where their products come from because of all the reports. They pushed the public eye on Apple, and this gave Apple the push they needed to start enforcing higher standards.

Newspapers were not the only ones who pushed Apple into making changes at their third party vendors. Stephen Frost and Margaret Burnett, who both work at the University of Hong Kong in China, did an extensive case study on Apple in China. Frost and Burnett looked at Foxconn and found that at the end of 2006 Foxconn “had a market capitalization of 36.5 billion dollars” (104). Frost and Burnett compared this to what Apple made in 2006, which was 13.931 billion dollars (105). With all of that money Foxconn earns, it shows the power the company holds. Fox-

conn clearly makes more money than Apple yet they do not raise their workers' salaries. Frost and Burnett found that Foxconn, in 2006, had around 200,000 employees and the average employee made 53 dollars per a month (105). China does have a set minimum wage for each city, but since Foxconn is a subcontractor, China cannot force them to follow minimum wage requirements. This allows Foxconn and other subcontractors to ignore the minimum wage requirements. In 2007, Yan Zhu did a report for the Fujitsu Research Institute and found that Shenzhen had the highest minimum wage in China. Zhu reported that in 2006 the minimum wage for Shenzhen was 111.10 dollars (Zhu). Apple customers are shocked when reading Zhu, and Frost and Burnett's articles because Foxconn employers only make, on average, 53 dollars per month. It is upsetting that Foxconn makes more money than Apple, and yet they still do not pay their employees the minimum wage. Since Foxconn was not following their own country's rules, one could question if they would keep breaking American companies' rules as well.

In response to all of the reports, in February 2007, Apple published the "Final Assembly Supplier Audit Report." This report went into detail about what they found in Foxconn and how they attempted to fixed it. Apple hired audits-- people to go into their factories and make sure that those factories are keeping up to Apple's codes. The audits interviewed hundreds of employees and went through all of Foxconn's records. The report said, "This audit and the actions that followed have improved the working and living conditions at this facility. The housing conditions are better, pay practice are clearer, and employee benefits have expanded in the areas of educational programs and recreational options" ("Final" 1). The audits found that "about 2% of the interviewed employees reported that some workers were required to stand in a corner or do pushups, which are methods of discipline that Apple does not tolerate" ("Final" 2). As far as working hours go, the audits did find that many employees were working over 60 hours per week, which Apple, in their Code of Conduct, set at a maximum of 60 hours per week ("Final" 3). Apple's audits found that the living conditions of their third party vendor were up to Apple's Code of Conduct. However, the audits did find problems with the health and safety of the factory. The audits said, "we found blocked or improperly installed emergency exits, issues with the placement of or inspection of fire extinguishers, wiring that

was not in the proper protective conduit, and incidents of improper storage and documentation of chemicals (“Final” 4). According to Apple’s 2007 report, all of their third party vendors agreed to fix the problems. However, have they really made these changes? Two watchdog groups, Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour and the Fair Labor Association eventually pushed Apple to make changes at Foxconn.

The Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour (SACOM) is a nonprofit organization started in 2005 and is based in Hong Kong. According to their website, they believe that “corporations should commit to ensuring that working conditions in their supply chains are safe, workers are treated with respect and dignity, and manufacturing processes are environmentally responsible” (“Mission”). In 2011, SACOM did a one-month investigation at Foxconn’s three main plants Shenzhen, Chengdu and Chongqing. They published their findings in an article on their website called, “Foxconn and Apple Fail to Fulfill Promises: Predicaments of Workers after the Suicides.” They found that Foxconn still has harsh military style drills, safety problems and underpaid workers. SACOM examined the three buildings and did hundreds of interviews with workers. During their interviews, they had an overwhelming number of workers, from all three factories, complain about the military style training. They were shocked that Foxconn did not follow through with their promise to Apple to stop military style training. Foxconn also did not follow through with their promise to have better safety regulations. SACOM found that workers in Chengdu, “do not have adequate training on usage of chemicals and do not have regular on-post health examination” (“Foxconn” 13). In their report, they stress that lives can be saved if they make simple changes such as training people on how to properly use chemicals and having regular health examinations. The last big problem that they found with Foxconn was that they still were miscalculating workers’ pay. According to SACOM during their interviews with workers they found that many workers did not receive their pay slips (“Foxconn” 7). Since Foxconn often does not hand out employee pay slips, it does not tell the employee how their wage was calculated. SACOM thinks it is unethical that Foxconn does not give their employees pay slips because the employees therefore never know how their check was calculated. At the end of their article, they demanded that Foxconn change their ways. This organization created a huge media buzz and

once again Foxconn was under intense scrutiny, but SACOM alone did not push Foxconn to change. Foxconn did not change their ways until March 2012 when the Fair Labor Association stepped in.

The Fair Labor Association thankfully joined the cause to help the Foxconn employees. On January 13, 2012, Apple finally joined the Fair Labor Association. The Fair Labor Association is based in Washington, DC and their goal is to protect workers' rights worldwide. The Fair Labor Association states on their home page that, "the products we buy should not come at the cost of workers' rights. The Fair Labor Association believes that all goods should be produced fairly and ethically, and brings together three key constituencies- universities, civil society organizations and companies- to find sustainable solutions to systemic labor issues" ("Protecting"). The Fair Labor Association for several years had been asking Apple to join their organization. When Apple announced that they would join, the Fair Labor Association was ecstatic. Since Apple agreed to join, it gave the Fair Labor Association permission to extensively look at all of their factories. The investigation of the factories took around one month to complete and the Fair Labor Association surveyed more than 35,000 workers ("Fair Labor"). On March 29, 2012, they published their findings on their website. They "found significant issues with working conditions at three factories in China operated by Apple's major supplier Foxconn" ("Fair Labor"). The Fair Labor Association was confident that after talking with Foxconn they "secured groundbreaking commitments that will reduce working hours to legal limits while protecting pay, improve health and safety conditions, establish a genuine voice for workers, and will monitor on an ongoing basis to verify compliance" ("Fair Labor"). After they inspected and talked with Foxconn, they seemed to finally fix the problem and there are no recent reports on Foxconn abusing their workers.

Several days after the Fair Labor Association published what they found in Foxconn factories, Meg Roggensack, a writer for an organization called the Human Rights First wrote another article on their website called "Five Key Takeaways from the FLA's Foxconn Report." This article explains why Apple was unable to fix the problems with their third party vendors. Roggensack explains, "As the FLA has learned through years of audits, unless root causes are identified and addressed, improvements in working conditions are superficial and temporary at best." Apple, for five years,

was putting a band-aid over the entire situation, but with the help of the Fair Labor Association's in depth investigation, they changed those horrible conditions. Roggensack also makes clear that Apple needs to make sure that "Foxconn and their other suppliers are given clear and consistent message about what's expected, how the brands will be engaged to drive, how quickly improvements must be made, and how results will be measured and publicly reported" (Roggensack). Foxconn is now treating their employees' better thanks to the hard work of the Fair Labor Association. Apple can now set an example for other companies outsourcing to China. This was a big success for not only the Fair Labor Association, but Apple as well.

After a long five years, Apple has started taking the right steps towards becoming a better company. It is disappointing that Apple waited so long to actually fix the problems and many employees suffered from Apple not moving fast enough. Apple did however make the huge step to join the Fair Labor Association. They are the first technology company ever to join and this makes Apple a role model for other companies ("Final" 1). Hopefully this sets a trend for other companies and there can be fewer people suffering for products we love. Since Apple's third party vendors have changed, customers should still support Apple and their products. Thanks to the pressure of newspapers, the public, Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour and the Fair Labor Association, Apple's third party vendors are finally treating their employees right.

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P O R T F O L I O T W O

Kayleigh Day

The Real Cost of Corn

In 1787 the Constitution of the United States was drafted and in the very first sentence proclaimed that this government is designed to promote the general welfare of the people. Yet every year, the United States government spends billions of dollars on corn subsidies that promote the welfare of only a select few factory farms. While America's public school system is in shambles and millions are without jobs, the government diverts tax dollars to this expenditure. The United States began subsidizing corn in the late 1920's in order to encourage corn production and feed the nation. However, eighty years later, this well-intentioned policy has been hijacked and corrupted by special interests and factory farm lobbyists. Each year, approximately eight billion taxpayer dollars are funneled from the treasury into the pockets of massive factory farms under the guise of aiding corn production. Corn subsidies contradict the constitutional principle of promoting the general welfare by benefiting the few and causing harm to the nation as a whole.

During the years leading up to the Great Depression, Congress enacted the US farm bills (Poole). These bills were meant to help everyday American farmers out of debt and keep their farms churning out produce to feed the nation. When the Great Depression began, over 25% of Americans owned small family farms. With the crash of the United States economy in August of 1929, six million family farms found themselves in desperate need of aid (Spartz 8). In a effort to save these farms, Congress then passed the 1922 Grain Futures Act and the 1929 Agricultural Act, as well as the 1933 Agricultural Adjustments Act (Spartz 8). These acts were intended to relieve some of the economic pressure placed on the farms and kick-start the economy. Sixty years later, less than 2% of the American population was working on farms. However, the Depression-era bills remained in effect (Learn 66). Despite the drastic change in the economic climate, the government has continued to keep the budget for agricultural subsidies extremely high. By 2000, American taxpayers were shelling out over eight billion dollars each year to subsidize the production of corn alone (Saitone 177).

Kayleigh wrote this portfolio in the class of Professor Jennifer Tynes.

The government began to overlook the general welfare of the people when it started doling out corn subsidies in direct payment, unrelated to needs of those receiving them. The issue began as large factory farms came to dominate the agriculture industry, leaving the small family farms unable to compete. The legislation has failed to adapt to the structure of the modern farming industry (Bittman). This change has taken place quietly, and what many fail to realize is that America is no longer fed by quaint family farms, but rather massive factories with thousands of employees and enormous pocketbooks. The Environmental Working Group stated in the 2008 US Farm Subsidy Database “direct payment subsidies are provided without regard to the economic need of the recipients or the financial condition of the farm economy” (Vandiver). The government now pays 75% of all corn subsidies to the wealthiest top 10% of farmers (“Largest Farm”). This means that large production farms with millions of dollars in profit every year are receiving the vast majority of government aid. In other words, our government is writing checks, not to the people, but to the giants of the agriculture industry. This is clear evidence of the government acting in a way that is not compatible with the principle of general welfare

In fact, some would argue that corn subsidizing serves to undermine the general welfare of the people. The demand for corn in today’s economy is not high enough to justify the amount of money that is used to fund corn subsidies. These subsidies have resulted in a surplus of corn grown in the United States, which, in turn, has driven the price of corn down significantly (Poole). The low cost of corn has served as an incentive for companies to use it in their products and was a major contributing factor to the development of high fructose corn syrup. Corn syrup is used as a low cost sweetener in many unhealthy and cheaply available foods (Spartz 8). With the government supporting corn, other products have a hard time competing with the artificially low prices of corn products. In order to stay competitive, many companies choose to use this unhealthy substance to lower their product’s cost (Hett 775). Therefore, food produced with corn syrup becomes cheaper and results in more people purchasing the produce. The heavy subsidization of corn provides a disincentive to grow other healthier products such as corn or apples (Bittman). With the prices of healthier substances skyrocketing, the subsidies continue to quietly undermine the general welfare of the people.

With the current media focus on the massive amounts of government spending, a few billion dollars spent on corn subsidies may seem like a drop in the bucket to many. However, those billions could be used to improve America's schools, repair the decaying roadways, and provide healthcare for those in need. Additionally, the money could be diverted to other things to promote the general welfare. For example, since the end of the recession, over 300,000 teaching jobs alone were cut from school systems, yet the funding of corn subsidies continues to stand strong (Spartz 8). Does our government value lining the pockets of already wealthy corn farmers over the education of our youth? Last year alone large corporate farmers received four billion dollars in corn subsidy payments before any crop insurance payments were made ("Largest Farm"). Without these disproportionate corn subsidies, there would be more funding for the creation of jobs, more success for greater numbers of people, and our country.

Many politicians agree with corn subsidizing, claiming that by supporting corn we are becoming environmentally friendly. "Ethanol and bio-diesel allow people to burn a cleaner form of energy," said Mark Kennedy, a politician from Minnesota (Saitone 170). Ethanol, a fuel source made from corn, is advertised to be more environmentally friendly than gasoline. However, what these politicians fail to inform their constituents of is that less than 10% of cars used in the United States are able to run on ethanol. In fact, it was determined that in order to create one gallon of ethanol, it takes one gallon of oil (Saitone 169). The environmental benefits of ethanol are weak at best, so why does the government continue to so heavily support it? If, as the constitution states, the government were to serve the general welfare of the people, the practice of subsidizing corn would only be continued if it served the greater good. However, by now, it is clear that it does not.

Seeing as the environmental benefits of ethanol are dubious at best, why do politicians continue to support its production? The answer is two-pronged. The first half of the explanation comes from the Iowa Caucus, the first in a series of state primary elections that ultimately decide each party's presidential nominee. In the beginning of the election process, candidates migrate to Iowa to start this cycle. (Korth 558). Iowa collects close to half of the government subsidies because of its fertile land and over 3.8 million acres of farm space ("Number of Farms"). For this reason, Iowans are

greatly in favor of the continuation of corn subsidies. Candidates in the Iowa Caucus tend to pander to the needs of the Iowans, as the outcome of the Caucus can make or break a Presidential campaign. Candidates are expected to keep the general welfare of the people in mind, yet as the Iowa Caucus demonstrates, that is not always the case.

The second half of the explanation regarding support of these subsidies comes directly from the wealthy recipients. Lobbyists, who travel to Washington and make connections that will persuade future candidates to support these subsidies, continue to be an extremely problematic factor in the system. Farmers endlessly spend on these lobbyists in order to secure their high corn subsidy payments in future years. Randy Russell, a factory farm lobbyist, stated that he could not remember a time when a farm bill had failed (Hagstrom). Those who can afford lobbyists will continue to receive the benefits that they want and become more powerful. This cycle perpetuates itself until the giants of the agriculture industry have enough power to dictate how much money they receive. With a politician's vote available because of a lobbyist's role, the politician is undermining the general welfare of the people and benefiting the few factory farms.

Telling people what they want to hear is the easiest thing to do. The members of the government and the delegates involved in promoting corn subsidies need to take the road less travelled and do what is best for our country as a whole. Americans elect these officials to help our country and they need to consider the true implications of corn subsidizing. Based on the unbelievable amount of taxpayer money going to a select few factory farms, it is clear that the government is not doing its part. In a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, it seems that the government has forgotten what it truly stands for. Corn subsidies are clearly breaking the laws formally embedded into our country through the constitution. Politicians need to go back to what our founding fathers originally intentioned for our country and do what is best for the general welfare of the people, not just a special interest group. Though it may not be the most popular stand with some, it will ultimately change the course of our country and promote the general welfare of the people.

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The Chains in the Education System

When every single one of us enters this world, we are given a gift. Some discover their calling at the age of five while others don't discover it until they are eighty eight. Either way, every one of us has a gift. *Freedom Writers*, a 2007 MTV drama, directly accuses the United States education system of suppressing the discoveries of these gifts in our youth. This film showcased the true story of a teacher who changed the lives of many students, but also highlighted the flaws of our education system.

Freedom Writers is a heart-wrenching drama that depicts the life of inner-city high school students. In the beginning of the film, groups of students are divided by hatred because of the color of their skin. Throughout the film, we watch in awe as one teacher, Mrs. Gruwell, strives to eliminate the hate between these teenagers and make the classroom a more accepting place. Whether fighting the wars outside of the school or fighting the challenges within it, many students in Mrs. Gruwell's class did not consider education to be a priority. These teenagers dealt with various struggles including homelessness and abuse. Over the course of the film, it becomes apparent that the flaws in the education system affect the students' chances for success. *Freedom Writers* shows that our schools do not adequately teach inner-city children the skills necessary to overcome these issues.

At the beginning of the movie, Mrs. Gruwell's enthusiasm about the upcoming school year gives us an optimistic feeling about her potential impact on these troubled teens. However, after Mrs. Gruwell introduces her proposed lesson plans for the school year to the department head, Mrs. Campbell, the optimism is quickly squashed. Mrs. Campbell explains that the children she will be teaching are incapable of learning normal coursework. Mrs. Campbell suggests that the children, who were brought into the school by an integration program that was introduced three years prior, will be too much for her to handle. The film gives us our first clear image of a problem with our American education system; some people who work with students allow stereotypes to affect their faith in the child's abilities. In a recent study, it was found that the success of an inner-city child in school is directly correlated with the amount of optimism that a teacher exhibits in the advancement of the child's academic standing (Hill 371). From the

beginning, *Freedom Writers* exhibits this persistent problem in the education system.

Shortly into the film, Mrs. Gruwell meets the other teachers who have been at the school for a long period of time. One faculty member suggests that if she puts a few years into teaching, things will get better because she will have more intelligent students to teach. In other words, students who work hard enough will move up to higher levels of learning while those who are not capable of completing the coursework for various reasons will eventually stop attending classes. This attitude is found throughout the education system, where students with different needs are not encouraged to succeed, but rather to assume a position of failure (Hill 373). Some teachers and faculty are more inclined to work with students who are more easily taught; less effort is invested into making the inner city student successful. The damage done by the low expectations of educators for inner-city students, particularly reflected in the higher dropout rate, is accurately portrayed in this film.

Another problem the film addresses is that these children have extreme challenges and yet the curriculum does not change. The curriculum should be flexible enough to change based on the needs of students growing up with the challenges of inner city poverty and lack of emphasis on education. Unlike someone who lives in a wealthy area with A-list schools whose focus is on education, the inner city students do not see the same relevance in learning. Rather, they are living and dealing with daily unforeseen challenges. We find in the movie one instance where Mrs. Gruwell is shocked to discover that the majority of her class was not planning to make it through the first two years of high school. Why do these kids assume that they are incapable of finishing their secondary education? A significant factor is a rigorous curriculum that is an illogically large amount of work for students who deal with battles outside of the classroom.

A scene that brings about a highly debated educational topic occurs once Mrs. Gruwell decides that she needs to engage these students through their own experiences. Taking a journey to the book room, where copies of books are released for the teenagers to read as part of curriculum based learning, Mrs. Gruwell finds a relevant and important novel- *Romeo and Juliet*. With the department head along side her, Mrs. Gruwell politely asks for these books to be released to her class for a lesson. In a rude tone, Mrs.

Campbell states that the books are not to be distributed to these children because they will destroy the property. This statement reveals, yet again, that the school does not feel it is worth investing in the education of these children. This raises the question: is it right that these children do not have access to resources that a public school provides to other students? What are the resources there for, if not to support all of the children? *Freedom Writers* brings about a highly important topic. Those who do not have higher test scores should not be punished with less resources. By refusing to provide the necessary resources to succeed, these schools create a viscous cycle.

Freedom Writers focuses throughout the film on the divisions and hate among students based on race. Are students the only ones who see race as a factor? Throughout the film, administrative staff and teachers state their opinions about the integration program brought to the school three years prior. Each and every time it is brought up, it is clear that Mrs. Gruwell's fellow colleagues feel that race plays a huge factor in education. At one point, Mrs. Campbell goes so far as to say that you just "can't teach 'them'" in reference to the new, diverse students brought in by the integration program. Mrs. Campbell clearly establishes a line between those of a different race and the rest of the school, implying that different races do not have the same capabilities as others. *Freedom Writers* continues to expose the negative side of the American education system based on this prejudice.

Much like the movie *The Blind Side*, *Freedom Writers* displays the problems of prejudice within the faculty throughout the school. Whether it is a superintendent or a secretary, the idea that some races will be more successful in the education system than others is well established in these films. In *The Blind Side*, we watch as the main character struggles in school because of the academic expectations placed upon him without regard to upbringing and challenges. In *Freedom Writers*, these same ideas come to play when we look at the teachers and administrators. At one critical point during the movie, Mrs. Campbell proclaims, "The best that you can do is try and teach them to obey". The problems of our education system continue when those in charge of the education system turn their backs on many who enter it.

Later on in the movie, we see Mrs. Gruwell meet resistance when trying to positively affect the lives of these inner-city kids. Throughout the course

of her time as a teacher, Mrs. Gruwell picks up two part time jobs in order to support the needs of her classroom children. Once she starts using her own money to pay for things such as field trips, Mrs. Gruwell finds that she still meets resistance from administrators. During this portion of the film, we are introduced to the idea that the teachers, who work directly with the children, do not have enough input in how the school can meet the children's needs. It is unfathomable how the power to change the system's flaws lies with the people who do not work directly with the students. Those who do not see the repercussions of strict actions against the students first hand will never understand the damage that they cause. If teachers had a say in what the students needed, then our education system would be better as a whole.

Finally, a highly debated topic throughout the course of the movie is understated yet prevalent. A simple idea, first suggested by Mrs. Gruwell's father over dinner, is that "sticking around" would provide what she needed to transfer to a different school within the district's system. During the film's presentation of this topic, we can start to make assumptions about the idea of tenure and its effect on students. What Mrs. Gruwell's father intended to say is that Mrs. Gruwell should do minimal work throughout the course of her time teaching at such a difficult, troubled school and follow the directives of the administration. When tenure is introduced, we start to see an extreme problem. Teachers strive to reach tenure in order to reach benefits and job security without a consideration of how well they are teaching (Ostro 4). With this in mind, we can assume that the goal of some teachers is only to achieve tenure, rather than teaching their students effectively. Once tenure is achieved, some teachers may no longer have a strong motive to work hard for their students.

"You can't make someone want to learn", Mrs. Campbell noted during her disapproving rant of Mrs. Gruwell's successful teaching. Though not the intention of the film, it showcases some problems in the education system. There is a lack of faith from educators, assumed automatic failure from teachers, and a prejudice based on past events. Irrelevant coursework and curriculum, school budgeting, and the negative side of tenure all contribute to the issues. These things drive the possibilities of our youth out the window. Those who have not yet discovered their gifts will remain suppressed within the system. *Freedom Writers* is not just a drama based on

a true story; it identifies the problems that the American education system deals with every day.

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Kayleigh Day

The Man with the Shiny Shoes

The sound of a wailing siren echoed as I cautiously opened my eyes. “You’re going to be fine,” exclaimed a strong man in a full uniform. “We’ll be at the hospital very soon.” I looked to my right to see my puffy-eyed mother grab my hand and force a grin. Confused, I lifted my fingers up onto my face to find a big plastic mask covering my nose and mouth. My mother immediately grabbed my hand and put it down by my side before I drifted back to sleep.

I woke up the next day to a room draped in white, glistening from floor to ceiling with cleanliness. “Happy sixth birthday, Kayleigh!” was written on a small whiteboard directly across from my bed. For just a moment, I became enthusiastic; I was still far too young to understand that this wasn’t the ideal birthday. I began to scope out the compact area and waited for someone familiar to emerge. Fear began to sweep over me and tears fell from my dull blue eyes. It wasn’t a new phenomenon for me; I’d arrived in this same room many times in my life. Yet somehow, every time I entered a hospital it seemed to be an unfamiliar experience.

A young nurse with long blonde hair and a beautiful smile entered the room. She stood beside me without saying a word, and suddenly pain shot through my chest. My shriek of horror resonated throughout the halls, causing a pack of unrecognizable adults to flood the room. There emerged my worst nightmare. Through the flurry of people I spotted the one thing that I feared more than spiders or the boogiemán. There stood the white coat. There stood a doctor.

At six years old, I was a strong believer in many myths. Santa Claus watched me all year long, microwaves turned brain cells into popcorn, and stepping on a crack in the sidewalk would break my mother’s back. I believed that monsters hid in my closet at night and mermaids flew through the sea. But I never believed anything more than that a doctor was a cruel, evil person. For as long as I could recall, I’d been going to the doctor whenever I felt sick. He was the one who poked and prodded at me, and that made me feel horrific pain. When I went to the doctor, he shined lights brighter than the sun in my eyes and beeped little machines in my ears. He

critiqued my milk intake and compared me to other kids. Doctors were the meanest of mean. With yet another doctor in my presence, I was terrified.

The doctor walked towards me before I could take cover. He seemed to be as tall as the Eiffel Tower, and as he looked down at me I fearfully tucked my chin into my legs and rocked myself. No matter how many times he told me “it will be okay” I refused to release myself from that tight ball. Pains shot up my sides and into my throat but I clenched my fists to hold it in. Suddenly I noticed the faint click of high heels walking down the hall, clunking louder and louder as the woman came closer and closer. Eventually I pulled my head up from my legs to peek out, and there stood my mother. I climbed up on the small bed and began to cry as she handed me a purple Popsicle and held me closer than she ever had. She lifted me up off the bed and into her arms, and carefully began to unravel the wires that had become tangled into knots around my trembling legs.

“We just can’t figure this one out,” the doctor somberly explained. I continued to suck on my cold Popsicle and crawl as far behind my mother’s chair as possible. They continued to chat as I carefully studied the doctor’s black shiny shoes pacing around the room. It seemed like he had marked every single square of the laminate flooring with the soles of his shoes before I finally watched them travel on out of the glistening room. I climbed out from behind my mother and she held me close. “We’re going to head for home sweetheart,” she whispered in my ear.

After a few hours of watching my mother fill out what seemed like every colored paper in existence, we walked hand in hand out of the hospital. The pain subsided and I was confident that it was the doctor had caused my discomfort. “Why are doctors so mean?” I asked as we drove away. I sat in silence for a moment while my mother fidgeted. Eventually, she cleared her shaking voice and simply stated “he’s going to try and make you feel better, not worse Kayleigh.” My mind couldn’t fathom why she didn’t see what this man was doing to me.

Three days went by and I knew I was feeling better than I ever had. “See mom, I told you it was that mean doctor!” I shouted as I jumped into the freshly fallen autumn leaves. With tears developing in her eyes, she stood up from her lawn chair and made her way to the large burgundy garage door. Just as she stepped inside the house I immediately felt a sharp pain that compelled me to scream and gasp for air. The scattered leaves cush-

ioned my fall as I soon found myself staring at the enormous clouds and lifting my hands to find the air that my lungs suddenly could not.

The white coat must be near, I thought to myself as I waited for assistance. That man must've done something to me. He must've made this happen. More importantly, I questioned why he did it to me. None of my friends had these pains. My brother never lost his breath. Why did the doctor decide to exert such incredible pain on one person and not another? I could've asked a million questions about it, but I soon lost my vision and my mind became a blank slate.

Later that afternoon I woke up from yet another unexpected snooze on my living room's floral couch. This time was a bit different, as my father had come home early from work and my brother was quietly gazing at me. The house was consumed with the smell of fresh peanut butter cookies and apple cider. Grabbing onto the side of the couch, I used all of my strength to pull myself upward.

My mother told me that we needed to talk, and my father sat back ready to listen. You see, not everything that the doctor told my mother in that hospital room could be explained to a six year old. My parents were fully aware of the severity and pain that the future had in store for me, but no amount of explaining would help me understand. It wasn't important for me to understand, either. So they began to speak in the simplest terms that they could muster out of themselves. "Some people are born with illnesses that even the most intelligent researchers have trouble finding the answers to, and those that you meet aren't trying to hurt you". At first, this was confusing to me. All that I'd ever known was that the doctors tended to do things that would repeatedly cause me pain.

The rest of the conversation is a bit of a blur, but I remember seeing my mother wipe tears from her face every now and then. I'd never seen my mother cry before. Somehow, that image of her made my mind grow stronger and I knew I had to do something to make her feel okay again. So I repeated the words that she had been reciting to me and embedded them into my brain. I stood up with much confidence in my step and exclaimed "mom, that man with the shiny shoes is going to make me better".

In that moment, the creature that once was the cruelest thing to roam the planet turned into a hero, a true inspiration. My little mind clothed itself in hope that the doctors would make it possible to play in the autumn

leaves again. Who was once believed to be pain inflicting suddenly became pain eliminating. All fear that was once cemented into even the tiniest creases of my brain grew into the understanding of a lifetime. It would create the biggest basis of trust that I would ever need to have. It would create the most belief that anyone would ever need. It created an optimistic outlook within me, even if all those around me created their own world of realistic expectations.

That day, I chose to believe in the man with the shiny black shoes. Through the next eleven years of my life, I spent every moment I possibly could believing in that same doctor that I was so fearful of just days before the revelation. When experimental drugs didn't work and surgeries went awry, I kept my belief in this man. When I would become discouraged he would assure me that it's always darkest before the dawn, no matter how hopeless it seemed.

The distinct nature of humans is to reevaluate our beliefs as we grow and learn. Throughout the years of fighting for a cure, doubts reemerged in my mind. At eight years old a pulmonologist told me that I could no longer play on the playground during recess, and my trust temporarily collapsed. At eleven I underwent my first experimental surgery and I woke up with less oxygen and more pain. Once again, I lost hope in the doctors. At fourteen a doctor increased a drug that in return overdosed me and kept me in the hospital for weeks. My faith in these men and women diminished. At sixteen, a group of intelligent doctors formed a new drug regimen for me to experiment with, which made my scale rise by over eighty pounds in a matter of ten months. I certainly refused to believe that they were helping during that stretch of my life. At seventeen I was flown across the country in a last ditch effort to save my own life, and listened to the most highly regarded lung doctor in the world tell me to start being a little more realistic and give up. As a result, I gave up on them.

Doubts and reevaluations of beliefs come daily in all of our lives. We find that sometimes we need to take a different approach to our views. I've found myself reconstructing my own ideas about doctors, but in the end I always deviate back to the discovery I made at age six. Even if this trial continues and I don't find an answer as to where I'm going next, I will continue to fight. Those who don't believe in the power of their own optimism will never see an end result, and I refuse to be conquered by my own mind.

Maybe that's what the doctors are here to teach me, that some days will be better than others and that my optimism will always give me a better outcome than the realism many expect. Maybe I won't continue to feel trust in the man with the shiny shoes forever, but I know that as long as I believe that an answer is out there, I will be a happier person. We don't always know what is next in our lives, but if we charge forward with hope, we will always have a chance at finding our way.

Kelsi Malcolm

Even the Strongest Fall

When I was in the fourth grade, I learned that my parents' marriage was failing and they were going to separate. I vividly remember my mother talking on the phone with my father, watching with tears rolling down my face. I was screaming in the phone at my father, "Why are you doing this? We're a happy family!" I sat on the stairs crying for hours. After what felt like years, in which my life was completely flipped upside down, I felt warmth enfold my stiff, young body. My grandmother was wrapping her arms around me while I sat in her embrace for hours. She stroked my hair and whispered in my ear, "I love you. I will always love you. You know that." She reminded me that even though my father would be leaving us, I would have the love and support from my sister, my mother, and, most importantly, her: my best friend. There may be an empty hole in my heart, but she would do the best she could to fill that hole; I was not by myself. I know now that she is a woman of her word.

"Just because you are alone, does not mean you are lonely." These words were the sole reason I got through many hard experiences in my lifetime and would ultimately be the best piece of advice she passed along to me. Whether it was a breakup with a boyfriend of two weeks, or the loss of a beloved pet, I always remember being able to run to my grandma's arms with many tears shed as she did the best to comfort my young distraught self. In the case of my parents' divorce, this idea was the reason I was able to be so strong while going through the situation. Although I felt abandoned by my father, I knew that I had and always would have a world of support behind me. It would have been much harder without my grandma there reminding me of all of the people I had to turn to, especially her.

After my parents' divorce, my mother, my sister, and I moved in with her. "The Ladies Lair," we all called it. We grew up with her; she was practically a parent to my sister and me. It was she who I turned to for guidance in this time of need. Because my mother had become a single parent trying to raise two young children without the help of a spouse, my grandma filled the role as a second parent. Because my mom was so busy, I turned to my grandmother. When I would lay awake at night with my mind racing, I would sneak up the stairs and crawl into bed with her. She would lift my

Kelsi wrote this portfolio in the class of Professor Rick Iadonisi.

shirt off my back and scratch my skin with her long, carefully manicured nails. I would not even last five minutes. The next morning I would wake up in my own bed with a letter on my pillow: “Love you forever, Grandma V.”

Despite the age difference, we could see eye-to-eye. Yes, I was close to her because we moved in with her after my parents’ divorce, but it also had to do with her personality. In the eyes of my ten-year-old self, she was the coolest grandma I knew. We would blast the newest, hip music that had just come out, and dance around the living room for hours, afterwards falling onto the couch laughing and panting from exhaustion.

In the early years of my schooling, my grandma really helped to get me through the place that eats many children alive. Because of the divorce, I was a shy, quiet girl with a thick, hard shell surrounding me, so I did not make many friends. I would attend this 7-hour day, watching other girls hold hands and skip down the hallway, while I sat alone at my lunch table. The days seemed to drag on. Many times I would come home and fall into my grandma’s arms. She was the only friend I needed.

Elementary school came and went, all with her by my side. Middle school was next. Fifth grade was an adjustment; I was growing up. By sixth grade, change was occurring; I could feel myself beginning to grow out of my shell. I began communicating with others my age; it was not as scary as I thought it would be. I could feel myself becoming my own person, gaining my own independence. As I started to change, I began to cut the strings from the connection between my grandma and me.

When I was in seventh grade I found my best friend, Rachel, whom I knew would be my companion forever. She was like my long-lost twin; we shared everything. My grandma started to fade to the background. I was gone from home more and more, staying at my BFF’s house. I no longer ran to my grandma when I had problems; I confided in Rachel. This did not scare me, like I thought it would when I was younger. I never thought I would be able to talk to other people the way I could talk to her. I never could have imagined that I would grow apart from the person I was closest to throughout my childhood, but I was doing just that. I had friends now; I did not need my grandma to be my friend. I finally had other friends; she was kind of just there.

Then one day I felt as I had fully transitioned from the role of my grandma's best friend to almost that of strictly a grandchild. I had just gotten home from being over at my best friend's house for two full days. I was exhausted; obviously I had not gotten much sleep because there were much more important things to do, such as talking about how Bobby had gotten so much cuter since elementary school and teaching each other how to French braid, the newest trend in hair-dos. When I walked into my house my grandma was sitting at the kitchen table.

"Hi, honey. Can we talk?"

"Hi."

"How was Rachel's?"

"Fine."

"Do you want to tell me more? How have you been? How is school?"

"NO! I don't need you anymore; I have my best friend!" I screamed in response.

The last string had been snapped. After that point my grandma and I barely spoke. She was hurt; I was an annoyed, indestructible teenager. We had lost that strong bond that had seemed almost invincible.

As I grew older and older, we not only continued to grow distant from each other, but we began to fight constantly. We were both similar in the fact that we happened to be hardheaded by nature, which did lead to many issues, although it was not the only problem. As I began to mature, a seed of an idea had started to implant itself inside my ever-working brain. I was growing my own idea of what I thought to be independence and started to realize that I was able to fend for myself. This meant I did not need as much from her as I once had. I was making this transition, but in the process she was getting hurt. She had not changed. So when I started cutting her off, even though it was unconscious, I did not even realize that I was hurting her. I was being a typical, selfish teenager.

Day in and day out I would become more and more irritated. I would think: "Where did the cool lady I grew up knowing go?" All that remained was a nagging old bag. Of course, being a hormonal teenager did not help with the attitude I had toward everyone, including my grandma. I just remember everyday thinking how I wish the three of us did not live with her anymore. I was sick of being known as the girl who lives with her grandma. I clearly remember thinking of the lessons she had taught me growing

up, and purposefully started going against them. If I was not constantly with someone, I felt lonely. I no longer needed anyone's help; I was figuring everything out pretty well for myself. I began growing my own idea of what independence meant. I no longer needed those who I needed before, including the woman who was my best friend. I could do it all myself.

While this independence idea continued to develop, the years came and went. At this point I was hardly a part of her life anymore. I spoke to her as little as I possibly could; avoiding contact as often as possible. Because we lived with her, she made the rules; it was her house that the three of us lived in. When I was younger, I followed those rules down to the very letter. But as I began to grow older, I started to become more rebellious. I was so annoyed with my grandma trying to be my second mother that I said things like, "You can't control me; you are not my mom." But she had taken that role of a parent. Yes, of course I loved that woman, but why did she think she could be my mother? Her daughter was doing a pretty good job of that, if I did say so myself. I never went to her for advice; I did not listen to a word she said anymore. I began taking my grandma for granted. I just assumed she would always be there and later on maybe we would become best friends once again, but not right now. Maybe when we both are a little older and a little wiser we will connect again. She will always be here, always.

You know what the problem with assuming is? Things change. On a cold February morning, I was doing a lab in Mr. Ferwerda's 10th grade chemistry class. The classroom phone rang, just like any other day. The difference today? It was for me. I was told to collect my belongings and go to the office; I would be going home. Confused. I walked into the office and my grandfather appeared. He took my hand. "Your grandmother has been in a car accident and has been killed." I stood, frozen stiff. Then the sweet, salty sorrow began rolling from my eyes down my flushed face. That picture still burns a hole in my memory to this day.

The death of a loved one has the scary effect of opening your eyes to things you never realized before. If you have never experienced this, you will. This is what I was going through.

You want to know why I struggled so hard with my grandma's death? Yes, I had lost my grandma, but guilt is still sitting heavily on my shoulders to this very day. Every morning before I would leave for school, my

grandma would walk out the door for work. "I love you, Kelsi," she would say to me as she walked by. I returned a very mumbled, barely audible version of "love you." On the day she died, we did the same routine in the morning, but as she walked by and told me she loved me, I was silent. I had decided because I had grown up and could do what I want, I did not need to say anything if I did not want to. That was the last time I ever saw my grandma.

My grandma's death helped me understand what growing up truly meant. Because I had been forming my own idea of what being independent symbolized, my grandmother being gone made me truly understand the meaning. As a young girl struggling to find myself, I thought I did not need the help of others. I had planted this idea inside of my adolescent brain that talking to people and seeking help was for the weak; and weak was not what I considered myself. I now realize the strongest people are those who know when to ask for help. Just because you are alone in the world, does not mean you have to be lonely. There is a world full of support behind you, it just may take a lot for you to realize. It took the death of my best friend for me to realize I am a strong person and sometimes the strongest people fall the hardest. The strength comes in the ability to pick themselves up one more time.

Kelsi Malcolm

Setting the Foundation

As I was growing up, I remember little to no physical activity during the school day. In elementary school we had recess once a day and a physical education class once a week. Recess was only about twenty minutes, and if our lunch table was not considered clean enough after filling our pre-pubescent faces, we were not even allowed to go outside. Our “physical education” classes consisted of playing games every day; there was no organized rigorous exercise required. I can perhaps remember once when I actually broke a sweat.

During middle school, it was the same. Although we did have PE classes, these classes were not even close to rigorous; I considered them a waste of time because instead of recharging me and giving me more energy, which exercise has the tendency to do, I ended up more tired from acting like I was joining in the games, when I was trying to avoid being involved all together. I felt as if I was getting no benefit from these physical education classes. I signed up for them in order to get a good work out and release some energy by being active, but instead the classes were mostly filled with game time in which we stood around half the time waiting for the ball to come our way. In high school I was able to take an aerobics class my freshman year, which met three times a week. This was the most influential physical education component I had in school. I was able to get in shape and lose some weight; I loved it. The class had a strict, rigorous syllabus, consisting of running, swimming, aerobic dance classes, cardio training, weight lifting, and other activities.

After freshman year, I was not able to take another physical education class. Being a student who was strongly concerned with her future and getting accepted into a prestigious college, I was more focused on academics in school than physical activity, a choice that many other students are facing nowadays. This disregard had to do with stricter requirements to graduate and a greater concern for schoolwork. Having gone through this personally, I realize today that it would have been more beneficial to have that strong foundation of activity on a daily basis. I am now beginning to question why so many schools are completely cutting physical education from their curriculum.

After President George W. Bush put into place “No Child Left Behind,” physical education in schools started to make its plunging descent, often being eliminated in most school districts. This act gives money to local school districts, while the districts have to administer standardized testing scores and maintain an acceptable level of literacy, even in minorities (Lemann). The school districts in many states, including Michigan, have enforced stricter requirements for academic-based classes in public schools in order to meet the criteria to gain funding, neglecting physical education. Many schools have completely cut physical education altogether, but the programs that do still exist are nowhere near the level that they need to be. Physical activity is vital for children at a young age and, especially in the increasingly obese society we live in, schools need to maintain physical educational programs within their districts and ensure they are at a rigorous level of activity in order to set a foundation and increase healthy lifestyles.

The need for stricter physical education requirements can be seen in the state of Michigan. The state has once again reevaluated its school curriculum and made adjustments in order to make sure their graduating students are prepared for the competition they will face as they make their way college and the workplace. As seen in Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) High School Graduation Requirements, for the graduating class of 2016 requirements have been raised to eighteen mandatory credits from the mandatory sixteen credits required for the previously graduating classes. Four credits need to be in mathematics and English language classes. Three credits are required for science and social studies classes. In addition, we see the change in credits needed in language classes other than English. Two credits are now required here, rather than one for the students previously. All students must also participate in an online course, or learning experience. The problems occur within the visual, performing, and applied arts category as well as the physical education category. For both of these only one credit is required for graduation compared to the multiple credits required for the core subjects (“Michigan”). This is where change needs to occur. Building a healthy lifestyle foundation is just as important as building an academic foundation. But why is there such an imbalance? There is one simple answer: money.

In order to receive federal aid from the government, school districts have raised the academic requirements in order to meet the level of test scoring

that is necessary. In Michigan with the raised the graduation requirements, we also see an increase in test scores. These raised requirements are allowing students to score over the average score needed to gain funding (“Michigan”). That means that because of the raised requirements in schoolwork, students are scoring better in standardized testing, allowing Michigan to receive funding. With all of the changes that the government is making toward requirements for academic classes students need to receive their diploma, they do not have time in their schedule to take classes for enjoyment, such as physical education (Hohentanner and Napiewock). As the director of instruction for the Brighton Area Schools district, Baiba Jensen, said; “I think the biggest challenge we’re going to have is continuing to give kids lots of opportunities for electives, because the minute you add the two more years of math requirements and two years of foreign language requirements, it starts limiting your options” (qtd. in Bergsieker). The stricter requirements result in many schools not requiring participation in physical education on a daily basis which results in trends of fewer students participating as they progress throughout grades.

These trends are strongly connected to whether or not the district requires participation, which many are starting to decline. In the first five levels of grade school, only 50% of schools require daily practice, in the eighth grade it’s 25%, and in 12th grade it is a mere 5%. As we can see with these statistics, more students participate during middle school and freshman year of high school than the number of students who participate at the senior level of high school (Coe et al., “Effect”). As a student progresses through school there is more of an emphasis on education than there is on exercise, so this is the reason for these trends. Even if physical education is required during the earlier years of school and a healthy foundation is set in many of these children, as they progress and the academic requirements become stricter, they will begin to lose that foundation. This foundation instills the value of exercise, and promotes the idea of healthy living, which can bring about long-term health benefits and allow these students to lead healthier lifestyles. With this loss, young adults’ quality of life will suffer. Physical education on a daily basis will allow children to meet the projections for society specified in Healthy People 2020, which strives to create nationwide health improvements and a healthy nation (Coe et al., “Effect”). This is vital in the world we are growing up in. Because more and

more children are becoming obese, they will have health issues and live shorter lives. If we instill these values in them at a young age, we can avoid some of those health issues and allow these children to thrive throughout their lives.

Although physical education classes are being replaced with academic classes, there is no evidence to support that cutting physical education classes and allowing more time for education will improve the academic level of students (Coe et al. "Effect"). In contrast, however, many studies show a positive affect that being physically active has on academic achievements. Two studies done recently, which were presented at the American College of Sports Medicine's most recent meeting in Baltimore, show that the positive effect that physical activity has on academic achievement. One of the studies specifically looked at 338 sixth-grade students in an urban school district in Illinois. It was found that students did better on standardized testing when they were more physically active. Students who met specific physical requirements, such as cardiovascular standards, were six times more likely to meet reading standards and two and a half times more likely to meet mathematical standards.

The second study revealed students who participated in twenty minutes of rigorous physical activity tended to have higher grade point averages. The difference was about 0.4 in GPAs between the active and non-active. Other outside factors, such as race and gender were isolated during this study, and the positive correlation between being active and academic achievement was still shown ("Physical"). The results of these studies may be because physical activity has been found to reduce stress and improve mood. It has the ability to increase the attention span in many children by allowing them to release energy throughout the day, giving a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. This atmosphere allows kids to be able to concentrate for longer periods of time, and allows them to learn more (Coe et al., "Effects"). The results may support the idea that physical activity can help students to better their ability in academic based curriculum.

Another study done at Michigan state University was aimed at determining if health-related fitness (HRF) had any impact on academic achievement in middle school students. Three hundred and twelve middle school students were assessed. Students were first tested for their abilities in fitness tests and then four core classes were assessed given a grade (A-F). It

was found that grades and test scores for standardized testing were higher for students who scored higher in the fitness tests (Coe et al. "Health-related"). These results show how fitness is related to success inside the classroom, supporting the idea that physical education in schools would improve student's performance in academic achievement.

Despite these trends, there are many opposing views on why physical activity is no longer being included in public schools. Schools are beginning to cut recess and/or physical educational classes allowing more time for students to improve in academic achievement. Because the government has implemented new restrictions on standardized testing scores and academic based achievement needed for funding, it is nearly impossible to receive support for more physical education in schools; their focus is on scholastics. Budget cuts, especially in low-income school districts, cause physical education to be removed first, before academic classes. For example, the school board in Jackson Park Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri has recently made budget cuts, voting "to lay off four physical education teachers because of a tight budget. The action saved the district about \$125,000" (Bower). This shows how electives such as PE are being removed first to avoid money issues, rather than affecting educational courses. Although the issues of academics and money are of very high importance, there are ways of getting around that and still including physical activity in the school setting. Summer programs and including activity in academic classes are possibilities of getting physical education back into schools.

One would agree that academics are of high importance, but rigorous activity on a daily basis is nearly as important in allowing kids to be successful. Schools could look into other options for implementing physical education back into the school's curriculum. Instead of taking time out of the school day for physical activity, schools could implement after school activities that are mandatory for students to participate in. These activities could be held local gyms or college programs with trained professionals who could supervise. Physical activity could be included within the academic syllabus created by teachers. Summer programs could be another option to get these students involved on a daily basis outside of the school year. Any of these options, plus many others, could be the programs of physical activity needed in schools, allowing time for academics and the importance of physical activity. Setting that basic physical, healthy, foun-

ation, while helping to improve the academic achievement of students, allows for both sides of the argument to benefit.

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Kelsi Malcolm

26 New Angels

A small hometown community, which none of us could have placed on a map, is where twenty-six innocent people were ripped from the grasp of life. Newtown, a community in Connecticut, has been shoved to the forefront of newscasts by the act of a single, psychologically unstable, twenty year-old. This young adult, Adam Lanza, ruined the lives of families in this quaint town. After forcing his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School, he fatally shot and killed twenty elementary aged students and six adults on December 14, 2012, sending a paralyzing shock throughout the country. President Obama was called to action to address those fears and sorrows during his speech at Prayer Vigil. Obama's message pierced the hearts of many, comforting the victims and bringing together the nation as a whole, and in doing so, may be the best speech presented during his presidency.

President Obama gathered the nation to preserve the memory of these individuals who lost their lives. Obama offers his love and prayers from his perspective as a father and emphasizes how these families are not alone in their grieving; that all across the nation we have been pulled together by the loss of these children. He outlines the stories of strength and courage, including how "the school's staff did not flinch for a second in the sign of fear, teachers barricaded themselves into classrooms, and the schoolchildren held each other while dutifully following directions." Using these examples, he shows how Newtown has inspired us and will never be forgotten. Then taking the role of a president, he identifies how our nation is now left with some hard questions as he begins to subtly hint how certain laws in this country need reevaluation in order to ensure the safety of our children. It is made clear that he will use his power to stop this from happening; the fourth time that we have come together in this sort of situation while he has been in office. President Obama then blesses the community and our country as he asks God to watch over the United States of America.

Our president draws the audience's attention when he opens by saying, "Do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly, we are being renewed day by day." In his closing he also states, "'Let the little children come to me,' Jesus said, 'and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'" The president uses these scriptures to give

a sense of comfort to those who are grieving. These religious statements are used to ensure the survivors are aware that each of those twenty children and six adults are new angels in heaven; the fact that they are in a better place. However, a problem starts to occur here. President Obama clearly expresses his beliefs, but this religious role taken by the president may not have been the best one as he was addressing the nation. A bold move like this can be very welcoming and comforting to those who share these same opinions, but the same words can shut many people off if they do not share the same views. It is obvious that he is trying to relate to this small community through the use of his religious references, but it may not have been the best position to take in order to relate across the country. Because of the overwhelming amount of beliefs nationwide, the many religious entities dominant, these references could have posed an issue coming from a leader who should seem neutral in his beliefs.

Along with the issue of religion expressed here, another concern is carefully laid as groundwork underneath the words that our president is speaking. It comes on the underside of the main point that our president is emphasizing. The message of the speech is that, as a country, we are not doing enough to provide our children with a chance to live the lives that they should be allowed. In Mr. Obama's opinion, we must change as a nation. More specifically, this is where he is carefully hinting for change needed to the policies and laws concerning gun control within our country. He implies that the government will handle these problems, that he himself will make changes to these policies in order to keep these crimes from happening, but in the meantime America needs to focus on what will make the country safer for the generations that come after. This may cause one to stop and wonder, was this the best time to introduce such a controversial topic?

According to the Second Amendment, the right of an individual to own and carry weapons and firearms for self-defense within the home is protected ("Second"). Many people do not agree with this. They believe that issues, such as the Newtown shooting, occur because there are not enough laws preventing individuals from owning weapons. President Obama makes it clear that change dealing with these issues needs to happen in our country when he says, "No single law, no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society, but that can't

be an excuse for inaction.” President Obama states that he understands that the causes of these acts are very complex and cannot be pinpointed to a single action or reason, such as the private owning of guns. He realizes that evil will find a way in this world no matter the restrictions placed in society, but this does not mean that we cannot take action to save one child, one adult, or one town from the grief experienced here. President Obama shows that because he believes that more can be done, that is exactly what he will be doing. He comforts the nation by saying through all the power that he has in his office, through the people of our country like the law enforcement and parents, he will do what he can to prevent tragedies like this from happening again to our children. It is reassuring to hear that these changes are in order to greater ensure safety in this country, but the freshness and newness of this heartache are of much higher importance to these individuals. It may have been of greater benefit to address this issue completely separate and on its own terms.

Although there may be issues underlying his message, the words spoken by the President are incredibly effective at bringing together the nation and relating this situation that happened to one community to the rest of the country. Obama provides an important link through family. Every parent across the nation knows the love that they feel for their children. Parents want to be able to protect their children every step that they take throughout their entire lifetimes. They know that they are not capable of doing this and at some point they have to take a step back and watch their children grow. This is the time when we take responsibility for the growth of our children. Most parents take the full responsibility of giving their children the best lives that they deserve, but it is our nation’s responsibility as well. President Obama’s words put this feeling into reality when he says the following:

With their very first cry, this most precious, vital part of ourselves, our child, is suddenly exposed to the world, to possible mishap or malice, and every parent knows there’s nothing we will not do to shield our children from harm.... And in that way we come to realize that we bear responsibility for every child, because we’re counting on everybody else to help look after ours, that we’re all parents, that they are all our children.

These words are a call to come together to protect them and passing gun laws will afford this protection. As a community and as a nation there is a

feeling of failure to these innocents. Burdening the hearts of each family across the nation, there is disappointment in the bitter fact that we have failed to allow our children to thrive. Every parent and family takes responsibility for letting the community of Newtown down. Unified by this responsibility, the nation understands this idea that ensuring the lives of our children to be the best that they can be, is a top priority. The true reality of the situation is brought to the concern of every American.

This coming together of our nation and of this society that Obama addresses is shown after the Friday morning shootings. The community and those communities surrounding Newtown came together, while respects were paid and flowers placed on the memorials of those twenty-six lost lives. Positive messages filled the town on that Saturday: "God Bless the Families." The churches in town were packed shoulder to shoulder with those turning to the guidance of a greater power to lead them through a hard time. In the hall of St. John Episcopal Church, one could hear the pastor speaking of the evils in this world: "Evil is a choice," and "Victory over evil is accomplished only by struggles" (Swift). Strangers became a shoulder to lean on, brought together by the struggles brought on in a time of evil. This evil brought the reality that this world has to offer.

This reality is the most effective part of Obama's address and comes early on in his words. Mr. Obama says: "We gather here in memory of 20 beautiful children and six remarkable adults. They have lost their lives in a school that could have been any school in a quiet town full of good and decent people in one town in America." With these words, comes crashing down the reality of the event. It opens the eyes of each person and makes them realize that nothing is forever and nothing should be taken for granted. An event like this could happen anywhere and anyone could be affected. So many people live their lives as if events like the Newtown shooting could never happen to them, almost as if they are invincible. Events such as this put life into perspective. When President Obama spoke those words, that perspective was thrown in our faces. Nothing is forever. Everything happens for a reason, but in situations like this one has to wonder what the reason is.

Among these words of reality, this message crafted by our president stands out among the many speeches he has given. Although no words can be crafted to make up for what was lost, the president uses words, all that

we truly have, to do the best that he can to explain the tragedy we have witnessed. Rather than telling of all the broken promises and the ways that we failed, Obama states that we are all in this together and it is our own responsibility to maintain the safety of our loved ones. Instead of only addressing the families affected on a surface level, paying homage and respect where it is due, the president dives into a deeper level by personally naming each of the twenty-six individuals who were killed on this day. He is able to connect stronger with the victims of this crime because he makes that personal association with each of them, speaking the names of the loved ones. This not only connects with the families, but it gives more respect to those children and adults, which is the main difference of this message. These words mark the start of a new beginning.

As Jamie Steihm, writer for the U.S. News & World Report, points out, David Maraniss, the distinguished biographer of Obama and winner of a Pulitzer Prize, relates this speech to the famous speech given by the beloved late President Lincoln. During Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, "bloody bodies" that "stained the farm soil" were given respect through the words crafted by this president to try and heal the wounds that could not be healed by words alone. This short message gave "a new birth of freedom" and shed new light as to why those loved ones were there on that horrible day. It was the start of a new beginning. As Steihm writes, Maraniss believes that "the Newtown address might be Obama's Gettysburg." Although "there are no words when you are swimming in salt tears over the loss of a child," President Obama's words may be that fresh start that each of the families and the nation affected needs to be able to cope with the loss and be able to begin again (Steihm). This address will be remembered, just as we remember the Gettysburg Address, many years from now. Although it was brought about because of a terrible incident, the words that our President has spoken will leave an everlasting impact on those affected and those in the country who can relate to such a realistic event.

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PORTFOLIO FOUR

Clare Riley

Birds of a Feather Flock Together

Edward and Vivian in *Pretty Woman*: A mature, wealthy businessman and a spunky, young prostitute. Troy and Gabriella in *High School Musical*: a popular jock and a studious introvert. Maria and Captain Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*: a free spirit with a kind heart and a strict, serious Navy Captain. These popular movie couples all have something in common: the characters are polar opposites. Immense differences in personalities, lifestyles, values, goals, and communication styles all result in more opposite individuals. We frequently see two very opposite people that appear to be perfect for each other. As a result of pop culture, we are led to believe that opposites attract. Is this really true? Scientific evidence, real life examples, and psychological theories tell us otherwise.

It would only make sense that a shy introvert would love to be balanced out by the personality of an outgoing extrovert. Their opposite traits would teach the other to be more open-minded and well-rounded. This seems to be common sense, right? Depending on personal preference, certain opposite attributes can actually make people more compatible. In a study conducted by the University of Iowa, it was found that 85.7 percent of participants claimed that they want a partner with opposite traits. They may think they need an opposite to have a happy and balanced relationship, but the study's lead researcher, Pieter Dijkstra, believes this to be false: "Although many individuals occasionally feel attracted to opposites, attractions between opposites often do not develop into serious intimate relationships and, when they do, these relationships often end prematurely" (qtd. in Law). In terms of opposites, people don't know how to see traits of others and think about how they will come into play in the future (Lawrence). That is why "opposites attract" can be found to be true in short-term relationships. In other rare cases do opposite personalities attract and result in successful relationships, a specific example being couples with personality disorders.

Someone who is anal-retentive with obsessive-compulsive disorder needs the balance of a disorganized histrionic (Murray). Psychologist Florence

Clare wrote this portfolio in the class of Professor Michele Lussky.

Kaslow, PhD, explains this concept: “They seem to have a fatal attraction for each other in that their personality patterns are complementary and reciprocal.” She studied attractions between those diagnosed with Cluster B (antisocial, borderline, histrionic and narcissistic) and Cluster C (avoidant, dependent and obsessive-compulsive) personality disorders. She explains the attraction between Clusters B and C: “Someone in Cluster B or C will more likely seek a polar opposite they see as exhibiting qualities they lack and assume this will make them feel more complete or whole . . . so they’re essentially attracted to the thing they’ve rejected or have a negative attitude toward” (qtd. in Murray). Those with personality disorders have more extreme emotions and needs than average people. This helps to prove how only in extreme cases, do opposites fully attract.

So why don’t opposites result in a strong, long-term relationship? The first reason is a lack of compatibility. You would never respond to someone on Match.com who wasn’t compatible with you, so why would you do it in person? (Bizzoco). In order for a successful relationship to result, a couple needs to be compatible and able to tolerate each other. Secondly, differences cause problems (Bizzoco). If a couple has completely different views on huge topics such as religion or morals, this will result in struggle and disagreement in every aspect of life. Also, values will be compromised (Bizzoco). The only way to stay happy with someone unlike you is to make constant compromises. If you always attempt to please your partner, you will lose parts of yourself. Relationship coach Melanie Matcek explains why this is important: “Chemistry may have brought you two together, but being aligned with lifestyle and goals are where the longevity in a relationship lies . . . Opposites may attract, and they also make the best divorce cases” (qtd. in Bizzoco). You may be curious about opposite beliefs and interests than your own, but that doesn’t mean you should be in a committed relationship with a person opposite to yourself.

Opposite viewpoints lead to disagreement, which leads to fighting, which could lead to breaking up or divorce. No one wants that. Although successful relationships can sometimes occur, the “opposites attract” theory is not very promising. In actuality, there is more evidence for the theory that “birds of a feather flock together”.

Similarity is attractive. Think about it. Let’s say you are single and looking for a relationship. You are an outgoing, happy person who is very

involved at your church. You are at a party where you are introduced to two attractive people. One is an atheist who is shy and standoffish. The other is positive, kind, and also shares your religious beliefs. Which of the two would you be more attracted to and want to get to know more? The one who is most similar to you, duh. This seems to be just common sense, but there are theories and studies that help explain why people are attracted to others similar to themselves.

According to the attraction-similarity model, people with true similarity produce initial attraction. The balance theory states that we prefer consistency in our desires, thoughts, and attitudes. This helps to explain why we like those who are similar to us: it tells us that our own characteristics are normal and desirable (Morry). The similarity-attraction effect explains why most of the time, our friends and significant others match our demographics-age, religion, education and social class (Lutz-Zois et al, 2006). If you think about your group of friends, they most likely have very similar interests, values, and personality traits to you. Yes, there will be differences, but mainly similarities; this is also true of romantic partners.

Most people prefer and are in need of a partner with a similar personality to have a serious intimate relationship. In another study done by the University of Iowa, it was discovered that people tend to marry those who have similar attitudes, religion, and values. The study looked at 291 newlyweds who had participated in the Iowa Marital Assessment Project. A broad range of personality characteristics, attitudes, and signs of relationship quality of the couples were evaluated. It was found that couples were highly similar on attitudes, values, and personality traits (Klohnen and Luo). Along with personality and attitude similarities, another aspect of attraction is one's self-perception.

One's self perception is a predictor of what they will look for in a long-term partner. For example, if someone believes they are attractive, they will seek out attractive partners. If they believe they are wealthy or have high social status, they will seek a wealthy partner (Buston and Emlen). If we like ourselves, and find someone similar to ourselves, we will like him or her as well. Our qualities reflect what we enjoy and what we believe to be acceptable and admirable. If you want a happy, long-term relationship, similarity will be a very important factor.

As stated in a blog post from Bad Psychology: “If people are seeking short-term relationships, they may not be so attentive to similarities. Sometimes it may seem that a couple has more differences than similarities, but similarities will dominate. This is because people usually notice differences more than similarities within interpersonal relationships. Also, there are always exceptions. We are not clones” (Do Opposites REALLY attract?). Although applying to the majority of people, “birds of a feather flock together” does not apply to everyone.

Complete opposites meet, fall in love, and live happily ever after: that is what pop culture leads us to believe. But what happens after the movie ends? We only see the initial attraction, dating, and happy endings. Maybe the endings aren't so happy after all...

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All You Need Is Love...

I stepped out of the airport, automatically greeted by a wave of humidity and heat: a pleasant change from the forty-degree Michigan air. The chill vibe of the Jamaican music playing outside of the airport relaxed me as I took in the beautiful view of the white sand beach and the crystalline, turquoise ocean. This was paradise. However, as the tourists headed toward the nice resorts for vacationing, adventuring, and relaxing, my church group drove toward the poorer area of Montego Bay. I was not in Jamaica for my own pleasure; I was there to be the hands and feet of Jesus by serving the people of Jamaica.

As a soon-to-be high school graduate, this would be my fifth mission trip with my church youth group. I had previously served three times in Detroit, Michigan and once in Zambia, Africa. Being in Jamaica for a total of ten days, the goal of this particular mission trip was to spread God's love throughout the poorer areas of Jamaica through orphanage ministry, volunteering at a soup kitchen, work projects, running a day camp, and showing love to the people we would encounter.

Our first day would be spent at West Haven, a children's home for the severely mentally and physically disabled who were abandoned or had an unsafe or unpleasant way of life. A few weeks prior to the trip, our team was shown a Power Point presentation about West Haven, including pictures of some of the children. My heart absolutely melted when I saw the smiling face of a little Korean boy named Derek. Then I learned that his parents had abandoned him, and I instinctively felt upset and confused. Who could forsake such a helpless, beautiful child like Derek? Preparing for our first day of ministry, our youth pastor, Jack, gave us a few words of advice. Having been to West Haven before, Jack emotionally stated "It's going to be your best and your hardest day." I had no idea what that meant. Little did I know, my day at West Haven would change my heart forever.

Our bus drove up to the metal gate, and we were greeted with a sign that read "West Haven Children's Home." We had arrived. Out the window, I saw that our bus was being stampeded by the smiling faces of children of all ages and sizes, joyfully screaming and jumping up and down. Some of us were greeted us with tight hugs and loud screams of excitement.

I looked around, seeing four small, white cottages with reddish roofs, and a few worn down, wooden swing sets. We were given a speech from some of the workers, greeting us and explaining what our day would look like. They explained the goal of West Haven: to provide care, medical and therapeutic treatment and training, and to help the children and young people achieve their fullest physical, mental, and social potential in an environment filled with love. While all of this was being explained to us, I only had one thing on my mind: Derek. Ever since I had seen that picture of him, I had constantly been thinking about him and hoping that I would be able to spend even just a little time with him. However, knowing that this wasn't a selfish endeavor, I could not show favoritism by specifically seeking out Derek. Whatever and whomever God had in store for my day would be just perfect with me.

Our group parted ways: some went off to play with those who were already outside, while others went into the cottages, where some of the younger children were, along with the severely handicapped. Walking into the first cottage, who was sitting in his little chair, smiling from ear to ear, and waiting for someone to come up to him? Derek.

Wearing grey sweatpants, a blue long sleeve, and a small bib to catch his drool, the precious little four-year-old that I had prayed about was right in front of me. My heart stopped. I slowly walked up to him and said hi. Seeing as he could not speak, walk, or do much of anything on his own, all he did was smile and make sounds to express his emotions. He calmly fidgeted in his chair, with spit bubbles coming out of his mouth, and a glimmer of joy in his eyes. He was the most precious child I had ever met. I grabbed his hand, and he squeezed it right back. For twenty minutes, we just sat there, smiling at each other. I was in awe at the pure joy shown by this little boy: he was constantly smiling and laughing, even though we were just sitting there. He held my hand tight, and was so happy just to be with another person.

I thought about how sad his life must be. Living inside of a gated compound with eighty-one other children ages five to thirty-one, and only fifty staff, it was clear that each child could not be given the attention and nurturing that they fully deserved. However, these children still managed to be joyful. As this thought dawned upon me, my heart sunk. Feeling so

emotionally broken just thirty minutes into the day, I knew I had to keep my composure and focus on making Derek and whomever else I would encounter happy.

I picked Derek up out of his chair and we walked outside, heading directly for the swing set. I pushed him for what seemed like forever. But, it was the most heart warming “forever” I could ever imagine. I cannot emphasize the power of his smile and his laugh enough... words cannot describe how sweet, innocent, joyful, heart-warming, and truly life changing these simple expressions and sounds were to see and hear. Derek’s smile and laughter had more of an impact on me, emotionally, than any other smile or laugh I have ever had the pleasure of encountering. You can see his beautiful smile in the personal picture I have attached, and just imagine how precious it was to experience in person.

After pushing him on the children’s swing, I carried him over to the big swing set and placed him on my lap. I cautiously held on to his weak and tiny body as we swayed in the wind. His laughter made it evident that he was having so much fun. After an hour or two on the swings, we went back over to his cottage and sat on the porch. Surrounded by other students and staff from my church, along with other joyful kids and young adults from West Haven, we all danced and sang as some worship and Jamaican music played. I sat on the ground, held Derek up, and helped him dance. Holding his arms with each hand, we danced to the music. Being grabbed by other children who wanted to dance too, we all had so much fun on the porch.

After the dance party, it was evident that Derek was tired. He sat down in my lap and started to drift off, still managing to spontaneously smile every few minutes. I have never been a mother, but I sure got a glimpse of what motherhood must feel like: such an overwhelming sense of joy and love for a little person. Having them fall asleep in your arms, and knowing you would never be the same.

After sitting on the porch for an hour or so, Derek awoke from his nap. It was time for his lunch. Knowing he could not feed himself, I wondered who would feed him. Would he be taken in to eat, and then would I not see him again for the rest of the day? Or what? To my surprise, his caretaker

asked if I would like to feed him. I agreed and walked to the back of his cottage. I was not emotionally prepared for what I would see next.

Lying in beds, some even in cribs, were bony, malnourished children. These children lie there motionless; probably in the same spot they were in yesterday, and the same spot they would be the next day. Wearing diapers and not being able to express themselves whatsoever, I assumed these must be young children. I was baffled when I was told a few of them were in their teens. You can see a specific example of one of these children in another personal picture I have attached. This boy's name is Donald...he is seventeen years old.

As Derek's caregiver was preparing him for his meal, I walked over to a crib hidden in the corner; I looked down and saw a small girl contorted in the corner of her crib. As I bent down to get to eye level with her, I gently placed my hand on her frail arm, feeling her bony and rough skin. Then we made eye contact. Through her deep, big brown eyes, I saw the most heart-wrenching sadness. Wow. I had just been hit so hard with emotion, and I could not hold back tears. I sat there, staring into her pain-filled eyes, and lightly touching her bony hand, knowing this was all her life would ever consist of. I just sat there, and prayed for this little girl... ..prayed for Derek...prayed for all the other children at West Haven.

Once Derek was ready to eat, I left the girl's crib and sat across the room, placing Derek in a chair in front of me. I spoon-fed him some thick mixture of grains and beans. Despite the fact that this mushy goo constantly dripped from his mouth and smeared all over his bib, I did not care. Sometimes dazing off and staring into space, Derek still ate. This was yet another a turning point in my day. This little boy could not talk...he could not walk on his own...and he could not eat on his own...The simple things in life that we take for granted, he will never be able to do.

After a few more hours of singing, dancing, and playing with Derek, our youth pastor and the other adult leaders were walking around the cottages telling us it was time to go. NO! It was only 4:30 in the afternoon! Why could we not just stay there for the rest of the night? Or just never leave...

Although it was heartbreaking to leave, I was given a little comfort knowing that another team from our church would be back at West Haven two more days that week. I was also comforted knowing that other churches and volunteer groups would visit West Haven in the future. I was just

upset that this would be my last time at West Haven. I was broken-hearted that those children's lives would always be the same: they would always have a lack of resources, a lack of attention, a lack of medical care, and a lack of love. Although the workers at West Haven did the best they could, I could not help but think how the children deserved better lives.

After my day with Derek and the rest of the children, and all the emotional things I has just experienced, I was dreading saying goodbye to them. How could I just leave them? How could I just place Derek back in his chair, and leave that little girl lying in her crib? I could not stand the thought of leaving them there, but I knew I had to. Although he could not respond to me, I said goodbye to Derek. I told him I loved spending my day with him. I told him how amazing his smile and laughter were. I told him that he was loved. He just smiled the whole time. As I slowly backed away, I began to tear up again. I kept turning back and seeing that precious face, sitting in the same chair that I first saw him in. With opened eyes and a broken heart, I left West Haven.

Now I know why Jack told us it would be our best and hardest day. That day was the most emotionally draining day of my life. Although Derek never spoke a word, we formed such a powerful bond. I fell so in love with this little boy and will never forget his smile and contagious laughter. It was such a moving experience to see how Derek, along with the other children and adults, struggled with disability and had nothing, but still found joy in the simplest things. Listening to music, dancing, playing simple games, and even just spending time with other people made them all SO happy.

As I returned back to the United States, I found myself feeling extremely bothered by the materialism and selfish attitudes. The "post mission trip effect" had really hit me: I felt so guilty looking at my closet. Man, do I love clothes and fashion...but I still felt awful seeing all my clothes and materialistic items that meant nothing in the scheme of life and true joy. I live in a beautiful home, and am able to eat whenever I want to. I have all these blessings while the children at West Haven and the others in poverty have nothing.

Coming home with a fresh set of eyes, I learned so much about life, love, and to never take my blessed life for granted. I truly became aware of the need for love and compassion in our world, which has led me to have a

greater passion for people. Reminiscing about West Haven, I am constantly reminded of a famous Beatle's song... "All you need is love." These children just desperately wanted love and attention. After all, "love is all you need."



Take Back the Night

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) sophomore, Ian Lepointe, received an anonymous message on a social networking site one day: someone wanted to meet her. She was hoping it was another lonely lesbian who wanted a friend. To Ian's surprise, her secret admirer turned out to be a lonely guy on campus. Open to new friends, Ian bought him coffee, and they immediately hit it off. They became best friends, and he soon became her only friend. On October 18th, 2012, Ian was watching Halloween movies, and her best friend came over. His fidgety body language and an odd silence gave Ian the hint that something was wrong. Suddenly, he whipped out a bottle of pills. He gave Ian a repulsive ultimatum: she could either watch him take all of the pills and die, or she could do sexual favors for him. Not wanting to be responsible for his suicide, she felt she had no choice...

Despite what the majority of society may believe, Ian is a victim of sexual abuse. Today, she claims she is stronger because of it. She emotionally reflects: "He may have won the battle, but I won the war because love is louder than abuse."

On a rainy night in mid October, over two hundred students and staff of all ages, ethnicities, and genders quickly filled the Grand River Room at the Kirkoff Center. On top of each seat was a survey to gauge what the audience learned, an informational card, two blank pieces of paper, and a pencil. Approximately thirty students, most of them being survivors of sexual assault, proudly wore bright red tee shirts that read "Take Back The Night" and "Consent is Sexy." These students, members of the GVSU group Eyes Wide Open (EWO), hosted this event: Take Back The Night.

Being at GVSU for fifteen years, EWO is a group of sexual assault peer educators who advocate for a safe campus free of sexual assault. They conduct educational programs for classes and various campus organizations. The purpose of EWO is to educate students about the definitions of sexual harassment and assault by providing a forum for discussion, to teach students skills in helping someone who discloses a sexual assault, to educate students about the available resources for survivors of sexual assault on and off campus, to provide campus-wide outreach events, and to include males in the process of education and raising awareness about sexual as-

sault, while highlighting their ability and responsibility to prevent violence against women (“Eyes Wide Open”).

This event was the tenth annual Take Back The Night (TBTN) at GVSU. According to Theresa Rowland, speaker at TBTN and staff member of the GVSU Women’s Center, this event is “a shifting of culture. It is taking the responsibility off of the victims. We are all responsible for preventing this.” The goal of TBTN is to end all forms of violence and to demand an end to rape and sexual assault. Victims, like Ian, desire to let their stories be heard so that others can be aware of the prevalence and seriousness of sexual violence.

The night began with a greeting from EWO’s President and third-year member, Zak Wilson, a well-dressed, professional young man. Passionate about EWO, he was very animated in talking about his involvement with EWO. With a kind and welcoming smile, he explained why he joined EWO: “Actually, my girlfriend brought me! I became a part of EWO because there is a lot of misconception about sexual assault that needs to be cleared up. For example, people typically blame the victim saying ‘her skirt was too short’ or ‘she drank too much’ or ‘she shouldn’t have been out that late.’ But it’s the fault of the perpetrators. Since rapists are mostly men, I believe it is a man’s job to help end this. We need to educate women about how to avoid these situations, to let them know that people want to help them, and to educate men to respect women and not to sexually assault them.”

Majoring in International Relations and minoring in Arabic Studies, Zak initially wanted to be in the CIA. However, this group has given him a passion to go to law school: “I want to be a prosecutor specializing in cases like these [sexual assault]. I want to fully support victims the way that many current lawyers do not: they are not educated enough on this topic, so they may not be doing the best job that they could do.”

EWO has significant personal meaning to Zak: “I know people who were affected. According to a 2012 survey at GVSU, one in four women and one in ten men were sexually assaulted: it’s here on our campus, it’s everywhere. I don’t think it’s right that people blame the victims because it’s not their fault one bit. I want to be able to support women and men and help them find support and someone to talk to when the greater culture will not do so.”

In addition to TBTN, EWO hosts many other events. For example, the Silent Witness Program is an event that features large images of silhouettes of women who died of sexual assault; recorded voices tell their stories. There is also the Clothesline Project, where students are encouraged to decorate tee shirts with their stories, messages to their abusers, or phrases to increase awareness about sexual assault. Some read “You may have controlled my past, but you WILL NOT control my future. I’m stronger now and I will not be silent”, or “It happens here at GVSU, your campus”, and “I won’t be afraid. My voice will be heard. NEVER AGAIN!” EWO also sponsors Sexual Assault Awareness Week in April: a week full of small events, leading up to a large outreach event with a speaker.

In addition to hearing from a student, a professor had a story to tell to at TBTN. LGBT rights advocate, trained sexuality educator, writing consultant, and GVSU professor Michele Lussky decided to share her story. A very personable, giddy and humorous woman, Michele was all laughs and smiles in her red lipstick as she introduced herself and began her story.

In 1986, friendly, philosophical, independent and idealistic Michele was a senior in high school. That year in October, Michele and two of her friends took a drive to Michigan State for Cedar Fest: a huge off-campus party that occurs twice per year, attracting up to five thousand people. This year’s party just happened to be the craziest yet: cars turned over, street-lights broken, and people running around drunk. Once Michele arrived at the party, she grabbed a cup and filled it up with alcohol. She soon met a sweet, twenty-two-year-old named Christopher. With his clean-cut, preppy look, Michele started an intellectual and philosophical conversation with him. Soon, a fight broke out in front of them, so Christopher suggested they continue their conversation in his apartment where it would be “safe and quiet.” Michele agreed, abandoning her friends and her car.

Once they arrived, Michele realized she had no idea how they got there. With all of the people walking around and the winding roads, she lost track of how they arrived at Christopher’s apartment. Nevertheless, she walked in to continue their conversation. He offered her a drink, and she declined. Suddenly, Christopher’s mood changed: he no longer seemed interested in the conversation, but more Michele and her body. Michele reminisces: “I felt so effing stupid. Shit of course, college girls have sex. Of course this is

why he brought me here. I saw it in the movies all the time, a one night stand...”

Michele was quick with her excuse: she expressed that she simply “wasn’t feeling it tonight.” Christopher creepily responded with “C’mon beautiful, I can make you feel it.” So they kissed. Michele hastily backed out again with “I really should get back to my friends, they’re probably worried.” Chris snapped back with “don’t you like me?” Michele, afraid to call her parents or the police, not wanting to hurt Christopher’s feelings, and feeling powerless, gave in.

Michele regrets not saying “no” more firmly. Although she told him three times in a weak way, she never fully stood up for herself and said “NO.” She didn’t want to feel like a bitch. Soon after the rape, Michele found out she was pregnant. More on that later...

According to a sign created by EWO, “Not now means no”, “I have a boyfriend/girlfriend means no”, “Maybe later means no”, “No thanks means no”, “You’re not my type means no”, “I’d rather be alone right now means no”, “Don’t touch me means no”, “Lets just go to sleep means no”, “I’m not sure means no”, “You’ve/I’ve been drinking means no”, and “Silence means no”. As a writing consultant, Michele explained the roots of the word “consent”. “Con” means “with” and “sent” means “feelings”: She explained consent as being “with the same feelings.” The absence of consent is sexual assault. Although Michele used one of these less direct statements, she still was taken advantage of and sexually assaulted. This was not her fault; it was Christopher’s fault, and whether he wanted to believe it or not, he had raped her.

In the United States, someone is sexually assaulted every two minutes. Sixty percent of these crimes are never reported. Curbing the myth that rapists are masked strangers who lurk in dark alleys, approximately two-thirds of these rapes are committed by someone known by the victim. One in six American women and one in thirty-three men have been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her or his lifetime (“Statistics”).

Sexual assault can have traumatizing effects on the victim. Not only will they feel worthless, violated, and damaged, but also they are at risk for serious emotional and mental suffering. Victims of sexual assault are three times more likely to suffer from depression, six times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, thirteen times more likely to abuse

alcohol, twenty-six times more likely to abuse drugs, and four times more likely to contemplate suicide (“Statistics”).

Regretting how she handled the situation, Michele expressed her feelings: “I wish I had told someone right away, I wish I would have gotten medical help right away. I sat shamefully on this information, hoping it wouldn’t affect me.” After the rape, Michele did everything she could to be unattractive. She cut her hair short, wore combat boots, hospital gowns, and trash bags. She felt used up and thrown away, like garbage. Soon, she became depressed, and began cutting and smoking.

She tracked Christopher down, and was very direct with him: “I’m pregnant and you’re the father.” As a pro-life conservative, Michele was stunned to hear him say “I’ll pay for an abortion, I can’t do anything else for you though.” With much contemplation, Michele decided to give the baby up for adoption. After being given to a loving family through an open-adoption process, that baby, Ariel, grew up to be a twenty-six year old researcher at Princeton.

Michele went through a rough patch after the rape. She never sought counseling, so she was still broken. She dropped out of college, dated two drug addicts, an alcoholic, and even a mentally unstable man who stalked and abused her. However, many years later, she felt tired of feeling wounded and like a piece of trash. She finally sought counseling, which changed her life. She addressed her pain, and although she didn’t feel that she deserved to be well and whole, she came to terms with her situation and now feels whole. She has been happily married to her husband for eighteen years, and they have three sons. She emotionally stated, “I am not my history or my prior suffering or my bad decisions or the story people write about me or my identity. I just am.”

Michele finished her powerful speech with the following words of wisdom: “Define your boundaries, be a bitch, be in power, be the author of your own life . . . now let’s go take back the night!”

After hearing such an inspirational and emotional story, the crowd responded with a roar of cheering and a standing ovation. Michele’s story seemed to greatly impact those who heard it. She closed by explaining the two blank sheets of paper on everyone’s chairs. On one paper, everyone was told to write about a time they felt powerless or shameful, or how somebody violated or hurt them. On the other, everybody wrote who they really

are. This piece was to be kept, as Michele explained, “you are everything beautiful and good”, while the other sheet of paper was to be ripped up. Michele took all of the ripped up paper and explained how she wanted people to burn their own memories, symbolically letting go of the past. However, she was told she could not burn the papers on campus. Feeling upset, she explained that she would burn the papers herself at her home. She still positively exclaimed “Burn baby, burn.”

President of EWO, Zak Wilson, finished up the event by commending Michele for giving “the most honest and most real story” he’s ever heard. The night was ended with a march to spread awareness about sexual violence. To Michele’s pleasant surprise, a police officer on campus, Officer Lien, walked up to the stage and picked up the box of papers. He told Michele he would find a way to have it burnt. She immediately felt such relief and excitement.

Finally reaching the part of the event that was to be symbolic of “taking back the night”, the march began. Michele explains her experience: “We walked silently across campus so as to commemorate with reverence those who have been assaulted.” Officer Lien walked through the cold rain with the group, carrying the box of ripped up paper. Michele began to sob as she saw him holding it so proudly and marching next to them. She emotionally reflects: “You see, when I was a student 26 years ago at GVSU, there were no stalking laws and I was a victim of a stalker who followed me everywhere I went-including campus. He would wait outside my classes, leave notes on my car, slash my tires, etc. And, every time I called campus security at GVSU, I was told that he wasn’t doing anything criminal or that they couldn’t prove it was him. I called my local Walker police as well, and they would joke about the incessant phone calls, the driving by my house all night, etc. by saying that I had a ‘Romeo.’ Even after he broke into my house, cut my phone cord, and beat me, they said they it was ‘his word against mine.’ I wasn’t protected by the police back then.” She realized, as officer Lien was proudly marching along, that he was symbolic of the change in university policies, societal perceptions, and ethical standards of the police. The hard work of groups like EWO and advocates like Theresa Rowland has helped in changing perceptions and providing support.

Students and staff continued to march around campus, blowing whistles and shouting “Take back the night!” Once the group arrived at the bonfire

pit, “Officer Lien dumped out every last shred of paper that contained people’s worst pain of being abused, harassed, and belittled.” All of the students started sobbing, cheering, and saying “burn baby burn!” Michele said “We all were yelling and laughing and crying. It was very cathartic and beautiful to see our pain turned to ashes. I was especially touched to have a ‘full-circle’ moment in my life. One in which I came back to the place where I was a young woman and experiencing so much trauma after my assault. In that moment, I felt like I was freed from my past. I feel I didn’t just ‘take back the night.’ I took back my life.”

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PORTFOLIO FIVE

Rachel Abdalla

Fire Away

As I sit in the dirt, finishing my MRE (Meal Ready to Eat), I hear my Sergeant Higgins call my name, “PFC Abdalla, you’re up! Come on soldier!”

“I jump up in an instant and replied “Moving sergeant.” My heart is pounding as I head toward the ammo station and grab three magazines to use for my M16 rifle. It is about to be my turn at the shooting range in Fort Jackson, an Army base in South Carolina. Even though I know this is going to be challenging, I’m ready to put what I learned to the test. I’m ready to put my mind to it, push my hardest, and do what my sergeants always say to do “Never give up!”

Before I actually shoot my weapon on the firing lane, I wait in a designated spot with 30 other soldiers about 25 meters from the lanes. While I sit on this 40 foot bench, waiting my turn, I feel like this is the most intense wait ever. The anticipation of shooting next is making my legs shake. The place where I am sitting is in clear view of Lane 8. I begin to watch a soldier prep for her shooting test. She sets up the sandbag, gets into position, loads her rifle, and lies there to wait for the command from the sergeant. The sergeant in the tower screams, “Firing lane ready on the left, firing lane ready on the right, firing lanes ready.” This female soldier starts out doing pretty well; she hit about ten targets down. Just when she was doing well, I seen her start to jitter. I see her struggling with her weapon. A couple targets pop up, she starts missing them. I think to myself why is she not shooting? Sure enough, her rifle is jammed. I hope she remembers SPORTS which is a technique we learned. SPORTS stands for Slap the magazine, pull the charging handle back, observe the chamber, release charging handle, tap the magazine, and shoot. It is vital she knows this, or she might fail. I want to scream “don’t give up”. Basic training is about nine weeks long. So, I am worried for her because the sergeants told us that if we fail to get 23/40 targets down, we would have to restart basic training from day one. We were on week four. I see 10 more targets come up and slither away with no bullet in them. Is she giving up? Did she get so overwhelmed with the jammed weapon?

As I watch all the soldiers who just shot, walk toward the sergeant, I could not help but wonder how nervous and anxious each soldier must

Rachel wrote this portfolio in the class of Professor Julie White.

feel waiting to hear their scores. When the female soldier at Lane 8 walks closer, I realize the person I had been watching is my battle buddy PFC Brant. The sergeant now has all the results for the soldiers shooting tests. The sergeant begins to read the scores in order from lane 1 to lane 30. When he reaches Lane 8, I hear him announce "Lane 8, you scored 14." When I look over at my battle buddy PFC Brant, she is looking down at the ground; she looks very disappointed, and sad. She failed. PFC Brant then takes her empty magazines, clears her weapon in the barrel, and heads toward the designated area for soldiers who already shot their weapons.

Now I'm even more worried than before because now I saw my battle buddy fail, and it makes me so scared. Just then, the sergeant said "PFC Abdalla, you're up." I sure don't want to start from day one at boot camp all over again. My heart is throbbing out of my chest; I don't want to fail. I hate it here. I feel like I'm in prison. I have no phone, no communication with my loved ones, no T.V, no entertainment, no play time, no anything except hard core Army training. I pray to myself "Please God give me strength not to give up and help me stay strong."

I sit on the bench, rocking back and forth with my eyes stuck on the gravel in front of me. Sergeant Higgins shouts out sternly, "PFC Abdalla, go to Lane 7." I break out of my daze, stand up from the bench, take a deep breath, and head to lane 7. I walk quickly to my lane, breathing in and out fast, and pointing my rifle to the outfield. If I don't, I know that a Sergeant will yell at me and I will probably have to do some push-ups. My palms are sweating. I can feel the sweat under my armor trickle down my back. I don't know if it's from this 95 degree weather, or if it is because I am extremely nervous.

I arrive at my lane. I first scoped the area. The outfield was full of many trees, hills, and dirt piles that showed where each target would be. I then pick up the sandbag, punch it a couple times to insure I make a good indentation for the muzzle of my rifle to be placed. I place my rifle on the sandbag. I then lie down on my stomach, my legs spread apart about 12 inches, and my boots pointing away from one another. Little ole me, 5'6", weighing 130 pounds, lying here in the gravel, wearing my Uniform, FLA, Helmet, bullet proof vest, glasses, and ear plugs. This is so uncomfortable. I place my three magazines right by the sand bag, and place my cheek on the stock of my M16. I try to focus my weapon, but it is hard because

my glasses are fogging up from breathing so hard. My helmet is pressing against my forehead, and my mouth is so dry I can hardly swallow. Not only that, but emotions are sweeping over me. I am nervous, scared, and worried. And yet, at the same time, I am excited and thrilled to put what I learn to test. I am on week 4 of basic training. During week two, I learned about this M16 rifle. See Figure 1. The M16 is a lightweight, 5.56 mm, magazine-fed assault rifle. The rifle is made of steel aluminum alloy. We soldiers were taught how to take it apart and put it back together. Now, it is time for me to shoot. I start biting my lip and come back to reality. At that moment, the sergeant looks at me and yells, “Are you ready?”

“Yes, Sergeant,” I say with a confident voice. In reality, I feel a bit uncertain of my ability in shooting down the targets. Nonetheless, with an all systems go mentality, and a never give up attitude; I proceed to lie there prepped up. My rifle butt end is against my shoulder pocket. My right eye is focusing on a specific target through the scope on my rifle. My left hand is on the shaft of the rifle, while my right hand is on the trigger, and the muzzle lay on the sandbag toward the outfield.

The sergeant in the tower yells out, “Ready on the left, ready on the right, firing lanes ready.” Even though I am terrified, I keep my breathing under control with slow and steady breaths. I deeply exhale, letting half out and then holding it. I keep my eyes open and strive to keep my head positioned and cheek on the stock of the rifle. I focus. I aim. Then, I notice the targets begin to pop up. I see one target to the left 50 yards. With the tip of my index finger, I slowly squeeze the trigger in one fluid movement. The rifle recoils, but I have a tight grip. Bang! I got it. As I take a deep breath, I think to myself. Concentrate, you got this. Two targets stand up – one at 100 yards and one at 150 yards – Bang! Bang! Target down. Target down. I can smell the ammo smoke flowing through my nostrils. Another target at 200 yards comes up. My weapon becomes jammed. Oh no, I think to myself. This same thing happened to my battle buddy. Quickly, I slap my magazine, pull the charging handle back, observe the chamber, release the charging handle, tap the magazine, and shoot. I get it to work, but was too late. I did not have time to reposition my rifle and I missed that target. My heart is beating faster. My eyes become blurry from the sand, I can't see very well, my glasses are too fogged up, and I miss an-

other target. Just then, the sergeant in the tower says, "Remove sand bag." This means that we have to support the weapon on our own. I take a deep breath, move the sandbag, and lay back down in the same position. I load my second magazine and the targets begin to come up again. I slowly pull the trigger and shoot down the target. I see two, one at 250 and one at 300 yards. I take too long and only hit the 250. Oh my goodness! A few more targets pop up. The white smoke clouds around me, and the sand is blowing in my face. How many targets did I hit? I don't know.

I then hear the sergeant in the tower say, "Weapon on safe, switch to the last position." I get into the kneeling position. I put my right knee on the ground and sit on my foot. My left knee I raise up so I could place my elbow on it. I hold the muzzle of my weapon with my left hand, and place my right hand on trigger. I load my third magazine, and I hear the sergeant say "Ready on left, ready on right, firing lane ready." I look into my scope and begin shooting when I see the targets. After missing quite a few targets on the two other positions, I strive to make sure I don't miss many on this position. I see the target 150 yards. Got it! At this time, I make myself think this is life or death. I need to hit these targets. I pretend I am defending my mother. Targets come up and I hit those suckers down. After the tenth target, I hear the sergeant yell, "Weapon on safe." This means I am done.

I grab my empty magazines and speed walk to the sergeant with the shooting scores. I listen with open ears. The sergeant starts reading the scores. I feel chills run up my back. My tongue feels swollen against my throat. The sergeant says, "Lane 7, you scored 25." I passed! I am now considered a Marksman. What a relief for me. I walk toward the designated area with a slight smirk. I take my helmet off and my long hair blows in the breeze. My day is complete. This female does know how to fire away.

Figure 1.



“File:M16A1 brimob.jpg.” *Wikimedia Commons*. N.p. 3 Sept. 2011. Web. 16 Apr. 2014.

Guiding Light Mission: Purpose Driven Light

In my home town Grand Rapids, Michigan, a man had a confrontation with the people he was living with. It resulted in a physical fight and his roommate broke his rib and kicked him out. He lost everything, including his job and his car. Sadly, this man is my uncle. Situations in life like this may lead people to lose everything. So, the question is, where can these people find help? They, like my uncle, can find help at the Guiding Light Mission, which is located in downtown Grand Rapids. The Guiding Light Mission is a non-profit organization that provides rescue, recovery and reengagement for people with unfortunate circumstances. According to Jessica Manfrin, the Development Director of the Guiding Light Mission, states the end goal for the Guiding Light Mission is to help individuals meet their needs whether it is employment, schooling, or God given talents. The Guiding Light Mission brings the community together by using volunteers, donations, and fundraisers to provide meals, recovery programs, and housing to those who desperately need a helping hand.

According to the Guiding Light Mission website this organization has been around for eighty five years. It was first established as West Fulton Mission in 1929 by a layman named John Van de Water. It began out of a need for meals for the unfortunate in the community. The website continues by stating The Guiding Light Mission closed down in 1968 because the leader at that time had died and the directors did not have the funds to keep it running. The Mission remained closed for one year. It was reopened by Jacob Vredevoog as an independent faith project. Vredevoog used his own money to get the Guiding Light Mission started and with the support of local donors the Guiding Light Mission expanded (Guiding Light). Although, the Guiding Light Mission may have had its difficulties through the years, today they are doing outstanding work in my community by providing help and food to the needy. Presently, its current location is at 255 S. Division Ave, in the heart of downtown. The Guiding Light Mission continues to carry out its mission set forth by its founder.

The founders of the Guiding Light Mission helped make this organization the way it is today. Amazingly, this organization is now run strictly by donations (Manfrin). Manfrin and Marsha, the Development Managers, are responsible for allocating the funds that are raised from the donations.

In my community there are plenty of people who want to help the Guiding Light Mission. Manfrin says there are about two to four hundred volunteers per year. She also says the Guiding Light Mission does fundraisers such as golf outings, an annual banquet, and they seek to get many sponsors for silent auctions and raffle ticket. All this work has paid off and the staff and volunteers should feel proud that they played a part in making it possible. The Guiding Light Mission did so well last year, Manfrin says they raised \$1.5 million. The results were outstanding. This has brought the community together in more ways than one.

As The Guiding Light Mission progress, they were able to make renovations to their building so they could accommodate more people at a time. Ted Roeloff, a reporter for the Grand Rapids Press, posts about these Guiding Light Mission changes; this included a remodeled kitchen, a project that cost about \$65,000, a new volunteer center, refurbished rooms for residents, new ceiling lights and new bunk beds for transient visitors. The shelter also is graced by a 61-foot mural in the chapel and dining room (Roelofs). According to Tim Cole, the housing director of Guiding Light Mission, he believes that a more disciplined, compassionate operation will pay dividends for residents who need spiritual and emotional help (Roelof). This organization is driven by people who care to improve the community and get people off the streets.

Life on the street is frightening for anyone, let alone being hungry and having nowhere to sleep. The Guiding light mission is open for an emergency of this kind. They provide dinner daily at 6 p.m. for the community (The Guiding Light). You would never believe how many people go there to eat. I know this, because I volunteered before at the kitchen and helped serve the food. They serve up to 350 meals per day to the general homeless and hungry in the community. The Guiding Light Mission staff and/or volunteers have done an excellent job in 2012, there were 46,850 free meals served (Guiding Light). It's hard to imagine that some of these people will have nowhere to sleep at night. The Guiding Light Mission insures that if anyone needs a place to stay for the night the doors are open. Last year they provided 27,908 overnight stays (Guiding Light). There are requirements for someone if they were to stay longer than one night. Manfrin states they have to meet with the supervisor, have a valid ID, Social Security number,

and show that they are serious about making positive changes in their life. If they get approved, this will begin the road to their recovery.

To begin the road to recovery, Manfrin says that the Guiding Light Mission provides two successful programs. These programs are the New Life in Christ Program and the Back to Work Program. Both of these programs offer help to support men with their social, physical, spiritual and intellectual needs. I've seen it first hand with my uncle's transition, from an old shattered life to a new life in Christ. He reshaped his life by participating in the New Life in Christ program.

The New Life in Christ program is for men suffering from chronic homelessness, substance abuse, spiritual distribution, and life challenges (The Guiding Light). Manfrin says this program consists of counseling, work therapy, bible study, and mentorship. Counseling provides help for these men with any personal issues. Work Therapy helps the men develop skills and strong work ethic. They are required to wake up at 6 a.m., eat breakfast, attend Bible study, and make sure all daily chores are done (Manfrin). They are on a strict routine. The men are required to be in bed by 10 p.m. If they do not follow the rules, they may be withdrawn from the program (Manfrin). Rules and restrictions are there for a reason, to keep order and stability. The mentorship portion of this program is where these men are assigned to find a mentor. A mentor is someone they either know, or someone at The Guiding Light, who helps them along and keeps them accountable for their actions. This is done weekly to make sure they are staying on the right track. The end result of this program is to insure that these men have a job and a reestablished life.

The Back to Work Program provides a short term stay for men who are employed or seeking full time employment. This allows them to save money while they look for permanent housing (The Guiding Light). Manfrin says this program houses up to forty eight men. She says they are only allowed to stay there for 30 days, unless they haven't reached their goal. The goals are finding a full time job, and/or housing. If they do not reach their goal, they may stay a maximum of 90 days (Manfrin). This program provides three meals a day, clothing, and gives men opportunities to look on the internet for jobs. There is a job coach that will help them pursue a job by helping them make resumes and answering any questions they may have. The job coach also insures the men have transportation to and from

work (Guiding Light). This helps the community by providing businesses with employees to keep production moving faster and more efficient. I feel both of these programs give the individuals the proper help they need to maintain a healthy life style and get out of their hopelessness and reengage into society positively.

The Guiding Light Missions reengages the unfortunate people into the society with a whole new outlook on life. They bring the men who are jobless, penniless, and homeless out of their horrible state, and give them opportunities to build themselves up, and move forward to have a better future for their lives (Guiding Light). Finding jobs for these men is the objective of the Guiding Light's Mission. The men learn to make better choices and work at finding a stable full time job. Once they reach their goal of getting a job, they are able to save money. With their savings they will be able to rent an apartment or a house. Last year, the Guiding Light Mission opened up a new facility called Iron House.

In 2012, Mike Nichols, a Grand Rapids Business Journal staff reporter, states that the Guiding light mission provided the community with the Iron House. The Iron House which accommodates eight men, two per unit, who have proven their trustworthiness by graduating from New Life in Christ recovery program. The new transitional house is located at 540 Andover St. SE in Kentwood. The facility is called the Iron House of Sober Living, a reference to the biblical proverb, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17) (Nichols). There are many homeless people who wish they could live a normal life and get off the street. This organization can make these wishes come true.

As the years go on the Guiding Light Mission continues to help people out in difficult times in their life. Josh, a former member of the New Life in Christ Program, states that the Guiding Light Mission taught him the way out of his temptations and gave him the tools to stand up and make it through with Christ at the center of his life. Josh states that the program turned his life around and he is so grateful for the Guiding Light Mission. He is now the Food Director of Guiding Light Mission. Andrew, another former member of the New Life in Christ program, states that before coming to the Guiding Light Mission he could not go a day with being sober. He also states that the Guiding Light Mission gave him the strength to deal with his issues in different ways rather than turning to drugs and

alcohol for relief. He says he has a new role model, Jesus Christ. There are many other men who have been changed from this organization. In 2012, the Guiding Light Mission website states that 59 men benefited from the New Life in Christ program. It also states that 73% of men that went to Guiding Light Mission obtained full time jobs, established savings accounts and moved into independent housing (Guiding Light). The Guiding Light Mission is truly a beneficial organization for those who need assistance.

Everyone faces challenges in life. Some may have it worse than others. But, in the end, how you deal with them can make all the difference in the world. It can make you or break you. The Guiding Light Mission helps people look on the bright side and offer them a better way to deal with their challenges. The Guiding Light Mission has shown that they truly reach out with sincere compassion to those struggling with difficult issues in their life. These issues may include being homeless, hungry, addicted to drugs, or even mental disorders. They teach them many powerful and positive words from the Bible to help direct them so they can stay focused on their road to recovery (Guiding Light). The Guiding Light Mission provides great programs that insure those that attend have the adequate support needed to finish successfully. Thankfully, because of the Guiding Light Mission my uncle now has a job and his own place. This to me shows that The Guiding Light Mission benefits my community in numerous ways.

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Rachel Abdalla

Heart Pumping for an Energy Drink

In October of 2011, my Army National Guard unit was scheduled to take our yearly physical fitness training (PFT) test, which includes pushups, sit-ups, and a two mile run. When a PFT test is conducted, a medic is required to be there in case of any emergencies. I, a combat medic, was the one to attend this test. Before the test started, I noticed that PFC Williams, one of my fellow soldiers, drank a 24 ounce energy drink called Monster. I told him that it is not smart to drink an energy drink before any work outs because it will increase your heart rate dramatically. However, he continued walking toward the group of soldiers. Just about half way through the two mile run, I saw PFC Williams holding his chest. He then stopped running and was breathing heavily. I ran up to him and asked him, "What's wrong?" He responded, "My heart hurts." I walked him to a picnic table, sat him down, and put ice under his armpits. After I cooled him down I checked his blood pressure and it was extremely high. I check his pulse and it was irregular. His symptoms were chest pain and shortness of breath. This was serious so I strapped him on the stretcher, gave him Intravenous fluids and sent him to the emergency room for further evaluation. PFC Williams is another statistic of energy drink related emergency. I say this because according to the Drug Abuse Warning Network, a public health surveillance system in the United States that monitors drug-related visits to the hospital, stated that from 2007 to 2011 the number of emergency room visits related to energy drinks nearly doubled in the United States, rising from slightly more than 10,000 to nearly 21,000 ("Update"). The problem with most energy drinks is that they are portrayed as being healthy and harmless but in reality the high amounts of caffeine in them can be very dangerous to one's health causing heart disease, heart palpitations, and even death. Being a Medic in the National Guard and going into my major of Medical Diagnostic Echocardiography, I was interested in more deeply exploring information about how energy drinks are harming the heart; as a result I found some alternatives and solutions.

One of the problems I found about energy drinks is how some manufacturers fail to provide the accurate amount of caffeine on the label. Daniel J. DeNoon, a senior medical writer for WebMD, found Consumer Reports (CR) that did an investigation on the caffeine content in energy drinks.

He states that the consumer group tested 27 popular energy drinks. Eleven didn't list the amount of caffeine on the label. Among the 16 products that did, five had 20% more caffeine than the label claimed and one had 70% more (DeNoon). The Society for cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions Foundation, states that even if energy drink's caffeine level is listed on the can, other sources of caffeine that are popular in the beverages- such as guarana and yerba mate-may not include them in the total ("Energy"). This is ridiculous because people who drink energy drinks can be misled about how much caffeine is in a single can, and they may consume an excessive amount of caffeine. Sue Roberts, a Registered Dietitian and Certified Nutritionist, states that the top five ingredients in most energy drinks are Caffeine, Guarana, Taurine, B vitamins, and glucuronolactone. Individually, she says these ingredients are not usually harmful, but when combined with high doses of caffeine, it can cause serious complications to one's heart and may even cause death (Roberts). People need to be informed on how much caffeine they are consuming a day because too much may be destructive to one's health.

Energy drinks contain high doses of caffeine which provide a bit too much boost to the heart creating additional stress on the heart organ causing it to contract more rapidly than usual (Thompson). Dr. Matthew Worthley, a cardiologist, shows that energy drink consumption has been linked with cardiac arrest and myocardial infarction. This study demonstrates that 1 hour after consumption of an energy drink, there are objective cardiovascular changes characterized by increase in blood pressure, increase in platelet clumping, and impairment of endothelial function (Worthley). In Anatomy class, I've learned that increased blood pressure occurs when the force of blood against artery walls are elevated. This can lead to other problems including stroke or heart failure. Platelet aggregation means that the certain cells in your blood are clumping together. Too much clumping causes blood clots. This can lead to a heart attack which is also known as myocardial infarction. A heart attack occurs when the blood vessels (coronary arteries) that supply blood to your heart are blocked. This causes your heart muscle to become damaged or die. Impairment of endothelial function is where the linings of blood vessels do not function normally. The intensity of an energy drink may ruin or kill heart tissue. I stay away from energy drinks to keep my heart as healthy as possible.

Although Energy drinks may help someone get through the day a little easier, too much may cause heart palpitations. Heart palpitations are feelings or sensations that your heart is pounding and racing, or feelings that your heart skipped a beat. According to The Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions, a professional association for invasive and interventional Cardiologist, states that 19 percent college students who used energy drinks had experienced heart palpitations (“Energy”). My brother, Travis Abdalla, drank two energy drinks per day. He stated to me in January that his chest was in pain and his heart was palpitating. Not only that, but he couldn’t sleep very well and would wake up feeling this pain. He said he almost went to the emergency room but decided to hold off and just took some anti-acid relievers and hoping it would help ease his condition. He also told me he may have an ulcer because he had extreme pain in his stomach. According to Ben Greenfield fitness, the carbonic acid, citric acid and phosphoric acid in popular carbonated energy drinks can raise the risk of stomach damage and ulcers (Rodgers). Travis’s physical condition caused him to stay home from work three days. This was in January of this year. During his three days off from work, he did some research and based on what he found, he decided to stop drinking energy drinks. Within days, he was feeling better and now has not drunk an energy drink since. I am extremely grateful he made a positive change to better himself and get out of harm’s way for the sake of his heart and health.

During my medical training session in the National Guard, I’ve learned that exercise increases your heart rate and blood pressure. If you add energy drink to your work out, this may put too much strain on your heart. It’s like adding more flames to the fire. According to Andres Jauregui, a Journalist of the Huffington Post, a Brooklyn man suffered a fatal heart attack as a result of drinking a Red Bull. Cory Terry, age 33, was a regular drinker of Red Bull, a highly caffeinated energy drink that has sold 35 billion cans worldwide in the past 25 years. In 2011, Terry drank Red Bull about 45 minutes before he collapsed and died while playing basketball. (Jauregui). There are plenty of young athletes who take energy drinks before games or work outs. There should be restrictions on the intake of energy drinks before any physical activity because of the serious conscious that may occur.

Another tragic death regarding the consumption of an energy drink happened in state of Maryland. Rachel Morris, a writer for Scholastic Choices,

states that “Anais Fournier, 14, drank two cans of a popular energy drink called Monster in two days. Soon after her last sip, she went into cardiac arrest. Six days later, the Maryland teenager died. Doctors blame the death on complications of caffeine poisoning” (Morris 18). I’ve learned that cardiac arrest is when the blood flow through the body stops flowing properly because the heart has stopped beating. This causes your organs and brain to lack proper oxygen. This leads for a need of CPR to bring the heart back to life. Energy Drinks are no joke. If warning labels were on these cans, and age restrictions were in place, maybe Anais would still be alive.

The 5 hour energy drink slogan is, “Drink it in seconds. Feel it in minutes. Lasts for hours” (“5-hour”). I believe it should be “Drink it in seconds. Heart pumping in minutes. Uncertain results in hours.” WZZM 13 News reports that The Food and Drug Administration are now investigating 13 deaths allegedly linked to the energy drink – 5 Hour Energy (5-Hour). It is one thing to become sick from an energy drink but when it means that your life could be taken from these powerful drinks is another. The people who died from the 5 hour energy drink probably did not know about the potential harm these drinks had since they are portrayed as being a dietary supplements.

Fast-fix energy drinks aren’t the answer, despite what TV ads tell you. The key to boosting energy is making healthy positive lifestyle changes (“5 Simple”). How can you get energy without these dangerous drinks? First, start off by getting adequate sleep (7-8 hours) and not hitting the snooze button when you wake up, this can trigger you biological clock to be shifted and actually make you feel more tired. Second, eat a healthy breakfast. According to Dr. Jamie Davis, a research associate at the Institute for Prevention Research, states that for short-term and long-term energy boosts, make a habit of eating high-fiber, carbohydrate-rich breakfasts (Doheny). Third, exercise will help your blood flow and as I have learned in school it provides endorphins to be released in your body, which helps with energy levels. Any exercise is better than nothing. Forth, take a multivitamin in the afternoon to provide the body with all the necessary vitamins for energy. As I learned in medical training, the most important thing to do to keep your body healthy and energized is to drink water. Your body needs about eight cups of 8-fluid ounces a day. The main goal is to drink enough water to allow urine to be clear this ensures your body is hydrated. Energy drinks do

not hydrate your body instead they make you become dehydrated and give you a sugar crash.

Plain and simple, think before you drink. Many Americans do not know about how harmful energy drinks can be. I believe that from the stories I read, and from what information I have found, that it is crucial to get the facts out to the public about the problems that have an impact on our society. Even though energy drinks may have a good flavor and help with energy at times, there are precautions to look out for. To me, there is a big need to bring awareness to the public. I would have to agree with Dr. Ali, of the Texas Medical Centre, stated “Warning labeling should be done on these drinks regulating the content of Caffeine and its harmful effects on health” (Parker Pope). This would help prevent negative consequences from energy drinks.

Based on my research, I hope in the near future, the FDA will listen to the outcry of concerned people and take preventative measures to help stop the abuse of energy drinks. Barry Meier, a reporter for The New York Times, states that a group of 18 doctors, researchers and public health experts jointly urged the Food and Drug Administration to take action on energy drinks to protect from the possible risks of consuming high amounts of caffeine (Meier). These preventative measures could consist of banning certain energy drinks, banning the amount of the stimulants in them or caffeine, putting warning labels on the drinks, and putting more ads out there about the deaths that have occurred relating to energy drinks. According to David Collens, a reporter for WBAL-TV, states that progress is being made about energy drinks. In the state of Maryland, a bill is on the ballot to ban the sale of energy drinks to those under 18. If passed, Maryland will be the first state to restrict the sale and possession of these drinks (Collens). As more facts about energy drinks come out, I believe more people will think twice before drinking an energy drink. They cause too many harmful side effects on our bodies. So, in retrospect, this should help prevent more health problems in our country, and even prevent more senseless deaths. This is a serious problem that could lead to more disasters if not tended to.

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PORTFOLIO SIX

Austin Latture

Clenbuterol: Is It Worth it?

I shuddered as a rubbery tasting liquid rushed down my throat. While it was only a small syringe full of this mysterious substance, the effects were almost immediate. My eyes widened, my heart rate increased. I felt energy like I had never felt before; my heart pounded at my chest with increasing strength and velocity. My hands shook rhythmically with my heartbeat as I looked around the training center and weight room of my high school. The other football players and powerlifters were starting their workouts. Most of them were exactly like me; shaking with power and energy. Just as I felt atop the world, an ache sprang from the back of my head, curled around my temples and reached my forehead before stretching down to my nose. I gasped for air as I felt the blood rush to my head. I turned to my friend Duke, wide eyed, and asked him a simple question: “Will it be like this every time?”

Competitive athletes have evolved to the highest level of status in the modern century. Athletes often receive borderline worship for their performance on the field or the court. Some benefits of performing well include material possessions and money or scholarships, as well as nonmaterial possessions such as pride or confidence. The competitive nature of young adults culminates with the multiple benefits of performing well to create the perfect storm of a desire to dominate athletically. This competitiveness starts at a young age. Young adults, especially those in high school, are subjected to these pressures. Sometimes, young adults are willing to do anything in order to gain an edge on the competition. These athletes oftentimes turn to performance enhancing drugs, often referred to as PEDs or steroids, in order to gain an advantage over their competition. High school athletic departments outlaw the use of PEDs because they can provide an unfair advantage and some of these chemicals have very adverse side effects. High school athletes, especially football players and powerlifters, are put under an obscene amount of pressure to perform well and sometimes, in order to do so, ingest foreign substances to provide an advantage. A very popular substance to ingest is clenbuterol. Street named “clen”, the substance comes

Austin wrote this portfolio in the class of Professor Jason Lenz.

in two different forms. While there is a pill form, the most prominent form of this PED is a liquid labeled clenbuterol hydrochloride. This chemical creates an anabolic state in the human body. An anabolic state occurs when fat mass is being destroyed while muscle mass is being created; a process that naturally occurs very rarely (Clarkston and Thompson). There are risks both in the short term and the long term with taking this steroid. Despite the risks involved, clenbuterol is a growing phenomenon in high schools around the United States, especially among athletes.

Throughout high school I played football and I also powerlifted. These sports are the stomping grounds of PED, specifically clen, users. Some of my very best friends were users and on my teams. In fact, most of the powerlifters were football players and vice versa. I went to a large high school and our football team was proportional. The varsity team had upwards of eighty players on the roster and we were all fighting for the twenty-two starting positions. The first level of competition in high school athletics happens within the team itself. In Michigan, there are regulations put into place that prevent teams from practicing all year. The period when there are no practices – the offseason – is when players start competing for positions in the following season. This is also the time when state mandated drug tests are not being conducted. Being a veteran to the weight room, I am no stranger to clenbuterol usage. I have had many friends that abused the offseason to gain this illicit edge on their opponents; both on the team and off. Contrary to popular belief, there is not one particular, all-encompassing steroid that awards athletic dominance. There are a few different types of steroids used by athletes and they all have different effects. One of the more popular effects is referred to as an anabolic effect like the one produced by clenbuterol. An anabolic effect is simple; the shedding of body fat whilst gaining lean body mass at the same time. This is desirable to athletes due to the obvious physical advantages that become prevalent when one is leaner and more muscular compared to their natural counterparts. In 1999, a study conducted by West Virginia University on a Indiana high school revealed that more than six percent of a the varsity football team at that particular high school admitted to taking anabolic steroids (Stilger). Not only that, but the average age of first time use was fourteen, coincidentally the same age that most students are when high school begins (Stilger).

This study provides proof that the pressures of sports drive athletes to take drastic measures in order to improve performance.

Coinciding with the football offseason is powerlifting season. Being a winter sport, powerlifting becomes a good way for players to compete while still developing strength until spring training for the following football season. After that football season, the cycle repeats itself. Powerlifting is not a major sport at most Michigan high schools and my hometown of Grand Blanc's high school is no different. The number of powerlifters remains dwarfed by the small army of football players. This period of time is taken by players to get as big as possible. Players begin serious training regimens, eat an astronomical amount of food, and stay consistent during this time of the year. Lifting as often and as much weight as possible puts a strain on the body that can only be naturally sustained through an outstanding diet (Prather). This reason, coupled with the pressure to perform in the following season, entices athletes to ingest intense chemicals. Football players saw powerlifting in the offseason as a regulated means of training. Training with a coach and other players in a gym that can only be accessed by athletes that are currently in the midst of a season simply provides superior results to training alone or with some friends. Because there were no drug tests during the offseason, clenbuterol usage was rampant.

While I have almost always stayed natural and was inherently strong in high school, some people are not as blessed as I am in that regard. I had a few friends who took PEDs during the offseason when we powerlifted together. At the time I had no idea exactly what they were; simply white pills and clear liquid with a yellow tint. Players would take the liquid into an oral syringe and shoot it into their mouths before training. After the workout, players would take any number of the white pills. The fact that they all had the exact same substances implies that they received it all from the same source. One of my closer friends, who now plays collegiate football at a Division I university, was one of the most infamous abusers on Grand Blanc's campus. His name is Duke and he remains one of my closest friends from back home.

He played middle linebacker for the football team at Grand Blanc. Duke was a star; he led the team in tackles and our entire defense was based around filtering tackles directly to him. He stood at six feet and four inches tall and weighed two hundred and thirty nine pounds during the

offseason of football. I distinctly remember his weight because he was one weight class higher than me during powerlifting meets. His shoulders were broad and his chest protruded like Superman's. In fact, the only thing that protruded more than his chest was his ego. He is easily the most arrogant person that I've ever known. Basically, Duke knew that he was chiseled to be a star on the gridiron. He played middle linebacker for years, all the way back to when we were kids. However, he only recently sprouted to a size that rivaled those that played football for a living in the NFL. He now stands at six feet and five inches and a whopping two hundred and fifty pounds.

He was the first person to offer me "something that will make me as strong as him". I was mildly offended that he thought I needed something unnatural to match him, but in the end, he was right. The edge provided by what he was taking was undeniable. He sat down and explained to me what the yellow-tinted liquid that he and the other players were taking was. He explained it thoroughly and seemed shockingly knowledgeable on the topic. He explained that it was a substance called clenbuterol hydrochloride. Both sale and use are illegal in the United States, yet he seemed to have no trouble getting it. He said that it was the more mild of the two substances that he was taking and that it had an anabolic effect. At the time, I had no idea what that meant. Nevertheless, his constant prodding coupled with the obvious results that the substance provided convinced me. I tried it for one workout.

He loaded up the syringe for me the following day and I shot it to the back of my throat. The taste was dreadful. It tasted like water from a swimming pool, but also had a rubbery taste to it. The effects were almost immediate. My hands shook uncontrollably, my body heated up, and my pupils dilated. I could feel it rush through my bloodstream as my body struggled to adapt to the presence of the substance. My friend then told me that the first time was the worst experience that anyone ever has with "clen". After we were all locked and loaded, my teammates and I hobbled up the stairs to the weight room that our high school maintained. It was an incredibly beautiful gym, with all new equipment that color coordinated to Grand Blanc's trademark black and red. That day was what we all regarded as "bitch day". We addressed it as such because we had two major lifts to work on; the flat bench press and the deadlift. The same friend that gave

me the clenbuterol was my workout partner for that day as we were two of the strongest guys there.

I laid down on the comfortable cushioned bench that are commonplace in weight rooms. The bar that I was to pick up, bring down against my chest, and explode out away from my chest laid above me, supported by the weight rack. As soon as my head touched the bench, a splitting headache erupted from the back of my head around to my temples and then all the way into the bridge of my nose. This migraine-level headache literally had me gasping for breath. Biologically speaking, my body was reacting to a foreign substance entering my blood stream. This reaction is actually what generates the desired anabolic effect (Prather). My eyes felt pressured from behind, as if they were going to be pushed from their sockets. I sat up from the bench and turned to my friend.

“Is it always going to feel like this?” I stammered. “Is it normal if I feel like there is a vice grip around my brain?” I was only half joking. I was not completely joking because that was legitimately what it felt like; a zip tie or a clamp around the meridian of my brain.

“Yeah, that always happens. You get used to it.”

If this was the usual experience of PEDs, I would never be taking another one for as long as I live. They simply are not worth it to me. However, that was not the case to the rest of the team. Their affirmation to use the steroids was primarily fueled by ignorance. My teammates had no idea the side effects of PEDs, especially in the long-term. Clenbuterol has some especially negative effects on athletes. The drug is called a beta-2 agonist (PartyBoy). These types of drugs act on beta-2 adrenergic receptor in humans, causing muscles to relax. After a month of dosages, a noticeable anabolic effect begins to take place among most animals, including humans (PartyBoy). Production of muscle mass in combination with the retardation of fat cells provides both an athletic advantage and an aesthetic ascendancy (PartyBoy). However, there is no drug that acts as a physique’s miracle without repercussions. The side effects for clenbuterol are intense, in both the short and long terms.

In the short term, one side effect of clenbuterol is nausea. Nausea happens when one’s stomach has not adjusted to ingesting substances of such a foreign nature. The queasy sensation is strong and almost immediate. Another prominent side effect is shaking hands along with restless legs.

Having tried clenbuterol hydrochloride, I can honestly attest to this being the most noticeable side effect. It jumps into effect around fifteen minutes after the chemical goes down one's throat. It occurs when the PED flows through one's bloodstream, forcing the heart rate to increase. It feels similar to a very extreme dose of caffeine. The final short term side effect is an absolutely mind-melting headache. There is an extreme feeling of pressure that originates towards the back of one's head, wraps around the temples and into the eye sockets. It feels very similar to a rushing of blood to the brain, coupled with the intense pain of a migraine (Nieminen).

One of the major positives of clenbuterol is the lack of any severe long term side effects. Because athletes only take it while they remain athletes, any effects that it could leave in the long term are basically irrelevant. There have been reports, however, of those who abuse the substance for decades that develop regular heart palpitations ("Clenbuterol Dosage"). The irregularity of the heartbeat in an individual greatly decreases sexual drive as well as athletic performance. For this reason, many people refrain from taking clenbuterol for more than six months at a time. Furthermore, to take further precaution, generally dosages are cycled. A user of the PED would take the clenbuterol for two weeks, then take a week off, then cycle back onto it and repeat the process for six months at a time in extreme cases ("Clenbuterol Dosage").

Clenbuterol has both positive and negative effects. For the high school athlete, it provides an obvious and inherent advantage as far as strength and endurance goes. It also reduces fat content on the body while simultaneously increasing muscle mass, resulting in a much more pleasing appearance. Alongside these positives, clenbuterol also has the short term disadvantages of nausea, restlessness, and headaches. Despite these negatives, PEDs like clenbuterol will remain popular for years to come, especially in young adults if information is not provided at an arm's length for these users. If one could understand the side effects of clenbuterol, there is no way that one would abuse such a substance. The ingesting of PEDs like clenbuterol is simply not worth it.

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Subterfuge

The role that advertising plays in the success of a sportswear company is astronomical. Advertisements are how producers send a message to their consumers. That message, while often layered under extravagant colors, glamorous products and sculpted, athletic models becomes clear after one takes the time to analyze an advertisement. Companies like Nike and Under Armour utilize many techniques in order appeal to the consumer, but a few of those are the most prominent. Advertisements from these sportswear companies use subtleties such as word association and the placement of models in superhuman poses in order to appeal to their consumers: Athletes of all shapes and sizes. This recipe for success is applicable to every demographic of customer; it is simply altered to accommodate each demographically different group of people, all while remaining consistent throughout sportswear advertisements of all types.

To begin, sportswear companies, such as Nike, utilize word association to an extreme degree in their advertisements. This word association technique is referred to as transfer. There is one agreed upon definition of transfer. "Advertising Techniques" defines transfer as "Words and ideas with positive connotations are used to suggest that the positive qualities should be associated with the product and the user." In the case of this advertisement, the word "Greatness" is to be associated with Nike. Demonstrated in figure one, the text on the advertisements is one of the first features that a viewer notices. The text reads, in giant, bold lettering, "GREATNESS LAUGHS IN THE FACE OF GRAVITY." Nike presents the idea that their sportswear will make the wearer great enough to defy gravity, an obvious embellishment. Even without analyzing the advertisement, a rational consumer would not legitimately believe that Nike intends for their equipment to allow a user to defy gravity as such a feat is impossible. This means that the advertisement is not meant to be taken literally; it is simply meant to associate the word "Greatness" with Nike. This word association, referred to as transfer among analysts, is a classic way to appeal to a customer.

At an initial glance on a webpage or outside of a store, these subtleties are lost to the viewer. At a passing glance, the viewer simply sees an athlete who wears Nike and the word "Greatness" plastered across the advertise-

ment. A viewer would be struck by the image and then continue going about their business. That brief moment is all that transfer needs to implant the idea that the Nike gear being worn in the advertisement is what allows one to defy gravity. In fact, according to an article titled "Speed of Processing in the Human Visual System" explains that it takes an extremely small amount of time for humans to process visual information. "The visual processing needed to perform this highly demanding task can be achieved in under 150 milliseconds" (Thorpe, Fize and Marlot 1). Alongside this word association, Nike poses their athletes in exceedingly unrealistic poses.

Nike places the model for this advertisement in a hugely unrealistic pose: A tomahawk slam dunk which happens to be one of the most difficult dunking techniques in all of basketball. It requires an obscene amount of jumping ability, large hands to grip the ball, and enough strength to slam the ball directly into the net. These dunks are uncommon even among professional basketball players, let alone an average athlete. This athlete is portrayed as average as he is playing on a court that has the court lines drawn on with chalk. Also, there is not a net on the rim, which implies that the model is just an average guy, playing on an average outdoor basketball court. Nike poses their model like this in order to place the idea that their brand of equipment can allow one to do this into the mind of a viewer. This pose is also reminiscent of LeBron James, one of the greatest basketball players in today's world, as it is his trademark ability. Despite the obvious reference to a basketball legend, the advertisement remains relatable due to where the model is posed. The setting of the advertisement on a blacktop basketball court places the athlete in an urban and perhaps poverty stricken area. The absence of a net on the rim and the lines on the court being drawn in chalk implies that this player, who also happens to be young and African American, lives in a poor neighborhood. This is where Nike depends on a phenomenon called self-stereotyping. Self-stereotyping is exactly what it sounds like it is: "The self-regulation of people based on what they believe the world perceives them as due to their appearance and/or other factors" (Whitley and Kite 547). The model is placed in this setting in order to appeal to African American males. Northeastern University published a study on racial demographics in sports which revealed "In 1998, more than 77% of Division 1 collegiate basketball players were African American. That number has increased since" (Lapchik 6). This statistic

provides a reason for sportswear companies that manufacture equipment for basketball to advertise using African Americans as they are the primary buyers of the product. This advertisement is meant to show an average and especially relatable person, in order to make them seem as if they are just a regular athlete casually tomahawk slamming a basketball whilst wearing Nike equipment.

Under Armour utilizes the exact same technique in figure two. In this advertisement, Under Armour puts a lacrosse player, clad in Under Armour equipment, front and center. Just below his legs, he has the Under Armour campaign slogan “THE ADVANTAGE IS UNDENIABLE.” The words are placed in this location because according to Brandon Jones, the author of an eBook titled *Web Design Theory*, people view advertisements in a Z-pattern. This means that the first place people look at in an advertisement is the top-left corner. Then, the viewer’s eyes scan horizontally across the top of the ad, diagonally towards the bottom-left corner, and then horizontally again along the bottom of the ad. When viewing this advertisement from Under Armour, the final thing that the potential customer reads is “THE ADVANTAGE IS UNDENIABLE.” This leaves the potential customer with only the word association, or transfer, which remains after reading those words. Finally, these words take on a very positive message within the mind of the customer or viewer. Within the advertisement’s slogan, the words “ADVANTAGE” and “UNDENIABLE” are bolded. They are bolded so that they can be seared into the mind of the viewer, forcing an automatic association with these words that have such an obvious positive connotation.

Under Armour is even guiltier of subliminal promises of a benefit using superhuman poses. In figure two, the lacrosse player is placed in a truly superhuman pose; laying out horizontally in the air. His horizontal, airborne pose in combination with the blue sky resemble a truly superhuman ability: flight. While obviously Under Armour does not intend to advertise that their equipment will allow lacrosse players to fly. They do, however, have every intention of subliminally implanting the idea that their gear will grant a wearer the trademark power of Superman himself. Furthermore, this pose would never actually be necessary in a game of lacrosse. Lacrosse is a full contact sport with violence levels that parallel American football or European rugby. Jumping horizontally, for whatever reason, would leave

the player dangerously exposed to attack from another player. In addition, the only logical use of this pose is the laying out to catch a ball in the pocket of the lacrosse stick. However, this is completely unnecessary due to the length of a lacrosse stick. According to Joe Terzio of MadeMan.com, a highly respected website which publishes many articles about sports and the equipment used in those sports, a stick “must be between fifty two and seventy two inches in length.” Fifty two inches allows a reach long enough to prevent the need to go airborne in the middle of a game. These regulations were put into effect in order to prevent injury; jumping through the air with a large metal pole could very easily result in an accident, especially in a full contact environment.

The Under Armour advertisement places the player outside, on an apparently beautiful day judging by the perfect, blue sky in the background. The limitless expansion of the blue sky gives the viewer an idea of infinity; the sky is the limit if you wear Under Armour according to this advertisement. The model is also Caucasian which is the same race as most lacrosse players in the United States. Bob Cook of Forbes magazine explains “the sport has attracted mostly a white, suburban audience”(1). Attracting a primarily Caucasian player base through their advertisements using a Caucasian model seems fairly obvious.

The most interesting thing about these advertisements is the striking similarities between them, despite an attempt at appealing to completely different demographics. Their similarity is what fuels their remarkability. While these advertisements are obviously stereotyping, they have been proven effective despite that being the case. This is so remarkable because sportswear companies have created a virtual recipe for success when it comes to advertising. These two companies, rivals in a competitive market, are using nearly identical techniques in their advertisements. This is very uncommon, as generally competing companies try and take on a certain niche among consumers. For example, in the business battle between McDonalds and Burger King, McDonalds has taken on a role of nutrition being a higher priority for them as a company. Burger King has put nutrition on the back burner in order to advertise as a fast food restaurant that focuses on taste. This is an example of, generally, how rival companies do business. The remarkability of Nike and Under Armour’s advertising campaign is the striking similarities between the two and that both compa-

nies fill the same niche for two very different types of people. They are both filling the niche of an appealing form of sportswear for their respective demographics.

Advertisements from Nike and Under Armour use word association and the placing of models in superhuman poses in order to achieve success in the advertising department. This never changes to appease a certain breed of customer and is consistent throughout sportswear advertisements of all types. Each and every demographic of customer receives the same treatment, just tweaked to appeal to that individual group of people. Despite any differentials in race, sport, social standing or economic situation, the same techniques are used even among rival companies. This phenomenon is especially uncommon. Their messages can be lost behind their athletic models and elegant design plans, however after analyzing the advertisement their motive becomes clear: to present a viewer with the idea that their product gives them some sort of physical edge over anyone who is not wearing their gear. Advertisements like these play a large role in how we, as consumers, spend our money. The trick is to not allow oneself to be fooled by ridiculous slogans and the heroism of models.

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Figure 1. Nike, *Greatness Laughs in the Face of Gravity* (Nike)



Figure 2. Under Armour, *The Advantage is Undeniable* (Under Armour)

The Iron Never Lies

I was sick of being lied to. I stood up straight, leaned back, and tightened the thick, leather powerlifting belt around my waist. I took a deep breathe, and slowly lowered my hands deep into the public chalk dispensary that the power lifters in my gym used. I stared into the mirror in front of me, closed my eyes, and felt the grittiness of the chalk melt away into a smooth coat around my hands; similar to how a baker's hands may look after baking a fresh loaf of bread. Without opening my eyes, I slowly draped my hands out of the chalk bin and curled them slowly around the cold, iron bar at my feet. The iron never lied. Loaded onto each side of the bar was a forty-five pound plate and a twenty-five pound plate. This was my personal record for my weakest compound lift: The power clean.

I kept my eyes closed and started to think about the lies that I had been told my whole life. "You don't look fat, you look normal!" my mom's voice echoed in my head. I would mutter one simple word to myself in order to combat these falsities.

"Bullshit."

"It all just looks like muscle!" the voice of a close friend of mine, and coincidentally the girl of my dreams, assured me.

"Bullshit."

"You don't need to lose weight"

"Bullshit." My utterances began to grow into statements, and my statements evolved into barbaric yawns. My voiced bounced off the walls in my deserted gym, rebounding off the iron and echoing back into my ears. The iron never lied. With one final "Bullshit!" I cracked my eyes open. In one, swift motion, I jerked my elbows upwards, fired my quadriceps, and pulled the cold, iron bar towards my chin. I felt the burn of my firing quadriceps through my thighs and up into my lower back. Simultaneously, I dropped my hips, cranked my entire body backwards in an almost pelvic thrusting motion, and flipped the direction of my elbows to point directly towards the ground, suddenly beneath the barbell in order to support it at neck level. I stood, triumphant, having successfully pounded a former personal record into the dirt. I had achieved one of my many goals. As I stood there, with the bar pressed into my clavicle muscles and with my wrists rolled directly underneath it, I felt a squirming in my stomach.

How odd it was to feel a sensation around my abdominals after performing a lift that did not involve them in any fundamental way. I realized then that this was not a muscular stir of my abdominals, but an acidic stir of my bowels. I stood straight up, took another deep breath, and out of my mouth spewed a mahogany liquid. Like an uncapped fire hydrant, projectile vomit sprayed out of my mouth with decreasing velocity. As the final few ounces dripped from my lips, I threw the barbell as hard as I could into the ground and rushed toward the nearest drinking fountain. I rinsed my mouth out, grabbed a roll of paper towels out from a paper towel dispenser that was positioned above the fountain, and cleaned up my watery upchuck.

Months before the puking incident, my junior year of high school was coming to a close. My grades were acceptable, I had friends, and I had freedom. However, there was always something that bothered me about my life: my weight. Weighing in at a staggering two hundred and forty one pounds at the measly height of five feet and eight inches, I was beyond aesthetically displeasing. My weight problem had been the root of many of my social and mental issues and truly disrupted my psyche for years. Looking in the mirror with my shirt off forced me to look at my anathematic body, so I refused to do so. I blamed everything on my physical appearance. I always had the intention of making a lifestyle change but I never actually pulled the trigger. I arrogantly told myself things like “that girl only didn’t like me because I’m fat, other than that I’m basically perfect” or “I’m not as fat as I could be.” I would do anything to justify my obesity, yet I was afraid to have my shirt off anywhere outside of the shower. This bitterness with myself was something that I tried to avoid thinking about, let alone talking about. In the final weeks of my junior year, I had become increasingly closer with a girl that I had gone to school with since elementary school: Jennifer. Jennifer and I had a lot in common. Our religious, political, and philosophical views were nearly identical. On top of that, she was beautiful. She was the kind of girl that literally turned heads no matter what she wore or how hard she tried. She and I had become good friends because we shared an algebra class and we started spending time together outside of school. She made me happy and I thought that I did the same for her; in my eyes it was the perfect opportunity to pursue something

more than friendship. One afternoon, sitting in my car, I brought up the idea of going to the movies.

“Just the two of us?” She seemed tentative but agreed, and I decided that I would take it. When the day of reckoning came, I was getting out of the shower when she called me just hours before we agreed to go out.

“Hey Austin, sorry to cancel on you like this, but you just aren’t my type. I don’t like you like that, and I hope we can still be friends.” You just aren’t my type. How could I not be her type with all that we had in common? This was not the first time that I had been rejected and it absolutely shattered me. My already cynical attitude jumped to the next level and in a flash, I had a realization. I had finally seen the light. In that epiphanic moment, it became clear to me what must be done. I hung up the phone. I had been shattered but it was time for reconstruction to begin. I took deep breaths and looked down at my body and for the first time I was not disappointed with it. Instead, I was disgusted with it. I broke my personal taboo and stared at myself in the mirror of my bathroom, in silence. This disgust evolved and eventually, this moment would fuel the weight loss journey that was to come.

Fast forward a few months and my new lifestyle had become routine. I had thrown up after a lift once or twice but aside from that, everything was moving along smoothly. Over exertion is a very common cause for throwing up among athletes. Still, it was difficult to make such a change. Every day I would wake up in the morning, use the restroom, stretch, and weigh myself. I would then have exactly three eggs for breakfast, and start to mentally prepare for my daily workout. This was a huge difference from the years prior in which I would eat anything I wanted and would rarely workout. Exactly which body part would receive my attention and how intense my workout was would depend on the day. I followed a very strict lifting regimen, with an absurd amount of cardio afterward. I was also consuming a dangerously low amount of food. My caloric intake every day was, at most, a thousand calories. A male of my size should consume, at very minimum, around double that to avoid the risk of any long-term effects.

After just a few short months I started to notice physical changes. My stomach and chest fat was starting to become less noticeable and my arms started to become more defined but most prevalent were the changes in my face. Prior to my lifestyle change, my head appeared to sit directly on my

shoulders due to the abundance of fat around my neck. Now, after a few short months, my neck was visible! On top of that, my cheek bones began to peak out from behind the flab and my jawline was more defined.

Around the time senior year began, my progress had started to slow. I had lost forty pounds over the three month summer vacation in between school years. While I was proud of my accomplishment, I was unsatisfied. I had surpassed any goal that I had set for myself but I wanted more. At this point, I was beyond addicted to fitness. I no longer wanted to simply improve upon my below average body. I wanted a body that would make Apollo envious, a body more chiseled than that of the statue of David, and a body that Arnold himself would be proud of. I was no longer just a fat kid that was watching his weight. I had evolved; I had become a body-builder.

With my newly acquired mentality, the gym became my sanctuary. The iron became my bible. I began basing my daily schedule around when I could work out. With all of this training, I was not only leaning out. I was starting to see gains in my physical strength. Despite my smaller size, I had never felt bigger in the gym. The numbers on the plates grew at the same consistent rate that the numbers on the scale fell. The iron never lied. The various lifts that I performed became as second nature as walking or breathing. I began to want to push myself even further; beyond my natural limits. I also pursued strength and energy supplements such as creatine, fat burners or branch-chain amino acids.

“Austin, you know you should not be taking this stuff, not when you are thing young!” my mom once critically acclaimed as I received a new shipment of ephedrine, an illegal drug used for fat burning. I simply ignored her, as she would believe she was correct despite any evidence that I could provide. I told myself that she did not know anything. I did not just choke down pill after pill; I even analyzed my diet beyond caloric intake. I was counting the individual grams of fats, carbohydrates, proteins and fibers that entered my body. I spent hours at a time gazing into a computer screen, reading various articles and trying to educate myself as much as possible on human physiology.

As my senior year began to come to a close, a new goal arose. I wanted to be in the best shape of my life by the time college started. I was planning to attend Grand Valley State University and I wanted to improve my

overall quality of life so that when I arrived at the university I would be a generally happier person. Senior year ended, and my life continued to revolve around the gym. Walking into the gym, lying down on a bench or picking up some dumbbells, and pushing myself to my physical limit produced a euphoric feeling like none I had ever felt before. I was no longer just trying to prove myself to my peers. Not to Jennifer, not to my friends, and not to my parents. The pursuit of bodily perfection was the driving force behind every decision I made, in and out of the gym. I would even bring a food scale to restaurants and measure everything I ate and track it all in an online food diary.

A lot of my friends did not agree with, let alone partake, in my new lifestyle. Prior to my compulsive behavior, a few friends of mine and I had a tradition of going to a local Big Boy and getting pancakes on Fridays. We went only one time throughout the entire final summer of my transformation and we were planning on seeing a movie afterward. When we arrived at the Big Boy, we were seated and then we all placed our usual orders. I received some peculiar looks.

“You’re going to eat like a normal person all of a sudden?” one of my buddies questioned me. My only responses were a grin and the raise of an eyebrow as I turned to open my backpack, pull out a food scale that measured the mass of whatever was placed on top of it, and plop it onto the table. When our food came, I cut up my pancakes and layered them onto the scale, portioning out the correct amount.

The looks that I received while ordering the pancakes were ordinary compared to the ones that I got while measuring them. “Really, Austin, I don’t even understand why you worry so much, you look great man!” one of my friends assured me. Another lie. While it was a lie with good intentions, it was a lie nonetheless and I despised that some of my closest friends felt the need to lie to me. Before going to the movie theatre afterward, I did extra research on exactly what the nutrition was in the popcorn at the theatre in order to find out if I could eat any and if so, how much I could eat. Obsession is a term that is thrown around a lot, but in this instance, I was beyond obsessed with my appearance and my health.

College started a few months later and I had achieved my goal. On August 19th, 2013 I looked at myself in the mirror and for the first time I was satisfied. Just for one brief moment I felt as if I had actually accom-

plished something. I was standing in my bathroom, staring at the new one hundred and sixty eight pound version of myself. I had managed to lose almost thirty three percent of my prior self over the past fifteen months which computed to be just shy of eighty pounds. This victory was sweet. The only feeling that is better than achieving a goal is to be satisfied with that achievement. Discovering that I was two-thirds my former size was a surreal realization. I had done something great. Not only was there a clear physical improvement, but there were improvements in my personality and mentality. No longer was I the cynical, hateful, and depressed Austin. My new outlook on life was to be as positive an influence on those around me as I could possibly be. I wanted to be as helpful as possible, and I attribute my new outlook on life to my new physical appearance. It is almost as if I have become a postmaterialist with my own body. Now that I do not have to worry as much about my appearance I can focus on everything else that enriches life, such as laughter and love.

While my appearance has always been a struggle for me, it is not really a winnable battle. No matter how much progress I make, there is always more to be made. While I am proud of what I have done, I am never permanently satisfied. Even today I try and improve upon myself physically as a way to improve upon my relationships and mentality. I have evolved beyond what I was all those months ago. Despite all of the changes I have gone through, one idea has remained constant: I hate to be lied to. I skeptically accept any compliments and any insults that I receive and I do anything that I can do in order to not let either get to my head. Behind the front of a bodybuilding perfectionist that I put up, the fat kid inside me has never died. I find myself running run from my past, towards what looks like the light at the end of the tunnel. In actuality, the tunnel that I sprint through has no end. I understand this fundamental truth, but I continue to tell myself that I can reach the tunnel's exit. There has been one continuing truth in all of the shift and change that has gone on in my life. Whether the fat would not budge and I was depressed or it was melting away and I was happy; the iron never lied. I stare into the mirror and justify my appearance to no one but myself. The iron has never given me false hope. The iron is as cold as it is relenting, and it pushes me to be better than I am.

Good Writing Around Campus

The main purpose of the first-year writing requirement is to prepare students for the academic and professional writing they will do after their freshman year. In this section, we highlight some quality writing completed in classes beyond WRT 150. By examining some of the other pieces that were written outside of WRT 150, you will observe a wider variety of topics, styles, and forms.

The following section contains pieces written by students in GVSU courses, some of which required WRT 150 as a prerequisite. **Krissy Thomas** composed “Here Comes the Sun” in “Story Making” (COM 215) under the guidance of her professor, Robin Spring. **Marc Plooster** wrote “Critical Summary of Case Study I” in Professor Gordon Alderink’s course “Literary Explorations of Medical Controversies” (HNR 312). **Kurt Willert** created “Effect of Exercise, Detraining, and Aging on Muscle Fiber Adaptations” in Professor Steve Glass’ course “Professionalism in Exercise Science” (MOV 495).

As you read, think about the form and content of each piece. How do the writers organize, develop, and support their essays? How have these writers learned to manipulate purpose and focus to convey information in an informative and meaningful way to their academic audience?

Krissy Thomas

COM 215

Here Comes the Sun

I'm glad that I was fifteen when Uncle Wes stayed with us. If I was any older, the whole experience would have been entirely different. Instead of intently listening to his elaborate conspiracy theories about how our cell phones are killing us or how honey is hands down the healthiest food we can consume, I would have argued to no end with him and our relationship probably would've turned sour very quickly. Good thing I was fifteen.

The day he came to stay is forever lodged in my memory. Beth and I were coming home from school, her typical careless driving in the old, reliable Chevy Malibu without a muffler. As we approached our usual parking spot on the street, we saw it. There it was; the sky blue 1980's rusty Van. One side mirror missing, bugs and dirt caked on the windshield, it probably would have been cool if it was one of those old Volkswagen hippie buses, but it wasn't, it was a knock off at best and it was the one car I would never be caught dead in.

We strode into the house, tossing our backpacks on the floor, throwing our coats on the stairs and prepared for our typical afternoon of eating chips and salsa and watching Gilmore Girls when Dad came bustling over from the kitchen, followed by none other than Uncle Wes. His dark California tan emphasizing his graying hair, alluding to more graying hair on his chest that peeked out from his unbuttoned Tommy Bahama linen shirt, paired with dirty faded jeans and alas, the worst of it all, the smell, that eye-watering, vomit-inducing smell was escaping from his bare feet tapping on the hardwood floor. Trying to mask our discomfort, Beth and I entertained his stories from life in Cali for what seemed like hours.

His vagabond lifestyle was very interesting to hear about at my age because prior to my Uncle, I had never known that there were people who lived their lives, bouncing from place to place, job to job, lover to lover, drug to drug, van to van. I was intrigued by him and his unusual lifestyle. He came back home to Michigan after living in Orange County for years, for many reasons he claimed, but we all knew it was because he had run out of money and prospects and decided to free-load on the next empathetic family member. We sat there at the kitchen table listening to him

spew his conspiracy theories with such passion that I couldn't help but to get into them and, admittedly, believe him.

He stayed for nine months. In our basement, the rusting van remained parked in front of our house, a permanent eye sore. During that time of his stay, we tried to get him to look less like a homeless person by buying him some normal clothes well-suited to Michigan weather and even hinted at the repulsive smell of his feet by giving him all sorts of soaps and deep cleaners; did Mom bleach his flip flops? I can't remember. I don't even think that he noticed the smell, or how we all shrieked when he put his feet on the coffee table. But, he wouldn't accept any of these clothes and hints; he remained basking in his own California reject lifestyle, stubborn as a mule.

We got used to him, eventually. It was a lesson for all of us, to go to college and get a degree and make money, and not end up relying on family to help you. Although he eventually moved on to another get-rich quick venture, we remained in contact with him, eager to hear how he has been getting by.

That was ten years ago. And strangely enough, as I sat on the cold linoleum floor of my kitchen, newly laid off and newly dumped, tears creating black streaks down my face, I thought of him. It had been years since I last spoke with my Uncle Wes and in my fragile state, I tried not to overthink, and decided I might as well just go with this unexplainable urge to call him. I peeled myself off of the floor and thumbed through the stacks of old mail I had crammed in a kitchen drawer. I opened the handwritten letter with the Hawaiian return address and quickly scanned through the update that I had barely read months ago when I first received it. Near the bottom was a phone number scrawled in his trademark penmanship that my dad and I also shared. Without any thought, I dialed the number and waited for an answer. I walked over to the window and looked at the perfect view of the Chicago skyline from my high-rise apartment that I had paid so much for. Rain pelted the glass, sending a shiver down my spine, weather always seemed to emulate my mood, both a blessing and a curse.

A familiar "yello" interrupted the ringing with another "yello" following when I didn't reply, more annoyed this time. I scrambled for words, "Hello, Hi. Uncle Wes, it's me, Celia", dried tears and mascara covering my face made it hard to talk. The typical small talk ensued as we caught each other

up on our lives. Uncle Wes was never the type of person to feel comfortable on the phone with or even converse with in person, but somehow, today, possibly a result of my altered state; he was especially bubbly and personable. He invited my questions of his life in the beautiful Oahu with lavish descriptions of the scenery, his friends and his latest attempt at surfing. I had never heard him so animated, so... together.

He urged me to come visit, selling the lifestyle like he used to sell his theories to me. I brushed his offer off, like I do to every opportunity that ever comes my way, afraid of anything out of my comfort zone. Voices in the background distracted him from the phone and we finished up our conversation, promising to speak again soon.

I was alone once again, finally having to confront the series of unfortunate events that had just hit me like a train all in a day's time. It had been a lingering fear that the travel agency I had worked tirelessly at for two years would soon become obsolete, but I had no idea it would be as soon as it was. Apparently Andrea had known for weeks that we were going to have to close our operation but didn't have the heart to tell me, not even on any of our drunken nights at the pub with the new interns. So, I was now out of a job and friends to bar crawl with and now Jason. However, with Jason, I saw it coming, we both knew that things hadn't been the same with us for a while, we fell out of love with each other and got too comfortable, forgetting who we were without the other, which I never even knew was possible. The break up was mutual for the most part, both of us needing time to find ourselves, whatever that means.

It was only after a few days of wallowing that I realized how much of a mess I actually was. I woke up at two in the afternoon on a Tuesday, Chinese food containers littering the floor, making a perfect circle around my bed, my TV blaring of an episode of the Real Housewives of New Jersey and my phone buried amidst my blankets with five missed calls from my mother. I had given myself an excuse to be the world's most worthless human being, for I had just been through an emotional trauma, losing everything in a matter of a day. But I hit my low when I paid for my sweet and sour chicken with the change I had found in the coach cushions. I got a whiff of myself and tried to remember the last time I had taken a shower, which meant I was probably due for one. In a strange and haunting way, I felt like Uncle Wes, I had hit my low, just as he did when he came to stay

with us all those years ago. Lost and confused, unsure of the future, alone, an emotional wreck, un-showered. That was me now.

After the shower, I immediately felt better, cleaned the apartment and went outside, the fresh air like a cigarette to a former addict. I wandered around the city for what seemed like hours, letting the Chicago wind blow me in any direction it chose. It wafted to me to small pizza joint that I had never been to and the fresh baked smell drew me in. I was about to order my go to meat lovers slice when a young boy pulled out the most beautifully crafted pizza pie I had ever seen, cheese melting down the sides, huge chunks of pineapple glistening in the grease and flecks of bacon causing my mouth to water. I pointed, "I'll have that." The matronly woman at the register smiled, "Ah, the Hawaiian, our most popular slice." And rightly so, every bite was a new and delicious flavor and I quickly started to think that I had been eating cardboard in the years prior. I sat at the counter, licking my fingers, trying to keep the taste in my mouth as long as I could as the register woman approached me, "Did you enjoy it?"

"That might have been the best thing I have eaten in my entire life," and I was not exaggerating.

"I'm glad. I use the same recipe from my father's bar in Oahu, a local favorite," she spoke calmly.

On my walk home, I let the smell of that culinary awakening linger in my nostrils. Oahu. Weird, I thought of the Theory of twos. I rushed home and dialed the most recent number in the outbox of my phone. He answered after a few rings while I paced across the room. "Does your offer still stand?" I probed. I attributed my newest life changing decision to be from that \$2 slice of heaven.

The drone of the airplane was monotonous enough to put me to sleep, drifting off for the bulk of the flight and occasionally waking up leaning on the shoulder of the large, khaki-clad woman next to me, she didn't seem to mind. When I was awake, my thoughts were blurry and uncoordinated, this was not like me. I booked a ticket and packed within a matter of hours. Who does that? I worried that this could go horribly wrong and as soon as I get there I will want to go back home to my days that turned to nights in from the drone of the TV, at least San Tung Chinese House had my order on record. I tried to shake these doubts from my head and gave my full effort to give this rash, irresponsible decision a chance.

The smooth, masculine voice of the pilot came on the intercom, “Ladies and gentleman, we are now preparing for landing in the lovely Oahu where it is a cool 86 degrees. We hope you enjoyed your flight and thank you for flying Delta.” I began to panic. What was I doing? I am in no state, physically or emotionally to embark on an adventure in a place I’ve never been with my crazy Uncle. But, there was no turning back now. Sweating, I lugged my carry-on through the tunnel after getting off of the plane, and with each step into the airport a piece of the old me fell away. The large, tattooed Hawaiian guard at the end of the gate smiled and welcomed me to Oahu and gently placed a lei around my neck, his gut wiggling as he laughed at my uncomfortable expression.

I slowly made my way through the airport, seeing families and lovers being reunited everywhere I looked, tears, laughter, embraces, kisses, screaming. My instinct was to smile at the joy of others but I couldn’t help but wish it was me that was being wrapped in the arms of another. I neared the end of the way and as I tentatively approached the doors, I could already feel the sun warming my soul. As I stepped outside, the air immediately filled my lungs as I closed my eyes and felt the glow of my pasty skin in the light. I stood there for longer than what was necessary, attempting to bottle this feeling for later use, a car honked at me and I quickly snapped out of it, realizing I was standing in the middle of the road, luggage strewn around me, smiling and holding out my hands to the sky like a person who had just been freed from a twenty year sentence.

Collecting myself, I hopped in a cab and made my way the hotel that the travel agency could only give me a 5% discount on. I was aware that I looked like the biggest tourist Hawaii had ever seen, rolling the windows down of the air-conditioned cab, snapping pictures, sporting my lei and oversized straw hat. We arrived at the hotel and a bellman helped me carry my seemingly unnecessary amount of luggage inside. Immediately greeted with the laid back, comfortable, relaxed nature of the island, I checked into my room and began my search for Uncle Wes.

When we spoke he gave me an address of a surf shop/café that he would be at but no other way to contact him, he likes life off of the grid. With instructions from the concierge, I casually made my way over to the beach and may or may not have gotten a little lost on a trail through the forest that Linda at the front desk advised me to take for an extra dose of beau-

teous scenery. I did not panic, however, all was well with my soul, and I was completely at peace with where I was and let the sound of the ocean lead me. As cliché as it was, I embraced with full force the carefree island attitude that I picked up on my hour of being here. Trudging through the greenery, stopping to observe the vibrant colors of the flowers and plants that surrounded me, I confirmed that this must be paradise.

The surf shop/café was exactly how I had pictured it. A shack on the beach, a wooden sign reading “Surf and Sip” in that crooked handwriting I recognized as his hanging on the roof, screen door propped open and the smell of coconut and weed seeping through the wooden planks and I entered. Surf boards of all colors lined the walls of the small shack, shelves with waxes and straps accompanying them. Next to the front counter was a shelf filled with teas and coffees with no labels. A few wooden tables and chairs were scattered around the tight space. A few people reading magazines or newspapers sat silently, sipping from porcelain mugs. The wall opposite the surf boards was covered with vinyl’s of Bob Marley, Zeppelin, Grateful Dead, and of course The Beatles, my Uncle’s favorites. And there he was behind the counter, laughing with a patron as he poured him coffee, my Uncle Wes. The same one I had always known, but this time his face looked brighter, no more dark circles, he looked fit, not skin and bones like he used to be. His long white hair pulled back in a ponytail, his trademark unbuttoned linen shirt, and a shark-tooth necklace dangling over his white chest hair. As I caught his eye, a smile stretched across his face, revealing his coffee stained, yellowing teeth. He rushed over to me and exclaimed, “You made it!” reaching out his arms looking for an embrace, completely out of character of the socially awkward Uncle I used to know.

He served me a cup of coffee as we sat on the porch, our gazes drawn to the calm of the ocean waves. I told him how little thought I had put into coming here and how completely liberating it feels to do something on such a careless whim. He sympathized with me when I told him about hitting my low. He assured me I had come to the right place to heal my soul.

Right there on the rickety porch of the front of the surf shop, our feet in the sand, as costumers went in and out, he opened up to me with an a pure honesty and trust that I never thought was possible. The low that inspired him to pack up the life that he had left was far worse than I previously thought. He was in Orange County, living in his van, no money expect

for the twenty dollars in his pocket, recently fired from his latest temp job for being late five days in a row. He had spent the rest of his money on his latest addiction, heroin. He laid in the back of the van, coming down from a high when he heard yelling outside, getting closer and closer. Soon the walls of his van began to shake and he made out the voice of his latest dealer as he remembered he hadn't yet paid for his last supply. He knew this was it, this was the end. He cried as he opened the van doors and soon met the fists of several brooding men. He later came to on the curb with nothing but the clothes on his back.

His van and livelihood stripped from him, he claimed he had a moment of clarity and took this horrific event as a sign to get his life together. On one of his temp jobs at a construction company he built up a rapport with a Hawaiian man who was in Orange County to meet up with his woman, but when that fell through and she stole all of his money, he needed to work at this temp job to get enough money for a plane ticket back to his home. Adam was an older man who served as a sort of mentor to Wes and always tried to persuade him to come with him to Oahu, but with Wes being as stubborn as he is, the "I'll do it my way" attitude he could never shake, he always declined the offer. But now, with nothing left, and a thirst to start new, he rushed to the nearest pay-phone and called the temp agency to find Adam's phone number. After ample convincing, he finally connected the call with Adam and felt as small and insignificant as he ever had while asking Adam if he could buy him a plane ticket to come see him.

He lived with Adam and his daughter for a few months in Oahu, working for Adam's Taxi Company before he could afford a place of his own. He had saved enough money cab driving in those months to buy a broken down shack and fix it up into his own surf shop. Adam fronted him some capital to help get him started, he saw a certain strength in Wes, a man that would not give up. He attended the several business conferences at the hotels in the area, gaining knowledge and contacts to help better his business. Wes was always good with people, able to relate to anyone, a trait I had always hoped I would attain from him. And now as a successful business owner in Oahu, Wes had paid back all his debts, including those to Adam and to my father and Aunt from years before.

After being let in to the deepest part of Uncle Wes' heart, I felt incredibly remorseful for all the times I had written him off as a crazy black sheep

in the family. This was a man that turned his entire life around in a matter of months and was now owned one of the most popular surf shops in Oahu. The skeptic in me wondered how a man with a Hunter S. Thompson-esque past could now be completely at peace with himself. I was reassured when he shared how he felt content with himself for the first time in his sixty-five years of living and felt that he could finally stop wandering. He was at his ultimate high, clean for over a year. Does this place really heal your soul?

I spent the next several days at the surf shop with Uncle Wes. Our time together was filled with stories, mostly Uncle Wes', some of them from his past that I was obligated to question their validity. He claimed to have done a few lines with Keith Richards during his time backpacking in Barcelona and 'shagged' Joni Mitchell at a party in L.A before he even turned twenty. The sheer openness he had with me led me to believe he needed someone to talk to and share what he had bottled up all these years and hell, I needed someone, period. The stories of my Uncle, this washed up hippie, was exactly what I needed to feel alive.

After he closed up the store one night, he took me to a small diner in walking distance from the surf shop, one that he frequented often. As soon as we walked in, Wes was immediately greeted by what felt like everyone in the restaurant, getting a hug from one of the waitresses and a handshake from a fellow patron. We sat at the bar and he ordered Mai-Tai's for us as we toasted to a fresh start. It was the strangest feeling to feel so at home, thousands of miles away, in a hole in the wall diner with complete strangers. The whole night was a testament to my newfound independence that I felt, my worries and stressors were out of sight and all I cared about was my new sun-kissed tan and the pineapple slice in my drink.

The night progressed and the place was bustling with people and Mai-Tai's were flowing. Everyone was sharing stories and reminiscing on the other night when Uncle Wes got really drunk and went fishing with so and so. I have never laughed so much in my life. Being the niece of the island's favorite new-comer, I was singled out several times. These people genuinely cared about Uncle Wes and in turn, they cared about me as well, they wanted to know me, the deepest part of me. They accepted me without even knowing me, something I had never experienced before. I stumbled

back to the hotel; breathing the fresh coconut scented air and feeling the dew begin to settle on the grass with my bare feet. This was pure bliss.

Time goes by fast in paradise. It had already been a month since I had been there and I was sucked in to living the island life. I spent some days hiking the trails and mountains alone with my thoughts and in touch with nature, impossible to do in the city of Chicago. And the rest of my days with Uncle Wes who showed me the heart of the city, where the people were real with the same sorrows and troubles anyone else had, contrary to the popular belief that everything in Hawaii had to be paradise. I even got connected in the hotel helping to plan wedding ceremonies that were performed on their property, and actually got paid to do such a rewarding job. I made friends with the locals that knew Uncle Wes and even caught the attention of a local fisherman with a shark tattoo on his tan and muscular bicep. Needless to say, I was living the dream. I was learning about myself, slowly peeling away the layers of my soul that I had created, all with the help of my Uncle.

Some days at the Surf and Sip, Uncle Wes would be uncharacteristically quiet, mostly sitting, weak, and claiming he was just tired. Sometimes he would call me and ask if I could open up shop for the day, saying he just needed a mental health day. I knew he was sick, he was a horrible liar.

Then, one Sunday morning when he wasn't answering my phone calls and I rushed over to his apartment, finding him unconscious on his bed. I immediately called an ambulance and waited next to him, sobbing.

Hours and twelve People magazines later, the doctor calmly informed me that Uncle Wes was in the clinical latency stage of the HIV infection. He explained to me that it was somewhat common for men of his age and history to develop AIDS and it go unnoticed for months or even years. He told me he was in a critical condition since he went so long without any treatment and that there is only a small chance he would come through. The doctor left me in the cold, sterile room to process this startling news, with only the comfort of the knowing looks given to me by the receptionist. I sat there motionless trying to process what had just transpired so quickly, my entire world was upside down and even the new and improved me didn't know how to deal with it.

He was only in the hospital for three more days until they let him go back to his apartment, as requested, to live out the rest of his life with a

nurse to check on him and administer medication to ease the pain. What a funny feeling it must be to know that your days on earth would soon be over. I spent every minute with him, most of them silent but sometimes he would give me advice or try to make a joke of the situation, that trait definitely ran in the family. The last day I was with him, I took him to the ocean and we sat on the cold hard sand as he smiled and gazed out into the horizon. He looked at me with those steel blue eyes, and calmly said, “Celia, I don’t know what’s next for you, but I want you to always remember that life only begins at the end of your comfort zone. Let go of your past and move on to something new, there are far better things ahead.” He smiled and hugged me as I wiped tears from my eyes and we sat in silence watching the sunset for the last time.

The next morning, the phone rang early and with a pang in my heart I already knew what it meant. The nurse tearfully informed me that he was gone and I thanked her for her help and hung up the phone. The loss of my Uncle Wes left a gaping hole in my heart and I found myself in pieces on my hotel floor, wishing I would’ve written down everything that man had ever said, selfishly, just so I could read it over and over in order to feel alive again. I was tempted to spend the next few days wallowing, figuring I had good reason for it, once again, but there was something different about me, a new feeling, and it was impossible for me to sit in my hotel room, with closed curtains, hiding the artistic mix of oranges and pinks of the sunrise and feel sorry for myself.

Alone in the surf shop, I was surrounded by his memory. Trying to shake the incredible emptiness I felt as a result from the lifeless shop, there was a peculiar feeling of comfort that accompanied it. The glint of the sun coming up through the windows reflected on a glossy picture near the Zepelin record. It was a polaroid of Uncle Wes and I in front of the surf shop, arms around each other, his sunglasses on top of his head, eyes closed and laughing with his hands motioning the Hawaiian symbol of “hang loose”, my flowered sundress was blowing in the wind with my hand clutching the top of my straw hat, my laughter matching his. I remembered that day so clearly in my memory and in the haze of all of this sadness and loss, I felt completely and utterly happy. My heart was so full, it was brimming over the top, my body was numb but I could feel everything at the same time, a totally new emotion.

I began the process of opening up the shop, turned on the record player and as Cat Steven's crooned, "Oh baby, baby, it's a wild world," I smiled and swayed and brewed the coffee and waxed the boards. I felt Uncle Wes in everything I did, his soft tone guiding my actions. I couldn't help but wish I could've thanked him for giving me this fresh breath of life that I was consciously taking in. The glow of the sun lit up the entire room as it rose and I soon felt its warmth cloak my tanned skin. The hope that Uncle Wes always spoke of was now obvious and on this island, I could see it all around me. Sometimes it takes looking at the life of another to see your own for the first time.

Critical Summary of Case Study I

Using the basis of problem-based learning by taking a case and closely examining the facts, the issues to learning, and the ethical issues at hand, the best hypothesis can be proposed. In the case presented before us, we are faced with a medical ethical concern and a viable solution is needed. As an ethics board, we strive to make the best decisions, taking into consideration as many positions as possible. Still, we understand not every voice is satisfactorily heard. We regret that some voices take a larger position in decision making, but we do not discourage involvement in future cases.

To begin with, this ethics board started with listing the key facts. The patient, known as "D," suffers from Sotos Syndrome, also known as cerebral gigantism. As is the case with Sotos, children grow at a faster rate than others in their same age range. This includes reaching milestones faster than what would otherwise be expected. As the age of ten, D reached puberty as a result of her condition. Additionally, Sotos often results in mental delays among patients. However, D has a normal intelligence range, performs relatively well in school, and the understanding of a nine- to nine-and-a-half-year-old. Sotos can cause epilepsy, and D has presented symptoms of epilepsy. Physical characteristics of the syndrome include large hands, feet, and skull. Poor coordination and endocrine problems are also common among patients, but the severity and exact physical symptoms D is presenting is not known to this ethics board.

Family life for D is less than ideal in 1975 England. Two sisters and D are left to the care of their mother, a part-time cleaner, who became a widow four years earlier in 1971. The one description of family life presented to us portrays D sleeping with her mother in one bed, and though they live in a two bedroom house, it has no toilet. Two years ago D was transferred to a school specializing in children's behavioral problems, and D has made progress academically and behaviorally following the move. Given the accelerated sexual development in D, the mother feared her daughter would be seduced and become pregnant. The mother's fears were heightened by the prospect of having to take care of her daughter's child who would likewise have Sotos. The mother did not feel D could improve to a point where she

would be capable of independently taking care of a child. It is reported D does not have any interest in the opposite sex and there were few instances where D was without adult supervision.

Two doctors are working on the case: Dr. Ronal Gordon, pediatrician and Dr. Sheila Duncan, gynecologist. Dr. Gordon fears that a child, should D become pregnant, may present with Sotos Syndrome, or the epilepsy could case D to harm a child. Like the mother, Dr. Gordon did not feel D would improve to a point where she would able to take care of herself or any children she might have. Dr. Duncan and Dr. Gordon maintained they should be the sole judges of whether D should be allowed biologically to have children.

The above argument provided by the medial doctors relies heavily on their practical experience as doctors. This can either be understood as an argument under natural law, or a pragmatic approach to ethics. If it is to be understood as an argument based on pragmatic ethics, which I suggest here, it would likely be founded on the pragmatic tradition of scientific understanding of the world. In this scientific approach, it is widely held by pragmatics such as C.S. Peirce, William James, C.I. Lewis and W.V.O. Quine, to name a few, what is true is what is useful. Especially William James relies on the verifiability of an idea, which is understood as what is useful to the user (James 1907). Peirce has something similar, yet distinct, when it comes to the idea of truth. For Peirce, truth is about what is defensible in a public debate. Until the truth is disproven or no longer accepted among a community of thinkers, it should be accepted and used to form habits of action (Peirce 1877). While much has been written on the subject of pragmatic thinkers, this has been a brief view. What I suggest to say for the arguments of the doctors is that whether they realize or not, a pragmatic ethics argument uses the scientific process to come to a conclusion which is in turn justified and affirmed by the greater community.

Additionally, Dr. Gordon held one goal of medicine is “to ‘reduce’ the incidence of congenital malformation” comparing the operation to some forms of selective abortion (Lewis 2012). In their judgment, the doctors recommended a non-therapeutic sterilization operation, to which the mother granted consent. However, Dr. Gordon asked the mother to openly discuss the procedure with her daughter.

Before the operation could precede, the education psychologist at D school, Mrs. Margaret Dubberley, strongly opposed the operation and fought to make the girl a ward of the court. The court agreed and assumed medical custody of the child and postponed the operation. The headmaster at D school felt the doctors should not quickly assume the prospect of the girl's ability to learn and become a productive member of society. The headmaster and education psychologist were further supported by the National Council of Civil Liberties and a movement in the House of Commons opposing the operation.

To arrive at the best outcome possible in the case presented before this ethics board, additional materials have been brought in hopefully answering some issues to learning. For the purposes of this discussion, a special emphasis is placed on the factor of epilepsy. Recent studies have concluded that there is no statistical significance difference of postpartum depression in mother with epilepsy and without epilepsy (Turner 2006, 295). If the doctors feel D's epilepsy could cause D to hurt her child, it would not be a result from an increased likelihood of depression due to her epilepsy. While studies dating from 1963 show a two- to sevenfold increase in the likelihood of congenital abnormalities in pregnant woman taking antiepileptic drugs, the study also indicated seizures during pregnancy did not significantly affect the incidence of malformations (Oguni 2004, 37-38). Additionally, it should be noted that the effect of oral contraceptives may be reduced by the available antiepileptic drugs available in 1975, though progress has since been achieved through the development of drugs such as benzodiazepine (39).

The ethical issues at hand are represented by a number of actors within the case. The most pressing ethical issues are that of the autonomy of D and her reproductive rights. One set of arguments can be based on international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UDHR gives protections to the family and to men and women who are entitled to found a family. While not explicitly stated that women have the right to found a family outside of wedlock (i.e. reproductive rights), the UDHR also states that motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance regardless of the marital status of the mother. While the ideas encapsulated in UDHR do not have great influence on domestic laws, this case takes place in the United Kingdom and likely means that the

principles espoused in international law are respected in the common law system of the country. Evidence presented during the case giving ward to the court for medical attention to D revealed she would likely understand by her eighteenth birthday the implication of a sterilization procedure on herself. Furthermore, the judge presiding over the ward case, Mrs. Justice Heilbron, spoke of the basic human right of a woman to reproduce confirming the commitment of the UDHR and the common law system in the United Kingdom to the rights of woman and mothers (Legal Correspondent 1975, 776).

Other ethical issues are brought up by other participants in the case. Dr. Gordon feels doctors have a duty from medicine and society to reduce the incidence of congenital malformation. The duty in this case would be partially based on a Hippocratic Oath to the unborn, but a better justification of such a duty would come from a precaution stance. In this way, the doctors are trying to be as completely precautionary in their treatment of D. Rather than eliminating the risks that the doctors and D's mother feel are assumed by having D remain fertile, the best practice would be to remove any possibility. However, this does not take into consideration the rights of D as a woman or as child with potential dreams of having children.

Additionally, little consideration is spent disputing alternatives to sterilization. The mother also brings up an ethical issue when discussing her role as a grandparent. In this way, the mother uses a utility argument thinking about how a grandchild would reduce her own happiness and would likely result in lower happiness for a child of D's. However, I do not know if the happiness of the mother and any, yet unborn, child outweigh the happiness of D to even have the continued opportunity to have a child. Another question to ask the doctors is what grounds give foundation to the mother's fears given she or another adult is always present with D. If her fear is that D could be easily seduced, how is the mother basing her judgment of not sterilizing her other daughters with respect for their likelihood of being seduced? Finally, society presents an ethical issue. As health care is universally funded by the state, what duty does society have in helping raise another child? Is the cost of performing an operation to sterilize D an unnecessary cost? It seems as though evidence suggest D will continue to grow intellectually, and society should question the necessity of the procedure. Addi-

tionally, with the constant accompaniment of an adult, how could society justify a procedure to make the promiscuity of D irrelevant is beyond me.

The hypothesis of this ethical panel is to wait on performing the procedure. Rather, as long as interest in the opposite sex does not prevent adults from keeping a close eye on D, there is no need to perform any operation. Even providing D with contraceptives is not necessary at this time given D does not present any indication that she is or will shortly become sexually active. Treating with antiepileptic drugs is the best option for D at this time, and if she were to somehow become pregnant, stopping the medication would be highly recommended. If the procedure were to occur at some point in her life, D would have to present signs that she is not going to conceptualize ideas of motherhood and does not have the capability to take care of herself and/or a child. Until that point, all irreversible procedure should be stalled until changes in the condition of D are well documented by a number of professionals including doctors, educators, and psychologists.

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Kurt Willert

MOV 495

Effect of Exercise, Detraining, and Aging on Muscle Fiber Adaptations

This literature review will focus on muscle fiber types specifically and how exercise, detraining, and aging, may affect, improve, or change the behaviors of these fibers. Muscular adaptations of muscle fibers on a cellular level will be examined.

Introduction- Muscle Fiber subtypes

Human skeletal muscle is composed of a heterogeneous mixture of fibers and represents about 40% of tissue mass in a healthy human body (Ohlndieck, 2010). A review of literature done by Simoneau and Bouchard (1995) concluded that about 40% of the phenotype variance is influenced by environmental factors, whereas about 45% is associated with inherited factors. Simoneau & Bouchard indicated that muscle fiber types are more genetically inherited but may also be adapted due to environmental influences. These fibers can be categorized into two main types, which include Type I (Slow Twitch, MHC I), and type II (Fast Twitch, MHC II), although many different subtypes and hybrid fibers exist (Ohlndieck, 2010). Type II fibers can further be broken down into two subtypes known as type IIA and type IIB, as well as hybrid fibers known as type IIAB. Staining of muscle fibers have also revealed other potential subtypes of fibers which may include types IC, IIC, IIAC, and IIAB which exhibit intermediate characteristics of each subtype (Scott et al., 2001). Staining techniques done by Campos et al. (2002) has also found possibly up to 6 types of fibers based on their staining intensities (I, IC, IIC, IIA, IIAB, and IIB). More on this study of staining is discussed in the next sections to help identify fiber types and shifts of fiber phenotypes. On a cellular level, type I fibers are often classified as “red fibers” which are slow twitch fibers because of the high oxidative capacities, myoglobin content, and its fatigue resistant characteristics (Arendt, 1985). More specifically, these slow twitch fibers are metabolically adapted for oxidative work and have a higher concentration of enzymes involved in aerobic metabolism (Arendt, 1985). Type II fibers are known as “white fibers” because of the lack of myoglobin, and these fibers have developed an anaerobic system with high concentrations of enzymes involved in glycogen metabolism (Arendt, 1985). The charac-

teristics of type II fibers suggest they are best adapted for short duration, high intensity activities with the ability to store their own energy within the muscle in the form of glycogen. The difference between type IIA and IIB is the variance of contraction force and speed where type IIB are even more adapted for quicker contractions than IIA. Conversely, type I fibers are best adapted for slow firing, longer contractions due to their high oxidative properties. The order of fiber types based on firing rates and speed from slowest to fastest can be categorized in the direction (I => IIA => IIB => IIB).

The nervous system, and more specifically neurons and neuromuscular junctions, have a high prevalence for proper muscular contractions, and any changes in neural firing can affect the fibers ability to contract properly. Dysfunction in neural firing at neuromuscular junctions may result in disorders and diseases of the nervous system, which may directly affect musculature. A simple and known example of this is paralysis, where all musculature connected to affected neurons fail to contract, since muscular contractions are completely dependent on motor neurons. A motor unit is an alpha motor neuron and all of the muscle fibers it innervates (Scott et al., 2001). These motor neurons originate either from the spinal cord or the brain itself. Motor units are also classified into fast twitch and slow twitch neurons which correspond to fast twitch and slow twitch muscle fibers (Scott et al., 2001). Slow twitch neurons are scientifically classified as tonic neurons which are distinguished by smaller cell bodies and smaller axons. The activation threshold for tonic neurons is lower and fewer fibers are innervated per neuron producing less force per cross section (Arendt, 1985). Fast twitch neurons are known as phasic with a higher activation threshold and more fibers innervated resulting in more force per cross section area (Arendt, 1985). Adaptations of the neuromuscular system may occur within the muscle fibers themselves and within the motor neurons innervating the fibers.

Effect of Training and Exercise on Muscle Fibers

There is a considerable amount of evidence that muscle fibers as well as motor neurons are able to not only change in size, but can also convert from one type to another, indicating a high degree of plasticity (Scott et al., 2001). The most common type of conversions are from type IIB to IIA, and there is limited evidence showing the possibility of conversion between type I and II in extreme cases due to denervation or disease (Scott et al.,

2001). A number of studies and researchers have examined the effect of types of exercise and the ability of muscle fiber types to alter their physiological functioning to exhibit characteristics of other fibers. A study done by Campos et al. (2002) examined muscular adaptations in response to three resistant training regimens with 32 untrained men with a mean age of 22.5 (5.8) years and a mean body mass of 77.8 (11.9) kilograms. The study revealed that exercise induced fiber type conversions within the fast population went in the direction of type IIB to IIA. This is consistent with two previous studies examining the effects of different types of resistant exercise on skeletal muscle (Jackson et al. 1990; Taaffe et al. 1996). All three major fiber types (I, IIA, IIB) hypertrophied for low and intermediate rep groups, however the percentage of IIB fibers decreased with an increase in IIA and IIAB fibers for all three groups (low, int., high rep) (Campos et al., 2002). This study and others indicate that conversion of type II fibers is favorable towards fibers IIA and IIAB with resistance training independent of amount of repetitions.

There is lacking evidence in studies to show the conversion of fiber shifts from type I to type II and vice-versa, but many studies show the ability of fast twitch fibers to exhibit characteristics from type IIB to type IIA and IIAB. Another study conducted by Putman et al. (2004) investigated the effect of strength training, endurance training, and combined training of the two on fiber type conversions, cross sectional area of fibers, and myosin heavy chain content (MHC) of the vastus lateralis. Using 24 males and 16 females randomly assigned to the one of three training groups, the study revealed consistent results of the previous study, where fiber conversions yielded in the direction of IIB to IIA within the fast twitch fibers (Putman et al., 2004). Based on these two studies and previous studies conducted, fiber conversions within type II fibers are favorable in the direction of fast to slow by means of almost any type of exercise. Trappe et al. (2006) focused on training individuals for their first marathon and showed the same high degree of muscle plasticity within MHC I and IIA muscle fibers with improvements in aerobic potential. The study used 7 subjects (4 men, 3 women) with ages 22 ± 1 year to complete a 16 week run training program with the last 3 weeks a taper period. None of the subjects have previously attempted to run a marathon. The subjects completed a maximal oxygen uptake test on a treadmill and muscle biopsies were taken from the lateral gastrocnemius which is consistent from most studies that have done biopsies. Muscle bundles were taken and then individual fibers

were tested. However, this study also revealed a decrease in fiber diameter of both fiber types with unaffected functional characteristics or improved properties (Trappe et al., 2006). Not only does endurance training cause possible shifts in fiber properties, but it also increases mitochondria within type I fibers (Trappe et al., 2006). Despite predictions or indications that decreased fiber diameter would decrease performance; this specific study has shown otherwise and may indicate that increase or decrease in muscle diameter does not always reveal increased or decreased performance of musculature. It's safe to say that any sort of training, whether endurance, resistance, or sprint will have beneficial effects on some or all fibers.

Effect of Inactivity and Detraining Programs on Fibers

Detraining has been thought to be the cessation of exercise of any sort due to some physical or psychological disturbance, but it is being used more often as part of exercise regimens. Detraining and similarly bed rest has been examined in a study done by Fitts et al. (2010) among a prolonged space flight (180 days) to examine the alterations in the structure and function of human skeletal fibers. This was the first study done that used biopsies at a cellular level 45 days pre-flight and post flight of the gastrocnemius and soleus muscles to identify muscular changes. The study used 9 subjects/astronauts and their age, height, weight, and days in space were 45 ± 2 years, 176 ± 2 cm, 81 ± 3 kg, and 177 ± 4 days respectively. Many experimental measures were done to thoroughly review all possible factors contributing to muscular changes, but this review only focused on fiber types and any conversions of these fiber types and the effect that space flight has on these fibers. The results of this study showed a decrease in concentration of type I/type II fibers from 90% to 85% within the soleus muscle, and a decrease in concentration from 70% to 57% within the gastrocnemius muscle (Fitts et al., 2010). The findings were that prolonged weightlessness due to space flight produced substantial loss of fiber mass, force and power. The main contributor to loss of peak force was muscular atrophy which for the soleus declined 35%. Structurally, the most important adaptation was muscle atrophy and the shrinking of the myofibrils. The study also revealed a 20% increase in the fast type II(b) fibers which shows up regulation of the fast muscle myosin isoform and this is directly correlated to the degree of muscle atrophy (Fitts et al., 2010). This study shows that counter measures on prolonged space flights are not enough to reduce and/or prevent muscular atrophy and fiber changes and adaptations.

From previous studies done on detraining and bed rest, Andersen et al. (2005) has proposed that human skeletal muscle MHC IIX (Type IIB) represents a default gene setting that is expressed in the absence physical activity or muscle contractility. This states that a previously trained individual will go through muscular changes in the direction of Type I => Type IIA => Type IIB when detraining or becomes sedentary. The study carried out by Andersen et al. (2005) used 14 healthy sedentary male subjects with an age, body mass, and height of 23.6 ± 3.1 years, 179 ± 8 cm, and 75.8 ± 8.5 kg respectively. The subjects performed 3 months of resistance training followed by 3 months of detraining, in this case, no training. The study determined that the subjects' knee extensor isokinetic muscle strength increased 18% and 10% at slow and medium velocities along with gains in cross-sectional area after the 3 months of resistance training. Interestingly, after 3 months of no exercise (detraining) these gains were lost in terms of the slow and medium velocities, however maximal unloaded knee extension velocity and power actually increased 14% and 44% respectively. The findings showed a decrease in type I fibers and an increase in type II(b) fibers. This study as well as others indicated that peak power and velocity characteristics of muscle fibers are lost after a certain period of no training or best rest, but that percent type II(b) fibers may actually increase as well as peak unloaded force and velocity of these fibers through intense training and then detraining.

With the evidence of increased performance and fiber conversion predominantly from type IIB to IIA, other studies have investigated the effect of training and detraining, and whether the positive effects can be maintained through controlled detraining. Linossier et al. (1997) studied the performance of muscle fibers during short sprint training and detraining on a cycle ergometer. The study used 70 healthy men aged 20 ± 1 years with a mean peak oxygen uptake (VO^2_{max}) 51.6 ± 7.4 and tested performance after 5 weeks of training, 10 weeks of training, and 7 weeks of detraining. According to this study and with no implications of other studies, no training has been shown to increase % of IIB fibers. The study found a decrease in % type IIB fibers, but an increase in the size or cross sectional area of type II and especially type IIB fibers overall as well as maintaining these changes after the detraining on the cycle ergometer (Linossier et al., 1997). Along with the previous study, a study done by Santos & Janeira (2009) aimed to identify and compare the effects of both detraining and reduced training program application in the explosive strength levels in adolescent

basketball players. The study was done in order to confirm that reduced training and detraining programs may be used during in season sports in order to maintain physical peak levels attained prior to the season. To study this, 15 subjects aged 14 to 15 years old were randomly assigned to either a detraining group (n=8) or a reduced training group (n=7). Both groups performed a series of tests after of 10 week in season complex training program to assess baseline performance. The subjects were then followed up with testing at the end of 4, 8, 12, and 16 weeks of detraining and reduced training protocol (Santos & Janeira, 2009). The study showed at the end of 16 weeks that the reduced training and detraining programs were sufficient in maintenance of explosive strength values, however since there was no statistical significance between the two programs, it can be inferred that basketball practice alone is sufficient in maintaining performance due to its explosive requirements. This study can help further show that detraining or reduced training programs can effectively maintain muscle power and performance even if it may be just basketball practice. These programs may help reduce the conversion of fiber type IIa back to fiber type IIB, which often occurs with lack of exercise, or to fiber type I which may also occur if the person's genetic makeup is predominantly more type I fibers in which they have been converted to IIa through intense training.

Effect of Aging of Muscle Fibers

Sarcopenia is defined as age-related loss of muscle mass, strength, and function (Waters et al. 2000). It is known that muscular strength is directly dependent on muscle mass because the loss of muscle mass means less individual fiber recruitment available for contraction. Sarcopenia begins around age 40 and begins to accelerate dramatically at the age of 75 (Waters et al., 2000). With aging and inactivity, the most atrophy is seen in the fast twitch (Type II) fibers which are recruited during high-intensity, anaerobic movements (Vella & Kravitz). Although sarcopenia is mostly seen in inactive individuals, it is not limited to physical inactivity and can be seen in active aging individuals as well (Vella & Kravitz). Many factors, including physical inactivity, motor-unit remodeling, decreased hormone levels, and decreased protein synthesis, may all contribute to sarcopenia (Vella & Kravitz). It has been shown by the previous studies that physical activity causes a shift from type IIB fibers to type IIA/AB and that detraining shifts back toward type IIB. It would be expected that aging especially sedentary individuals would shift toward type IIB as well, however with sarcopenia, denervation of motor units also play a role and may affect the characteris-

tics of muscle fibers with aging. Since sarcopenia can be seen in all people whether or not they may be active or sedentary, differences between fiber types of active and sedentary individuals was examined between young and elderly individuals as well. A study done by Gallagher et al. (1997) sought to examine the effects of age, gender, and ethnicity on appendicular skeletal muscle mass. Gallagher et al. (1997) used dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry among 148 women and 136 men to measure the differences of muscle mass between age, gender and ethnicity. The results indicate that after adjustment for stature and body weight, age is a significant independent determinant of appendicular skeletal muscle mass (Gallagher et al., 1997). Older subjects had less appendicular skeletal muscle mass than younger individuals, and the decreasing muscle mass with age was greater in men than in women (Gallagher et al., 1997). These findings help conclude that age is an independent factor of the decrease in muscle mass of appendicular skeletal muscle at the least.

Since sarcopenia has been shown to have a direct effect on muscular function and mass, studies were also done to observe the differences between young and old individuals muscle mass at the single fiber level, and the effect of exercise and lack of exercise has on those fibers. Yu et al. (2007) also examined aging and gender on contractile properties in human skeletal muscle and single fibers. Muscle biopsies were taken from the right vastus lateralis from 13 young (20 – 43 years) and 22 old (65 – 85 years) men and women. Knee extensor muscle function was measured at slow (30° s^{-1}) and faster (180° s^{-1}) speeds of movement. The results indicated an aging related difference for the two groups with a 33 – 55% aging-related decline in maximum torque. At a single fiber level, aging related decline in knee extensor functioning was accompanied by a 20 – 28% decline in specific tension of type I fibers, a 29% decline in type II muscle fiber cross sectional area in men, and velocity of muscle fibers decreased expressing type I and type II MHC (Yu et al., 2007). This study suggests again that age is an independent factor in the decrease of muscle mass and muscle functioning. It should be noted that a decrease in type II muscle area was exhibited in men only and not women, which may indicate minor importance with age related declines of muscle functioning.

With the natural process of aging and its corresponding decline in muscle mass and function, a study was carried out by D'antona et al. (2003) to examine the effect of aging following immobilization on structure and function of muscle fibers. This study was performed in order to

inspect the differences of muscle fibers and possible shifts between young and elderly individuals after one of the elderly groups was immobilized. The subjects were divided into 3 groups: (1) healthy young individuals ($n=7$) with no previous record of muscular diseases or traumatic lesions, aged 30.2 ± 2.2 years, and who were not involved in any regular training or exercise; (2) elderly subjects ($n=7$) with same criteria as first group aged 72.7 ± 2.3 years; (3) elderly subjects ($n=2$) aged 70 and 72, whose right leg had been completely immobilized for 3.5 months in an extended position. Biopsies were taken from the right leg vastus lateralis. The results of this study showed an increase in MHC 2X (type IIB) and a decrease in MHC 2A (type IIA) in the order of groups 1 \Rightarrow 2 \Rightarrow 3. MHC-1 (type I) was significantly lower in the immobilized elderly than in the other two groups. As a whole, the results indicate a shift toward a faster phenotype in the elderly, and to a greater extent, in the immobilized elderly. Fiber atrophy following immobilization was more pronounced for type I fibers (-51%) than for type IIA (-26%) and IIB (-24%). Atrophy following aging was also more pronounced for type I (-22%) than type II (-12%), whereas no significant decreases in cross sectional areas were found for type IIA and IIB (D'antona et al., 2003). This study confirms that muscular shifts favor in the direction of type IIB fibers in the absence of physical activity, but this also presents evidence of preferential aging related muscular atrophy of type IIA fibers. However with the preferential shift toward type IIB fibers in younger individuals, elderly individuals may exhibit a slower phenotype on the basis of preferential denervation of fast motor units due to aging (D'antona et al., 2003). Phenotypes exhibited are dependent on the level of physical activity since sarcopenia may be managed and even reversed through intense physical activity. Aging causes a denervation of fast twitch fibers, while lack of physical activity causes a shift toward fast twitch fibers. It remains a little unclear as to whether type I or type II muscle fibers are more abundant within the immobilized or inactive elderly population since type II fibers are affected by denervation, but inactive individuals tend to favor towards type II fibers.

Since muscular contractions are dependent on the neuromuscular system and the motor neurons innervating the fibers, the effect of aging on these motor units was also examined. It has been previously reported that sarcopenia may cause denervation of motor neurons and may favor the denervation of fast twitch fibers (Vella & Kravitz). The review done by Ohlendieck (2010) states that natural aging has a striking effect on the

neuromuscular system, which causes a severe decline in the structure and function of the contractile apparatus. To confirm this argument, Erim et al. (1999) has concluded noticeable changes in motor units between young individuals and elderly individuals. Using 10 young subjects (24 -37 years) and 10 elderly subjects (65 -88 years), Erim et al. (1999) analyzed 231 motor units during isometric contractions at 20% maximal voluntary contraction (MVC) (69 from young and 68 from elderly) and 50% MVC (43 from young and 51 from elderly). This study led to 3 main observations. The first shows that among elderly subjects, there is a decrease in the common fluctuations that are observed among the young. The second shows that the relationship observed between the firing rate and recruitment threshold of young subjects is disturbed in the elderly. Lastly, the progressive decrease observed in the firing rates on concurrently active motor units in constant-force contractions in the young is not seen in the aged (Erim et al., 1999). This study has revealed changes in motor units that result in a slower average firing rate in aging individuals as well as the inability to recruit as many individual muscle fibers. Typical signs of denervation include a decrease in muscle tissue mass, decreased fiber size, and a massive decrease in isometric contractile force (Ohlendieck 2010).

The effect of aging muscle fibers and motor units combined have been shown to progressively decrease muscle strength, velocity, and functionality as people age. Sarcopenia is unavoidable; however countermeasures such as exercise and intense physical activity can help reverse the effect of sarcopenia. A review done by Porter (2001) has stated that low intensity resistance training and endurance training are not enough to show appreciable results to reduce the effects of sarcopenia. Ferketich and colleagues (1998) have found that a program of combined endurance and resistance training lead to a two-fold greater increase in strength than an endurance program alone. The study used 21 women aged 60 – 75 years to train 3 days a week for 12 weeks at 80% maximal oxygen uptake (VO_{2max}) and the women in both the endurance and resistance training group also resistance trained at 80% of a 10 rep maximum 3 times a week as well for 12 weeks. Muscle biopsies were taken from the vastus lateralis before and after the training period for each of the groups.

Conclusion

The human body and more specifically skeletal muscle and the neuromuscular system have tremendous capabilities to adapt to stresses created by the body and environment. Individual muscle fibers have the ability to shift

and show phenotype characteristics of other muscle fiber types (Type IIA ó Type IIB/AB). It has been shown by many studies that it is very possible to shift between type II fibers through either exercise or detraining. However, there still lacks the needed evidence of shifting from type I fibers to type II fibers. As seen before, Trappe et al. (2006) may help argue that point because of the increased proportion of type I fibers after an intense training program to prepare previous sedentary individuals for a marathon.

Exercise is a vital and necessary lifestyle activity to help muscle fibers to strengthen as well as motor neurons to become better adapted to aid the muscle fibers in more forceful contractions. It has been demonstrated that inactive individuals or once active individuals that have previously been active tend to shift toward faster muscle fibers (type IIA => IIB). As expressed by Andersen et al. (2005), this seems to be a default gene for most humans that cause a natural shift toward faster fiber types with inactivity. Individuals have been shown to benefit from this action through specific detraining or reduced training protocols. The implications of this evidence may be applied to aging individuals as well. By maintaining active lifestyles, elderly individuals may reduce the effect of and denervation of fast twitch muscle fibers with the consistent firing of these motor neurons. Denervation occurs as a result of decreased firing of those neurons and contraction of muscle fibers. Fibers begin to atrophy as well leading to a reduction in fiber size and fiber proportions. With the evidence of shifting between fiber types and causing hypertrophy of muscle fibers as well as maintaining the strength and velocity of these fibers, aging and elderly individuals may use exercise and training programs to reduce the effects of sarcopenia and to ultimately live longer, healthier, and more functional lives. Perhaps sometime in the near future, there will be more evidence or even ways of safely converting between muscle fiber types I and types II. The implications of this would be enormous for highly competitive athletes and Olympic athletes.

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Department of Writing

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