Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO EXPOSITORY WRITING

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

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Welcome to the Expository Writing Program (EWP) at the University of Washington. This manual is intended to guide you as you develop course content, as well as help you understand the philosophies of writing and teaching that this program encompasses. Ideally, this manual will provide both practical help (How do I create a writing prompt?) and suggestions on ways to meet pedagogical challenges (How can students transfer the skills they are learning in this course into other contexts?). We hope that you will first read these materials as an overview of the course you are about to teach, but we also hope that you will return to these materials to challenge and broaden your pedagogical approaches to writing instruction as you continue to teach this and other courses at the UW and beyond.

# Overview of Materials

To support you in your teaching in the Expository Writing Program, there are four main resources:

* This **Instructors’ Manual**, designed to cover the basic elements of teaching a course in composition, with a focus on providing practical information and advice. (However, since no manual can prepare you for everything, this material is meant to lead into the pedagogical work you will do in English 567.)
* The **EWP Website**, including pages for students and instructors. Instructor pages include policies governing TAs, sample teaching materials, department resources, campus resources, and more: https://english.washington.edu/expository-writing-program.
* ***Writer/Thinker/Maker: Approaches to Composition, Rhetoric, and Research at the University of Washington,*** a custom textbook designed to support the University of Washington’s Expository Writing Program outcomes. The text includes rhetorical chapters on reading, researching, writing, and revising as well as a selection of readings.
* ***Writer’s Help***, an optional online resource you can ask students to purchase at the bookstore that provides students with an easily searchable and customizable grammar, citation, and writing guide, which can help them respond to your feedback and develop self-editing skills.

# Students Demographics

The following information is provided so you can consider, in a general sense, who you will be teaching. The demographic information below comes from the “State of Diversity at UW” report released by the Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity on February 11, 2016. This information is largely based on enrollment data collected between 2003 and 2015. It is crucial to note that the percentage of International students has increased from 3.5% in 2003 to 15.2% in 2015. We have provided suggestions and resources in Chapter 6 of this handbook to help you to provide an effective classroom for multilingual speakers. At the end of this chapter, you will find a copy of a 2006 lecture delivered by Catharine H. Beyer, Director of the UW Study of Undergraduate Learning (SOUL). UW SOUL is a four-year longitudinal study on student attitudes toward their experiences at UW, and this lecture may give you a better idea of what to expect from your students and how you can best serve their interests.

**Table 1: University of Washington Student Enrollment Demographics, Autumn 2015[[1]](#footnote-1)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Enrollment By Ethnicity** | | | | | | | | |
|  | **Undergraduates** | | | | | | | |
|  | % | | | | | | | |
| African American | 3.5 | | | | | | | |
| American Indian | 1.2 | | | | | | | |
| Hispanic/Latino | 7.4 | | | | | | | |
| Asian American | 28.2 | | | | | | | |
| Hawaiian Pacific Islander | 1.1 | | | | | | | |
| Caucasian | 42.2 | | | | | | | |
| Not Indicated*[[2]](#footnote-2)* | 1.2 | | | | | | | |
| International | 15.2 | | | | | | | |
| ***Total*** | ***100.0*** | | | | | | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Enrollment By Gender[[3]](#footnote-3)** | | |
|  | **Undergraduates** | |
|  | *n* | % |
| Male | 14217 | 47.8 |
| Female | 15522 | 52.2 |
| ***Total*** | ***29739*** | ***100.0*** |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Percent of Incoming class that were freshmen | | |  | 66.6% |  |  |
| Percent of Incoming class that were transfers | | |  | 33.4% |  |  |
| Average GPA of Incoming Freshmen | |  |  | 3.78 |  |  |
| Average SAT of Incoming Freshmen | |  |  | 1855 |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **UW Undergraduate Characteristics[[4]](#footnote-4)** | | | | | | |
| % of undergrads who commute to campus | | |  |  |  | 61% |
| % of undergrads who work at least 16 hours per week | | | |  |  | 52% |
| % of undergrads from out of state | |  |  |  |  | 13% |
| Average undergraduate GPA | | | |  |  | 3.18 |
| *Female* |  |  |  |  |  | *3.22* |
| *Male* |  |  |  |  |  | *3.14* |

## How to Use This Information

The first table reveals that there is a dearth of self-identified under-represented ethnic minority students on campus, and that most students have high SAT scores and GPAs. It also reveals that many of your students will be holding down part-time jobs while balancing a demanding full course load, and many of these students will also be commuting to campus. Still others will be balancing the demands of athletics, volunteer work, or other issues not compiled in official campus demographics. This information should remind you that you will have a variety of beliefs and attitudes represented in your classes. How will you create a classroom environment where students with varying beliefs feel comfortable sharing their perspectives? It is a good idea to remind students that difference may not always be visible, and that each student must respect a variety of viewpoints, even if they do not share them. It is also a good idea to remind students that the ability to critically examine a variety of viewpoints, including one’s own, is a hallmark of academic inquiry and writing. It is toward this end—to practice and demonstrate academic forms of inquiry and discourse—that students will be asked to examine complex issues in EWP courses. Our goal is to prepare them to participate as active and responsible citizens within a diverse academic community.

Tolerance in the classroom begins with you; you are responsible for helping students feel comfortable in your class. You can make your life easier by acknowledging from the beginning that, because of the topics in the readings, there may be difficult material (about gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) discussed in class, and that you expect students to speak and write with respect. Keep in mind that your students may use terms/names that you (or other students) find offensive not out of intentional racism, but out of ignorance. You can often diffuse the situation by talking to a student after class and suggesting an alternative (and reflecting on the consequences of language choices), rather than by embarrassing the student in front of the whole class. Such “teaching moments” can be great learning experiences both for you and for your students. Please feel free to talk to any of the EWP staff about difficulties and/or successes in your classes.

## Working With Undocumented Students

It is important to note that there is a significant population of self-identified undocumented students at UW that embodies multiple identities, cultures, and countries of origin. Undocumented students are not legal permanent residents and do not possess a current green card, visa, or other form of legal documentation. These students must navigate serious obstacles and challenges (from accessing housing and securing financial resources to worrying about the threat of deportation and shifting immigration laws). ***Should a student disclose their undocumented status to you, here are some concrete things you can do to advocate on their behalf:***maintain your student’s privacy; be willing to be flexible with deadlines and accommodate students who may need it; educate yourself on issues undocumented students face; attend ally trainings for supporting undocumented students; and share relevant campus resources with your student.

Two key campus resources to direct your undocumented students toward (and where you can further educate yourself) are:

* **Leadership Without Borders.** Located on the third floor of the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center, the LWB Center at UW can offer information, guidance, and support to undocumented students on housing, study abroad opportunities, scholarships, academic support, and mental health counseling. It has also compiled an Undocu Ally Directory that can help connect undocumented students with trained allies across campus. In addition, LWB offers quarterly Undocu Ally Training for UW staff and faculty. They can be contacted at [undocu@uw.edu](mailto:undocu@uw.edu).

Visit: <http://depts.washington.edu/ecc/lwb/>

* **Purple Group.** This group is a peer support network of undocumented students that meets the first Wednesday of every month “to foster community building, connect with allies, share resources, participate in workshops, and discuss issues affecting immigrant communities locally as well as across the country and the world.” Previous Purple Group meetings have included workshops, presentations, and discussions on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), WASFA (state-funded financial aid), and so forth. They can be contacted at [undocu@uw.edu](mailto:undocu@uw.edu).

Visit: <https://depts.washington.edu/ecc/lwb/services/purple-group-peer-support-group/>

In addition to the above, should you be interested in learning more: The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project is a valuable resource for you that offers the latest immigration updates, community information, and important details about the NW Detention Center, “Know Your Rights,” and DACA/Dreamers. The UW Law School also occasionally holds UW Community Immigration Workshops that include informative panels as well as free attorney consultations.

# UW Students’ Previous Writing Experiences

In many places in the United States, high school students receive very little training in writing beyond the literary criticism paper, although this is changing with the Common Core, which stresses writing and argument in a variety of genres and for various purposes. Catharine Beyer and Joan Graham of the Interdisciplinary Writing Program conducted two longitudinal studies of first- and second-year students at the University of Washington. They found that entering UW students had written primarily literary arguments in high school—46% in 1989 and 36% in 1994—while producing a much smaller percentage of argumentative papers. Moreover, while the kinds of argumentative papers students generally wrote in high school may have been issue oriented, they were invariably from the perspective of personal opinion, rather than based on method, historical record, theory, or other academically authorized evidence.

The University of Washington is considered a selective university within the state and the Pacific Northwest region. Because Washington State, like California, has a three-tiered system of higher education—community colleges, comprehensive master’s granting state universities, and doctoral granting universities—the students entering the University of Washington tend to be particularly high achieving students. Approximately 80% were in the top fourth of their high school graduating class, and slightly more than half of those students were in the top 10%. Their average SAT scores are above 1650, and their GPAs are generally 3.7 and above. But they are also quite varied in their abilities to write, and we know that most have never read any academic or scholarly writing, even when they have taken Advanced Placement courses. Some students have emerged from high schools having taken AP English and are adept at producing a 20- or 40-minute essay exam, but may not understand how to develop a topic, solicit readers’ responses, or revise and edit a more substantial paper. Other students may be quite familiar with a kind of personalized, introspective writing process, but may have little or no idea of how a writer integrates complex, academic texts with personal reaction and opinion. Still others may arrive with exceptionally high quantitative abilities and less stellar verbal abilities. In addition, because the Puget Sound region has been an attractive place to settle for many immigrant groups, non-native speakers of English entering the UW may be very capable academically but may still be hesitant writers.

In the past students had been allowed to gain an exemption from composition credit with a “3” score on the AP Literature or Composition exams. However, **AP credit no longer exempts students from taking the Composition credit at the UW***.* While some students in AP classes may indeed have had a writing intensive course, the essays produced for the national essay exam tell us very little about how they might perform in our classrooms. AP exam formats are 20 and 40 minutes in length and typically don’t ask students to work with texts, other than a brief literary text, usually a poem. In AP English students will rarely encounter any academic argument about literature. Instead, students are taught a very traditional curriculum, fairly straight out of New Criticism. The AP English courses are literature courses and not writing courses, even though the College Board claims otherwise. We don’t know 1) if the student can perform complex, close readings of nonfiction texts, 2) if they can integrate several different perspectives on the same text, 3) if they can apply a concept derived from their readings to another set of texts, or 4) if they are knowledgeable about their own writing process. Moreover, as all AP tests are assessed on a bell curve, the “3” score represents an average performance. For an exemption, we believe something better than the average is necessary.

# Sample English Literature AP Exam Questions & Answers

The following essay prompts and essays are taken from the College Board’s Advanced Placement web site (<http://www.collegeboard.org/ap/english>). These tests are a fair indication of the kind of writing many of your students will have been asked to produce in high school. In moments of frustration, it might be easy to fall back on the easy excuse that “these students don’t learn how to write in high school!” We hope that reading these essays will convince you to think about how varied the definitions of “good writing” can be. It is certainly true that *at the beginning of the quarter* our students “can’t write” the papers we assign. That’s why we have jobs—to help students *learn* to write in new and more complicated ways that reflect the values of the new academic environment they are entering. Your challenge is to show students how to take advantage of the skills they bring to college (often focused on summarizing, interpretation, using literary terms, comparing/contrasting, and writing five-paragraph essays) in order to produce more complex, argumentative papers that emerge from critical engagement with a variety of primary and secondary materials. Below are questions from the 2001 AP exam, along with samples of student responses to them and AP evaluations. Following these AP materials are examples of 131 assignments. The contrast between the two should give you an idea of the shift in expectations that students face when they begin college.

Below is a sample free-response question from a previous AP English Literature and Composition Exam. Once you’ve read the question, you can take a look at the guidelines used to score the question, two sample student responses from actual exam booklets, and a brief explanation of why the responses earned the scores they did.

When you read the sample student essays (which were taken directly from actual student exam booklets), keep in mind that they were written under examination conditions and within strict time limits; in short, they will be less polished than if they had been developed at home, edited, and carefully presented. Faculty consultants (the people who score the AP Exams) take all these circumstances into account; they have been trained to look at the essays holistically and to judge overall quality rather than to attempt to divide the essay into content and style or to count errors.

**AP ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION**

**Free-Response Questions**

suggested time—40 minutes.

This question counts as one-third of the total essay-section score.

Read the following two poems very carefully, noting that the second includes an allusion to the first. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss their similarities and differences. In your essay, be sure to consider both theme and style.

I. Bright Star

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art --

Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night,

And watching, with eternal lids apart,

Like nature’s patient, sleepless Eremite\*

The moving waters at their priest-like task

Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores,

Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask

Of snow upon the mountains and the moors--

No -- yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,

Pillowed upon my fair love’s ripening breast,

To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,

Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,

Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,

And so live ever -- or else swoon to death.

—John Keats

\*hermit

II. Choose Something Like a Star

O Star (the fairest one in sight),

We grant your loftiness the right

To some obscurity of cloud --

It will not do to say of night,

(5) Since dark is what brings out your light.

Some mystery becomes the proud.

But to be wholly taciturn

In your reserve is not allowed.

Say something to us we can learn

(10) By heart and when alone repeat.

Say something! And it says, ‘I burn.’

But say with what degree of heat.

Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.

Use Language we can comprehend.

(15) Tell us what elements you blend.

It gives us strangely little aid,

But does tell something in the end.

And steadfast as Keats’ Eremite,

Not even stooping from its sphere,

(20) It asks a little of us here.

It asks of us a certain height,

So when at times the mob is swayed

To carry praise or blame too far,

We may choose something like a star

To stay our minds on and be staid.

—Robert Frost\*

## Sample Free-Response Student Essay #1

Keats “Bright Star” and Frost’s “Choose Something Like a Star” although similar in their address to a star differ in form, tone and theme. The latter contains an illusion to the former which brings Keats’ themes into the poem. In order to compare these poems it is necessary to look carefully at their themes and constructions. “Bright Star” is a sonnet in traditional iambic pentameter. Its tone is elegiac as it celebrates the woman’s beauty and his love for her in his plea for steadfastness. The poem opens with an apostrophe to the star which calls our attention to his plea. The verbs “would” and “were” indicate his wish to be like the star whom he addresses as “thou.” The star is “hung” in the night, a pleasant image, and he uses a simile to compare it with Eremite, a hermit, who presumably sat apart from the world watching. The eyelids of this star (the star is given anthropomorphic qualities) are eternally apart -- always watching, “patiently” and “sleeplessly.” Keats then enumerates what this star watches. It watches water -- which is also steadfast as indicated by the comparison “priest-like.” The waters that surround the land Keats says are performing ablutions or cleansings and blessings on the land. The star also gazes upon the snow. He uses the metaphor of snow as a “mask” (more personification) as it hides the mountains and moors. The “m” alliteration emphasizes the falling of the snow. The repetition of “of” underlines the parallel structure and idea of the two scenes the star regards. The rhythm of this 2nd quatrain is slow and peaceful like the scene. Then Keats puts a “No -- “ which interrupts this peaceful rhythm; he does not want to look at pastoral scenery but at his lover. The “still steadfast, still unchangeable” emphasizes the fact that this constancy is similar to that of the star regarding the earth. The poet wishes to be lying on his lover’s breast which he implies is like a pillow and describes as “ripening” which emphasizes her fertility. Line 11 has a rhythm of a “fall and swell” like her breathing. He will be in a state of “unrest”, yet a happy one. The repetition of “still” underlines his intense desire and the “t” alliteration the tenderness of her breath. The final line sets up a contrast and the hyphen divides it. He will live forever this way, or else he will die in a “swoon” -- a faintness of overwhelming love. Either way he spends eternity faithful and steadfast to his lover. The rhyme in the final 2 lines adds to his summing-up quality of the couplet where he expresses his main theme -- to be as steadfast to her as a “bright star” is to the countryside.

Frost’s poem is quite different. The form is a bit freer, the poem is written in 25 lines of octosyllables with a conversational tone and a varying rhyme scheme. Frost too looks to the star to be steadfast, although in his case it is steadfast in moral or political beliefs, not in love. Similar to Keats’ poem, Frost begins with an apostrophe, and adds to it “(the fairest one in sight),” an humorous allusion to the child’s tale of wishing on the fairest star. Similarly, we derive a sort of wish from this star. He calls the star “your loftiness,” another humorous play on “your highness”, reflecting its physical and moral height above us. The poet as “we” (meaning all men) grants the star some anonymity, some aspects of a hermit isolated and watching the earth as he gives him “some obscurity of cloud.” Dark brings out the light -- this is a subtle indication that “we” see the star as it is the stoic steadfastness when something “dark” and evil is taking place on earth. But Frost does not allow the star to get away with saying nothing -- his “position” requires his contributing advice. Frost implores him to say something catchy that we can cling to -- and the run on line emphasizes the energy of this begging. “Say something!” (9) disrupts the rhythm and adds even more desperation to his plea. All the star says is “I burn.” Frost with a tongue-in-cheek tone implores him to add scientific details -- the kind humans like to deal with. He speaks of “Farenheit” and “Centigrade” like they are languages -- and capitalizes “Language” for this purpose -- we understand facts. But it doesn’t really help that much, he says. In line 18 Frost changes to speaking of the star as “it” and alludes directly to Keats’ poem. Frost says that the star is like Keats’ Eremite, the star that steadfastly watched the goings-on on earth. In using this allusion Frost not only continues the “poetic tradition” but adds all the depth of meaning of Keats’ poem to his own. The star doesn’t want much of us -- only to stay above us. He says that “when the mob is swayed” or when social, political, or moral upheaval takes place and the norm is to be radical, the star likes being above it all, condescendingly regarding the earth. When this happens, we should “choose something like a star” and concentrate on it. In the final line the similarity between “stay” and “staid” emphasizes that we must emulate the star in being constant and moderate while society may revolve around us in social or political turmoil. This “staidness” is our key to survival like the stars’.

Therefore, one can see that these poems although similar in their title and central image of the star differ in their themes, form and treatment of the author’s ideas.

## AP Scoring Commentary for Sample Student Essay #1

This essay, which received a score of 9 at the Reading, was one of the very best essays received for this poetry question. It is included here not to represent essays typical of those in the 8-9 [highest] range, but to show you a distinguished response, an example of what the most accomplished students are capable of writing on this examination. Also, it provides such a clear and accurate explanation, it can serve you as a reliable guide to the two poems on this question.

Reading an example of an outstanding essay should not discourage anyone, but rather motivate you to develop your own skills in writing and literary analysis so that your response to essay questions -- whether on the AP Examination or for any college course -- will reflect your best abilities. This essay, then, represents a goal -- a model of the heights it is possible for students to achieve. The poems are, after all, about stars.

The writer begins by taking all the requirements of the question into account, noting that although the poems are “similar in their address to a star,” they “differ in form, tone and theme.” Thus, the student addresses the tasks of discussing the poems’ similarities and differences and considering both theme and style. Throughout the essay the writer explains not only what, but how the poem says.

The essay is organized first into a discussion of Keats’ poem and then Frost’s; the discussion of each poem contains a carefully integrated analysis of style and content. The student explains how the forms of the poems differ; “Bright Star” is a traditional sonnet, but Frost’s poem is “freer” in form with “a varying rhyme scheme.” He or she also explains that the tone of the Keats poem is “elegiac”; Frost’s has “a conversational tone” that is even in places playful. Apt examples from the texts are used to support and illustrate all such assertions.

The student notes that both poems begin with an apostrophe to the star; both poems present the star as representing steadfastness. But the student also recognizes that in Keats’ poem, the speaker’s concern is being faithful to an individual -- steadfastness as fidelity in love; the speaker in Frost’s poem is concerned with being faithful to individual values -- steadfastness as fidelity to one’s own beliefs in spite of the current opinions of the “mob.”

This essay is not perfect; the explanation of the alliteration, for example, strains credulity, but it is characterized by remarkably perceptive and cogent comments. Well focused and precisely worded, the analysis is fully developed and fluently written.

## Sample Free-Response Student Essay #2

Although both “Bright Star” by John Keats and “Choose Something Like a Star” by Robert Frost both address a star with a spirit of awe, the first uses formal diction to express a wish while the second uses informal diction and contains a lesson.

“Bright Star” contains lofty, formal kinds of words such as “thou art” and “splendor hung aloft” to show reverence toward the star. Keat’s specific word choices also contribute to the theme of the poem that man wishes happiness would last forever. Comparing the star to an eye with “eternal lids apart” brings to mind God, who is connected with eternity and happiness and the sky or heavens. The star is also compared with a hermit which brings to mind silence, holiness, and solemnity. The word “ripening” connotes life, and the speaker wishes to enjoy the best of life “forever.”

Robert Frost’s poem also address a star in the first fifteen lines, but the diction is informal. In plain, ordinary kinds of words, the speaker asks the star to “Say something to us that we can learn/By heart.” The speaker of this poem wants the star to tell the secret of its steadfastness, instead of just wishing to be like the star. Then in the last ten lines, this poem adds a lesson. Although the star seems to give “little aid,” it teaches the speaker “something in the end.” The speaker feels that just thinking of the noble star will help him to be steadfast and not to be swayed easily with the “mob.”

## AP Scoring Commentary for Sample Student Essay #2

This essay was selected by the faculty consultants as a good example of a paper that merited a score of 6 on the 9-point scale. Note that in terms of the scoring guide, it discusses “somewhat narrowly the meaning of the poems.”

This is not a weak paper, nor is it poorly written. Its chief strength lies in the fact that the writer does show evidence that he or she understands the two poems. The writer sees the difference in “theme and style” of the poems and is able to discourse, even if thinly, about the speakers’ purposes: Keats’ poem expresses the “wish” that “happiness would last forever” while Frost’s poem “contains a lesson.”

These assertions are elaborated upon through a series of references to the texts of the poems that focuses largely on “formal” and “informal” diction. Frost’s idea of “steadfastness” against the sway of the “mob” or unruly emotion is clearly grasped by the student, as is Keats’ wish to “enjoy the best of life forever.”

This is a competently written paper even though it may lack depth in analysis and polish in style. The student is an effective reader and writer, despite one or two glaring lapses. This is a good middle-range essay.

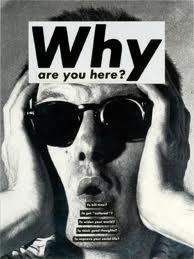
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# Sample English 131 Major Assignments

To give you a sense of how the major assignments in English 131 differ from writing for the AP exam (and the five-paragraph essays high school writers are so familiar with), on the following pages are examples of recent English 131 essay prompts, directly followed by a 131 student paper responding to that prompt.

When reading through the prompts and student papers, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

* How are these essay topics different from the AP exam questions?
* What skills are students demonstrating? What specific learning outcomes for 131 (see Chapter 2) do these essays demonstrate?
* How successful are the students at completing the assignments?
* How do these examples compare to your expectations of first year college writers?

ENGL 131, Malone

**Major Paper #1: Exhibition Essay**

**Context:**

Hello again, curator! You’ve already started planning for your (yes, imaginary) art exhibition at the gallery, and have selected your theme and the works you’ll be including. Now, your awesome curatorial self has also decided to put together an exhibition catalog for this exhibition (basically, a book of photos of the pieces chosen for inclusion, as well as information and essays about them) and it is your job, as curator, to write the introductory essay for this catalog.

**The Assignment**:

So, then, in a **5-7 page formal essay**, you will explain your theme and why you have chosen to include these four to seven particular works of art in your exhibition. You will consider these works of art, these visual texts, **with regards to one another and in conjunction with texts we’ve read by Berger and Ramamurthy** (you may use one or both). Develop a **strong claim**, explain the **stakes** of your argument, and give **support**ive examples and evidence. How do they relate to one another and to the theme of the exhibition? How does each make use of appropriated images, styles, and/or objects? What might the appropriative aspects of these works be commenting upon within your theme? What are some of the messages each artist appears to encode in each work, and what oppositional or incomplete readings might result through their usage of appropriative techniques?

**Audience**:

The art lovers who will attend your exhibition are largely educated folks, very much like yourself. Write for your instructor and your classmates (an academic audience), and you’ll be fine.

**Format**:

Your paper should be:

* 5-7 pages, and include a list of the art works you’ve chosen
* double-spaced, with standard margins
* in Times New Roman font (12 point)
* proofread for typos, grammatical errors, and speling mistakes (yes, like that one)

And should include:

* MLA citations (yes, this means you have to use quotations—**at least three**)
* Works Cited page in MLA format

**Targeted Outcomes**:

**Due Dates**:

Full First Draft: (for peer review and workshopping)

Final Draft:

Student Paper—Rough Draft (Will Be Revised For Portfolio)

ENGL 131 (Malone)

**“Identithief” opens on October 28, 2011**

There are always times in one’s life when one feels uncertain of his/her own identity. For most, at some point in time, the thought of assuming another identity has been contemplated, or even achieved. Opening on October 28th, 2011 will be the exhibition, “Identithief,” featuring works of contemporary artists such as Jeff Koons, Jonathan Monk, and Andy Warhol. The inspiration of the artists in this exhibition comes from the notion of different identities of one object, or in these cases, known works of art. Pieces in this exhibition are appropriated from a commodity object of some sort; for example, an inflatable toy popular in the 1980s, and one of the best-known paintings of all time, Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. These appropriated objects and artworks are then given a twist, or perhaps a re-appropriation, which alters the identity of the initial piece and raises important questions about originality and the idea of identity itself. As prominent commodity theorist Anandi Ramamurthy, in her essay “Constructions of Illusion: Photography and Commodity Culture,” has pointed out about commodities, they are in fact objects—“often inert—that have been imbued with all kinds of social characteristics in the marketplace” (604). In this works included in this exhibition, the “social characteristics” of these original objects have been altered in compelling ways.

Essentially, this exhibition deals with the notion that identity is a constantly changing concept.

“Identithief” will showcase paintings and sculptures ranging in date from the 1950s to 2009. One theme to note about this exhibition is the influence of “original” works on the “identithiefed” works. For example, Jeff Koons bases his steel sculpture of a rabbit on a mass-produced inflatable toy rabbit that was readily available to children in the 1980s. During this decade, Koons experimented heavily with inflatable plastic toys, and devised an original method of creating art out of commodity objects. In the case of the inflatable rabbit, this object was a cheap object that was easily accessible, and thus, this “cheapness” contributed to the idea of the rabbit. Koons, however, decided to challenge this aspect of the inflatable rabbit’s identity; he experimented with casting stainless steel over models of these toys, and created a “perfect” shiny steel rabbit, filed and smoothed into a brilliant gleam. This statue sits waist high if placed on the ground, but for the first month of this exhibition, it will be resting on a display case that allows viewers to come face to face with this brilliant body. The viewer will be staring at a spherical reflection of him/herself in this rabbit, though a reflection that is somewhat distorted by the sculpture’s shape. John Berger, one of the most well-known art critics in the twentieth century, believes that we never look at “just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active…continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are” (354). Thus, viewers are not only seeing *Rabbit*. They are seeing themselves within *Rabbit*, and their own eyes and features on *Rabbit*’s face. In this case, Berger’s metaphor of “holding things in a circle” springs to life when staring into one’s own face on the circle of *Rabbit*’s face.

The exhibit changes, however, during its two months of showing, granting a unique opportunity for two different views of this piece. For the second month, *Rabbit* will be sitting on the floor. Viewers will no longer be face-to-face with him, and thus, may gain a different perspective on both *Rabbit* and themselves. The reflections of a viewer’s self will not be as whole, but fragmented; instead of being stared blatantly in the face by one’s own image and identity, the viewer will get bits and pieces of shapes and colors, maybe just flashes of an eye. Dressed in a red coat, the viewer might see a flash of anger in the rabbit’s glare. Perhaps on a different day when that viewer decides to see the rabbit again, while dressed in white, the viewer might see the rabbit as quite at peace, or with an extra hint of glimmer. The experience of viewing *Rabbit* will be different for everyone, and it will be different every time. Because of its highly reflective surface, viewers will not only see the rabbit itself, but everything reflected upon the rabbit; the walls, ceilings, lights, other visitors to the museum, and, of course, even the viewer him/herself. Berger believes that seeing can be altered by many factors, including the viewer’s beliefs. According to him, we “only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice” (354). Then “we” must be seeing what we choose to see. These ideas are amplified when one stands in front of Koons’ magnificent statue. With every abstract reflection, one is inclined to interpret it as something—anything one chooses to believe. If the viewer is having a bad day, perhaps he will choose to see the rabbit as a mocking or menacing creature. On a good day he may choose to believe that the rabbit is a great soothing being. To gain full appreciation of this work, it is advised to see *Rabbit* at different times and under different circumstances.

Jonathan Monk challenges the identity of Koons’ *Rabbit*, just as Koons challenged the inflatable rabbit. In 2009, Monk appropriated *Rabbit* to create three more statues, which he named *Deflated Sculptures* (2009). They were numbered one, two, and three, according to the level of deflation in the rabbits. In *Deflated Sculpture One*, the rabbit’s usual perky ears and brilliant, firm, and smooth body seem to droop a little. By *Two*, the rabbit’s head is lolling on its right side, and its wrinkled feet, once smooth, round blobs, have become shriveled and threaten to buckle beneath it. By *Three*, the rabbit is almost completely deflated; it lies there lifeless on its side, no longer able to hold itself up.

Koons took the approach of glorifying a cheap plastic bunny by enlarging it and using shiny stainless steel. He gave a different identity to the inflatable objects, thereby making *Rabbit* one of a kind (even though there are multiple editions of the sculpture)—there was no other *Rabbit*, and this rabbit wasn’t just for any child, but for an audience of scholars, artists, critics, skeptics, collectors. Thus, the identity of the inflatable rabbit changed into the identity of *Rabbit*, a toy turned into something beautiful, something expensive, something that, unless one was very rich, one would be unlikely to gain ownership over. Monk, on the other hand, has further challenged the identity of *Rabbit*. *Rabbit* is a glorious creature, and essentially quite immortal, as stainless steel is extremely durable. But Monk takes the idea of a living creature aging, and begins to “age” *Rabbit* in the way a regular cheap, plastic, inflatable rabbit would “age.” It loses its air, and therefore loses its shape, until finally, it loses its perky rabbit-y essence. The three sculptures Monk creates are analogous to the stages of the downward aging slope experienced by all animals and humans. Viewers will likely think of the aging process of those they know and love in relation to this series of rabbit sculptures. The flawless, ageless *Rabbit* becomes smaller, frail, more vulnerable. In this way, Monk challenges the immortality of *Rabbit*, drawing a parallel between the idea of toys and humans, and the life span of each. The plastic rabbits of the 1980s upon which *Rabbit* was based have, by now, long deflated, but Koons’ *Rabbit* still sat, magnificent as ever, until Monk came along and began the deflating process. It is significant to note that *Rabbit* didn’t suddenly deflate—no—it was a process by which, little by little, *Rabbit* wilted more and more. Thus, Monk notes that even *Rabbit* cannot always assume the same exact identity. However, the deflation of this rabbit is a process, and a process can begin at any point in time. The title suggests that *Deflated Rabbit* is an end result—but perhaps it is the beginning, and the process is of inflation. When viewing the pieces, tell us what you think these pieces mean, and what identities the rabbits assume at different times (email us at: rabbit@identithief.org).

Perhaps the most universally recognizable “identithiefed” work is Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* (1507). On first glance, it is perhaps a very ordinary painting of a woman sitting serenely in front of rock and waterfall, but it has become extraordinary over the years, ultimately becoming the most reproduced painting in the world, printed in advertisements, on consumer products, and consistently up for analysis and debate in art or history classes. Scholars spend years trying to uncover the history of this figure, and write many journal articles and books in response, but the true identity of the *Mona Lisa* is largely unknown. Some believe her to be Lisa di Antonio Maria Gherardini, a wife of a wealthy silk merchant in Florence, and others believe her to be da Vinci’s mistress or even a gender-bending self-portrait. But much of this painting’s identity is its history; that da Vinci favored it, that it was stolen in 1911, that it hangs in the Louvre where thousands of people visit it each day. As John Berger reminds us, art is largely dependent upon market value (365), and the price tag society has put upon the *Mona Lisa* is a high one, giving her a high-class identity.

Andy Warhol created *Double Mona Lisa* (1963) to challenge the identity of the Mona Lisa. In the two side-by-side black-and-white prints of Warhol’s piece, it is evident that Warhol easily reproduced these images. These screen prints were actual screen copies of the actual *Mona Lisa*, and Warhol deliberately printed them out in order to sell them. The two pictures, however, are not exactly the same; the Mona Lisa on the left has a faded right side, whereas the print on the right does not. There is also a blotchy white spot on the right print of the Mona Lisa on the right lock of hair. Warhol’s idea of Mona Lisa’s identity was that of reproducibility, but not *exact* reproducibility. Despite having taken little effort and materials, the *Mona Lisa* is never exactly the same when reproduced. The identities of these reproductions cannot approach that of the original Mona Lisa, but are different versions of this image; they are Copied Mona Lisa or Poster of Mona Lisa. Thus, the identity of the *Mona Lisa*, through reproduction, is forever changing, and she herself is in somewhat of an identity crisis, because with all the appropriation of her image throughout the world, she has taken on a number of distinct identities. A screen print of Andy Warhol’s *Double Mona Lisa* will be showcased alongside a life-sized print of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. Viewers can note the flaws of Warhol’s work and contemplate the new identity he wanted to create for this mysterious woman.

This change in identity, however, is further noted within an extremely unique piece of art by Vik Muniz, which is also shown in our exhibition. Muniz, a Brazilian avant-garde artist, appropriates Warhol’s notion of an easily-printable *Mona Lisa*, and creates his own version out of peanut butter and jelly [*Double Mona Lisa (After Warhol)*, 1990]. Suddenly, this familiar work of art becomes unique again, and cannot be captured as simply as a screen print can be copied digitally. Made with perishable ingredients, ingredients meant for consumption, that could not set or dry, this was an “in the moment” art piece that had to be captured photographically. One of the key points of this Mona Lisa is, of course, that although it is beautiful and recognizable, the materials used to recapture this image are completely unique—that is, a food staple of almost every American’s childhood. Muniz allows the audience to see the *Mona Lisa* with a completely new identity—here she is, recreated with cheap ingredients that can be found in jars in any American’s home, and yet, this reproduction is one of a kind and unique due to these un-unique ingredients. One could recreate from the contents of one’s cupboard, but the thickness of the peanut better would never be the same, and the ratio of seeds and fruit to jelly would never be the same. Here she is for a fleeting moment, seemingly worth a lot, but never able to be exhibited in a museum because she cannot be propped up and because she is perishable. In contrast to Warhol’s prints, Muniz’s *Double Mona Lisa* cannot be sold as a product, just as a photograph (or a reproduction of a reproduction of a reproduction and so on), and her identity thus suggests pricelessness and inaccessibility, although her material value is perhaps less than a dollar. A screen shot of the original will be showcased in this exhibition, and a special speaker will be exhibiting (and eating) his similar food-based artwork on opening day.

Through the works in this exhibition, Jeff Koons’ *Rabbit* and Jonathan Monk’s *Deflated Scultpures*, Andy Warhol’s *Double Mona Lisa* and Vik Muniz’s peanut-butter-and-jelly version of the same, questions are raised about the nature of consumption in our society and the importance of art. More than that, these works raise questions about individuality and identity within works of art and within ourselves; after all, the identities of these works are constantly changing, being borrowed (or stolen), and may perhaps soon be appropriated further by artists in the future. “Identithief” opens on October 28th, 2011, and will continue running until January 1st, 2012. For those who are interested in delving into changing identities, or the notion of identity itself, this show is a must-see.

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**Seeing and Being Seen in Seattle**

Major Paper 1

*With all the talk of ‘virtual this’ and ‘online that,’ I think it’s important for us to realize that place matters still*.

– Tom Dobrowolsky, Urban Archives

In class, you were introduced to the Urban Archives, the only collection on the University of Washington Library website compiled by undergraduate students. For your last major paper of the quarter, you will take on the role of a member of the Urban Archives research team. To begin this paper, you will first need to pick a public space in Seattle to be the site of your research. You can pick a space on campus, in the University District, or anywhere else in Seattle that is of interest to you (such as a park, a shop, or a place of worship). Once you have chosen a space, you will need to spend some time visiting this space, observing how the space is used while paying particular attention to the types of texts that you find there (such as photographs, graffiti, videos, songs, advertisements, flyers, etc.).

The goal of this assignment is for you to see or “read” the space using the ideas in John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* and/or Michel Foucault’s “Panopticism” as your theoretical lens. Just as we have done in class with the Katrina example, you should apply these ideas to a new context – in this case, the space and text you have chosen for your research. Essentially, what you are doing in this assignment is analyzing the ways in which people see and/or are seen in the space, and to what effect (the stakes).

In your paper, you should include: (1) a **complex claim** about the space, (2) **visual evidence** (photographs) and **textual evidence** (including at least one source in addition to Berger and/or Foucault) to support your claim, and (3) clearly articulated **stakes**.

**The Format**

Your response to this assignment should be **5-7 double-spaced pages** with 1-inch margins and 12-point font. Make sure you use **MLA format** for your in-text citations and **works cited** page. You should bring **2 copies** of your assignment to class for peer review.

**Outcomes**

**Our Eyes Can Deceive**

Our vision is one of our most widely used senses and often times we see things and make assumptions before we actually know what is going on. In his book “Ways of Seeing,” John Berger claims, “It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it” (155). Berger discusses how we first see things by putting ourselves in a world, and then after that we gain knowledge about it. Those who have little knowledge about a place can create assumptions, good or bad, through what they see and in general these assumptions are incorrect. Due to the assumptions about Mariner, the high school I attended, it has become a target for negative attention. Many people have come to believe that Mariner High School students are involved in gangs due to the increase in gang-related activities in an area that surrounds the high school in South Everett. This assumption by onlookers has left a dangerous and violent image on all Mariner students, and in turn labels Mariner, and the surrounding area, as an inferior and unsafe place to be.

Although there has been a rise in gang activity all throughout Everett, the area surrounding Mariner has received the most attention due to some larger-scale gang activities; one of which happened in September, just a few weeks into the school year. This story was reported by several news stations and newspapers throughout western Washington. A woman was driving into an apartment complex, across the street from Mariner, but was unable to proceed through the entrance because a group of 20 teenagers was blocking her way. When the woman honked her horn and signaled them to move out of the way, the group became irate and violent, pulling her our of the car by her hair. The group was broken up by police, but a few hours later when she went to pick up her children from daycare, just down the road from the apartment complex, she was confronted by the same group. This time they threw her up against the car and pavement numerous times, leaving her with lacerations and a black eye.This assault may, or may not, have been done by students from Mariner, but due to its close proximity to the school, Mariner High School drew the attention of the media. Although the facts about the case were properly reported, the way in which it was presented created a negative assumption about students at Mariner. Using Mariner as the background for live broadcasts of the event created an unpleasant image of Mariner, one that will stay with many viewers. In a section of his book, Berger introduces the idea that captions on images change the way a viewer may see the image, as in the case with the news reports. According to Berger, “It is hard to define exactly how the words have changed the image but undoubtedly they have. The image now illustrates the sentence” (171). He discusses how words alter the image’s meaning and allowing it to become a part of a different argument. The example he uses was a painting of birds flying out of a cornfield by Van Gogh (see image below). Without any captions a viewer may interpret that Van Gogh painted this picture as he saw, or had seen, it happen. Yet, when a caption is added to inform an audience, “This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself,” (171) the words change the way the viewer sees the painting. The painting is now depicted as Van Gogh’s thoughts about leaving the world, just as the birds are leaving the cornfield. The assault that happened outside of Mariner’s campus resulted in fear over the community due to the way the media reported the story:

A young mother is recovering from injuries and is now in hiding after she was yanked out of her car and beaten by a mob of teenagers. Neighbors say the mob of teenagers always hangs out around Mariner High School, and [the young woman] is afraid they will attack her again if they see her. (KOMO reporters)

After hearing this report, those who never saw the “mob of teenagers” involved with the assault will now associate any group of teenagers hanging out around Mariner as angry and potentially violent students.

Aside from the violence, that may have gang ties, the area around Mariner has become a canvas for graffiti, which we commonly believe is there to represent gang boundaries and wars. Just as Berger suggests, “The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (155). Our entertainment these days gives an image of young gang members spraying graffiti on walls allowing our perception of graffiti to be shaped by what we have seen. But a recent article by *Everett* *Herald*’s reporters Jackson Holtz and Diana Hefley, reveals “About 80 percent of graffiti is called ‘tagger graffiti,’ often painted or drawn by teenagers.” This article suggests that a good share of the graffiti seen today is not gang-related, but rather, a new form of illegal art. As I walked around my neighborhood, graffiti seemed to overload the fences, electrical boxes, and street signs; some of the graffiti I found could possibly be gang-related (Image above taken by the author), whereas others I could tell were just tags (Right image taken by the author). Due to the excessive amounts of graffiti, the neighborhood is seen as a run down, suburban area amongst an urban city.

The neighborhood has tried to prevent crime from happening by stepping up surveillance through neighborhood watches, gated communities, posted signs, cameras and home security. Even though the community has done its best, crime continues to occur and more graffiti keeps showing up (Image to right, taken by the author). Surveillance is intended to discourage crime from happening by letting people know they are being watched. Although sometimes surveillance has no affect, like at Mariner. Cameras are clearly seen around the building, but this surveillance has not frightened these taggers and graffiti is now showing up on school property. The image on the left, taken by author, shows some graffiti on the backboard of the basketball hoop and in the top right corner of the building a camera is visible (through this picture the shadow of the camera is clearer). This graffiti is very visible around the school and to the observer it boosts the assumptions that the students at Mariner are delinquents.

Early last year, the Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office labeled the area around Mariner as a high crime rate area. Brian Alexander from *The Seattle* Times reported that statistics from 2005 showed that this one-square mile area accounted for five percent of Snohomish County emergency calls, averaging 36 calls a day. In March of 2006, Sheriff Rick Bart started a program called Operation Clean Sweep, designed to work with the community in cleaning up the neighborhood by stepping up the presence of county cops. For the kick off, “Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office lined up squad cars along 128th Street Southwest south of Everett with their lights flashing – a sign to would-be thieves, vandals and gang members plaguing the area that the sheriff was in town,” reported Alexander. Operation Clean Sweep has designated six deputy sheriffs to this one-square mile area, see Image 4 below, to decrease response time to emergency calls and increase the presence of power. This presence of power and the effects on others is discussed in Michael Foucault’s essay “Panopticism” where he states, “Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable” (322). In this part of his essay, Foucault discusses that power must be unverifiable so that in the Panopticon a prisoner lives in fear he is always being watched, even though he may not be. This fear is not present among the criminals in the area because the deputy sheriffs assigned to this area are very visible and make themselves known. They are not unverifiable; their cars are well marked and most of the time they are assigned to posts.

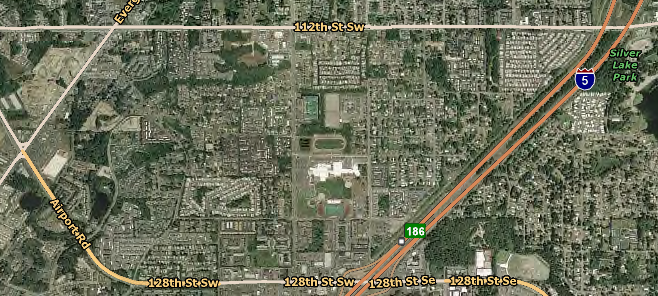


Image 4

Although the local neighborhood feels more safe with Operation Clean Sweep, others driving through, who may not know about the program, see the presence of police negatively. Every Wednesday, about 15 deputy sheriffs meet with Sheriff Rick Bart to discuss the previous week’s activities and the coming week’s goals. Unfortunately since Mariner is centrally located in the one-square mile area, they choose to meet in the parking lot around 2 pm, the time school gets out (Mariner is the large white building in Image 4). To drivers passing by, the scene of many police cars at the high school causes questions and assumptions as to why they are there. According to Berger these questions and assumptions arise because “we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves” (156). Berger claims that we are constantly looking around, connecting ourselves to what we see surrounding us. People from outside the area are comparing the mass presence of police around, and even at, Mariner to their neighborhood and local school. This comparison leads them to conclude that Mariner students can’t compare to those from other local high schools in education and in social situations.

Many people are seeing the negative events that are happening around Mariner and don’t have any knowledge about the positive effects that are occurring inside the building. Recently the school was remodeled to provide more classrooms inside the building, scrapping the junkie-looking portables that flooded the back of the school. The remodel also call for a paint color changed, Mariner previously had been known as the “pee-colored prison” and now sports a new neutral based blue and gray. Most of the funding for the remodel came from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has adopted Mariner as one of 13 Achiever’s schools in Washington State. The aim of the Achiever’s schools is to create smaller classroom environments where students can obtain a personal relationship with a few teachers throughout their high school career, rather than being shuffled around. The foundation also offers quite a lot of scholarships for students who want to further their education. Athletics are also a big part of the improvements, with some of Mariner’s sports beginning to get respect from local sports writers. In the fall, one cross country runner placed 3rd in the state competition and was recognized as athlete of the week several times in *The Everett Herald*. Back in January, Mariner wrestling took on their rival and fellow district school, Kamiak. Both schools came into the ring undefeated and the match would decide who would take home the Wesco South Division title; Mariner came out on top. Most recent sport’s team in the media was the boy’s basketball team that made it to the state tournament at the Tacoma Dome.

Students who attend Mariner believe if others can continue to read positive things about their school, and not worry about what they see happening around the area, then they should become a respected school like others in the area. However, if we let the assumptions continue, that all Mariner High School students are delinquents, we will in the end be doing the students more harm than good. The students who wish to achieve in high school, working towards getting into college, will eventually go unrecognized due to the increase in hostility towards Mariner. On the other hand, those students who are just trying to finish high school may subject themselves to the negative stereotypes because they will have no support from the surrounding area. Rather than criticizing a troubled area, communities should support the effort to clean it up, so that the local residents feel that they are a part of a larger community and are well respected.

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# Who Are Our Students?

**Catharine H. Beyer**

**Director, UW Study of Undergraduate Learning**

## Presentation to the Large Class Collegium

**Spring, 2006**

One way to answer this question is with numbers. The first handout I gave you provides you with statistics on UW students. If you look at that handout, you’ll see some information about UW undergraduates and graduates. A few interesting things about that side:

* we have very few under-represented minority students, particularly Native Americans
* more females than males all across the board
* average incoming GPA was about 3.7

Next year 90% or more of the students who entered this year will come back to the UW. And this is a sign that we are doing a good job with the first year.

The second handout provides some information about under-represented minority students—African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders. The experience of students in these under-represented populations differs in some ways from that of Caucasian and Asian students.

I’ve pointed out a few of the differences on this side of the handout. For example, under-represented students have higher attrition rates than Caucasian and Asian students. We aren’t sure why, but literature on attrition points to some of the reasons on this handout. Our own data on UW students confirms some of these reasons, including two climate surveys that our office conducted that showed that minority students at the UW do not feel as positively about the UW as Caucasian students and report greater exposure to racism.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Literature on under-represented minority students suggests that they have differing identity needs than majority students. And we found this same result in the UW Study of Undergraduate Learning, which I’ll say more about in a moment. Caucasian students come to the UW with positive attitudes about diversity, hoping to experience every aspect of diversity, and defining it in broad terms.

Minority students often find more students who look like they do here than they knew in their high schools. After being others’ diversity experience for years, they are excited to explore their identities as Japanese Americans, or Latinos, or students with multi-racial or ethnic backgrounds. Because of this identity need, as well as the small number of minority students they see here, students of color tend to hang out with other students of color, which bewilders some Caucasian students.

The two quotations on that second handout from UW SOUL participants address this issue.

Another difference in under-represented and majority students is that under-represented students have access to the Instructional Center, or the IC—a wonderful study center for EOP students, where students can go to get help in chemistry, math, or writing or a number of other subjects. At the IC, students work with peers and with tutors. As the chart on this handout shows you, going to the IC five or more times pays off in terms of students’ GPAs.

Students who are not eligible to use the IC have access to the CLUE—a study/tutoring center open at night in Mary Gates Hall.

Numbers can tell us a lot about our students, such as who’s here and who isn’t, when students leave and who stays, how well groups do and whether they like it here.

But there are some things numbers can’t tell us about who our students are. For that, we need stories.

Since 1999, I’ve directed the UW Study of Undergraduate Learning—or UW SOUL—and this is a study about students’ stories.

It is a longitudinal study, collecting data from 1999 through 2003 from 304 students who entered the UW as freshmen (about 2/3) and transfer students (about 1/3) in fall 1999. The study population was divided into two groups.

Half got $300 to

* participate in entry and annual interviews
* participate in annual focus groups
* respond to open-ended email questions each quarter
* respond to quarterly surveys
* collect pieces of some of the work they’d done for their courses into portfolios each year and turn them in
* write reflective essays about that work and include it

Half got $100 to

* respond to the open-ended email questions each quarter
* respond to the quarterly surveys.

The study broadly asked what students learn and where they learn it in six areas:

* writing
* critical thinking and problem solving
* information literacy
* quantitative reasoning
* understanding and appreciating diversity
* and personal growth

Today, I’m going to talk about four findings from the UW SOUL that I think faculty teaching large lectures may want to hear about.

* The first is what students are looking for when they come here.
* The second is a little bit about the academic challenges students face—particularly in their first two years here.
* Third, I’ll say a few words about students’ personal challenges.
* Finally, I’ll talk about some things students have told us help their learning.

**1. What Students Are Looking For?**

Students arrive at the UW with complex goals for their learning. They have huge, far-reaching hopes about what this experience will give them, and their definitions of learning mirror their goals.

This student’s response to my question about what she hoped she’d learn in her time at UW pretty well captures that diversity of goals:

*I want to learn about life in the city, about science. I want to pick a field and become knowledgeable about it. I want to learn about the community, how it works. I want to learn about living with a person. The roommate experience is totally new to me. I want to learn how to compromise, to work together, how to be a better leader, how to ride the Metro bus system, where all the cool places to hang out in Seattle are, what it feels like to live somewhere where it rains more than nine inches a year, how it feels to work with a professor who is on the cutting edge of knowledge and is passionate about what he is doing. I want to become more passionate about things.*

Students’ goals for their learning include social goals. They want to be more adept in unfamiliar social situations. They want to be able to talk to strangers. They are especially interested in diversity, hoping to get to know students who are different from them. But they don’t define diversity in the same ways we might here—with a focus on race, class and gender. Students, especially in their first and second years, define diversity in small ways: “You are different from me because you went to Catholic school and I didn’t.” These social goals are very important to students—and they often conflict with their other goals.

Students also have goals for themselves that have to do with self-knowledge, with clarity on where they stand on issues, with moral and religious identities, with themselves as members of ethnic groups. They have questions about their own sexual identities and about how they will handle failure. These kinds of goals are stronger for students entering the UW as 18 year olds than for those entering as transfer students or as returning students.

While it can be shocking to faculty to learn how deep a back seat academic goals can take for our students at certain points in their experience here, students do come to the UW with clear academic goals. They want to do well in school. They want to find an academic path they can commit themselves to that will become a career. Their focus on that career is not completely pragmatic; what they are looking for sounds more like a “calling” than a job.

While they come here with academic goals, it’s important to remember that they have no idea how the university operates. The way the institution divides into disciplines, what makes a discipline a discipline, and how those divisions will limit and define the paths they take is not clear to students entering the UW.

Here’s one student talking about the path he thinks he will take to his academic goal:

I honest-to-God want to study artificial intelligence. I want to create it. So what I want to learn is anything that will help me in this school. I want to learn biology, archaic languages, the whole gamut. Anything that can be remotely connected with AI that will help me benefit my goal.

The student’s comment shows a lot of confusion about what to expect here.

In addition to finding an academic path, what do students want in terms of their academic goals?

The biggest thing is that they want to be challenged. We need to remember that most of the students who enter the UW as freshmen represent the top 10-15% of their high school classes. They come here having been told all their lives that they are smart. And many of those students felt that they had to do very little to get the good grades that defined them as smart.

Students come to the UW hoping that we will challenge them, that we will wake up their minds and give them a run for their money.

This is evident in UW SOUL responses to interviews and email questions about how they view the level of demand we place on them.

It is also evident in student course evaluations. It’s notable that

*How much a student thinks she learned in class is more strongly correlated to the overall evaluation score she gives a class than any other item on the evaluation is—including the grade she expects*.

Here are a couple of students speaking to this issue of challenge:

*I have been in 200- and 100-level classes in my one and a half year history at the UW. The workload has been satisfactorily tough. In my International Studies 200 class…it was challenging to be constantly writing and reading. Nearly all of my classes have required me to stretch my thinking in some way here at the UW.*

*The expectations between sociology and psychology are vastly different, and the one that requires more work, interestingly, I find I enjoy more.*

Again and again in the study, students say that classes that ask them to think hard and demonstrate that thinking in a variety of ways—particularly through writing papers and giving presentations—are the courses they like the most and do the best in.

Classes that require them to think minimally and to do the least are they ones they say they get their lowest grades in, classes one student called “lecture/test; lecture/test” classes.

So students enter the UW with their arms full of hopes for what they will learn here. And we can’t possibly give them all of that learning. Even so, it’s amazing how much they actually do get, some of it because of us and some of it from other directions.

So this leads me to my second point--

**2. What Happens to Them Once They Are Here?**

Let’s look at one of their academic challenges.

Students have trouble—particularly in the transition from high school and sometimes community college to UW—navigating the disciplines. Particularly, they have trouble meeting the writing and thinking demands that the academic disciplines make on them.

Their biggest problem is that practices, conventions, purposes, and methods for writing and thinking change from one discipline to another, and students don’t know that when they get here.

For example, a freshman may take a Sociology 271 course, a Chemistry 142 class, and an English comp course in her first quarter here. The papers she will have to produce for that sociology class will be very different from those she will have to write for Chemistry. Her English papers will be different from both of them.

If the student takes Philosophy and Political Science the next quarter, there will be new things to learn about writing arguments in those disciplines—things she didn’t learn by doing the writing in Chemistry, Sociology, and English.

What changes as students move from writing in one discipline to writing in another? Here are three things, but I could talk about lots more.

First, the purposes for writing will differ. I need to write my chemistry lab report, for example, in such a way that someone else can replicate what I did exactly. I won’t need to worry about that in Political Science, however.

Second, what counts as a thesis or statement of purpose and where it is placed in the paper will differ. In sociology, I may be expected to write a hypothesis-driven argument. In English, I must begin with a “claim,” but it doesn’t have to be causal or capable of being disproven.

Third, what counts as support or evidence and where it comes from will differ. In chemistry, evidence comes from my experiment and my experiment may be evidence for some other argument out there, as well. In sociology, evidence comes from research studies and the quality of the evidence depends on the quality of those research designs. In philosophy, evidence often comes from the presence or absence of internal logic, rather than from the world outside the argument. In English evidence may be quotations from other texts.

Two students’ quotations illustrate this problem:

**“All of a sudden in philosophy, here are a whole new set of rules that pertain only to philosophy papers.”**

*“The most difficult writing I’ve done is probably the history papers I’m writing now, just because I don’t know how to write a history paper. I know how to analyze books and novels, but I don’t know how to include the historical context and other people’s opinions.”*

Just as writing practices differ from one discipline to another, so does thinking. What we do when we think critically or solve problems differs depending on the discipline we’re in.

First of all WHAT we think about differs from one discipline to another. Power and influence in political science. Crime in sociology. Shakespeare in English. But even when several disciplines are thinking about the same things—let’s say anorexia—how they think about anorexia and the methods they use to explore it will differ. Psychologists will think about anorexia in relation to an individual’s self-control; sociologists will think about anorexia in relation to socially acceptable body images for women; and biologists will think about the effects of anorexia on menstruation.

Second of all, the methods the disciplines use to do that thinking vary. And sometimes the language that we use about critical thinking hides these differences in methods. For example, students in chemistry and the comparative history of ideas may both be required to think reflectively about their own work. However, to do that, the chemistry students are analyzing why they have errors in their experimental findings. In contrast, students in CHID are doing their reflective thinking by identifying the biases and perspectives they bring to a piece of reading.

Particularly challenging for undergraduates is that they must learn “what counts” as good writing and how to think in each discipline at the same time that they are doing the writing and thinking that may constitute a major portion of their final grades for the class. Here’s a chemistry student’s description of that challenge:

CHEM 162:  *“We had to regurgitate results and do the math right, but that wasn't the thing they cared most about you doing. It was the conclusions you drew and your discussion afterwards, and that was up to your interpretation of what you did, what went wrong. And it was never anything clear like, "I dropped my beaker on the floor." It was always a little bit off. You had to really understand what was going on.”*

For the most part in their first two years at UW, students have to figure out what counts as good writing and critical thinking in the disciplines on their own. After they become majors, their immersion in ONE discipline speeds up the learning process about that discipline.

When I speak to faculty about these issues, I talk about some of the ways they can help students through them—and mostly it’s about being more explicit about expectations and disciplinary practices.

So let’s move on to my third point—besides the challenges posed by thinking and writing in the disciplines—

**What Are some of the Personal Challenges Students Face Here?**

Huge personal earthquakes happen to students in college, and in general we require them to take those in stride as they go about meeting their social and academic goals.

Here are a few examples of what some of the students in the UW SOUL lived through during their undergraduate experience here.

* Two of them lost a parent to cancer
* One was diagnosed with cancer herself.
* Several suffered serious depression. One had to drop out because of it.
* One saw her friend shot to death on the Ave.
* One learned his father was having an affair
* Three of them became parents. Only one of those three was married.
* One caught her boyfriend in bed with her best friend
* Two got married
* One got divorced
* One was cut off by her parents when she told them she was a lesbian
* One had brain surgery to remove a benign tumor
* Three attended grandparents’ funerals and grieved the time they had not spent with them
* One had a roommate who tried to commit suicide
* Several stopped eating or started throwing up
* One was turned down by four majors
* Many were turned down for jobs they needed to pay for school.
* One lost all sensation in his hands
* One had a father who left Reno and disappeared into thin air
* One was told to get out of a required class because she’d arrived from spring break a day late
* Two flunked out
* One was falsely accused of sexual harassment and cleared
* Several lost their religious beliefs.

**Even students who experienced no major personal challenges like these while in college lived with the pushes and pulls of a normal life.**

**Wonderful things happened to students as well. Among other things, they**

* were given scholarships they had not applied for
* won fellowships
* met future spouses
* learned what they wanted to do in their lives
* met and kept new friends
* and traveled all over the world—Italy, South Africa, Madagascar, Brazil, England, Ireland, Spain, Germany, India, China, Japan, and Indonesia, to name a few places we know that students have explored.

These academic challenges—which students meet day after day in class after class—and these personal challenges as well—bring about one large effect on students.

Quite simply: They change. When they leave the UW they are not the same people as they were when they arrived.

Here are some of the ways they change:

Their **values** have been challenged. Nearly every student reports that values have been challenged though not necessarily changed.

Their sense of themselves—their identities—have changed. As one student said:

*What happened in my sociology class—where my identity as a half-white, half-black person was challenged—I’m still trying to understand if all the things he told us were that important.*

They lose confidence in themselves as intellectuals—a process so common in students’ first years that we began to refer to it as “the hammering.” As this student put it:

*That first quarter was almost shocking because there are so many really intelligent people at the UW and I’m just not used to all that competition. Working with other students, getting quizzes and tests back, seeing the class curve and where I would be falling—those things made me aware of the other students’ abilities. It made me kind of give up a little bit. When I was in high school, I didn’t have to work hard to do well.*

And they RECOVER their self-confidence, so that by the time most of them are seniors, they have found something they are good at and that they enjoy.

Their relationships change with friends and family. With friends, they learn a new level of intimacy and of being self-revealing. With family—well—as one student put it:

*When you’re in high school, the last thing you want to do is spend time with your family. Now I just want to hang out with my mom.*

Their sense of what it means to be educated becomes more complex. They reject narrow definitions of the term in favor of broader definitions. As this student said:

*To be educated is to question the truth. Whose truth is it? Why should that truth be my truth? What we are learning in college is to question.”*

I tell you about these personal challenges not because I hope that you’ll go out there and solve them for the students. We’re not counselors. I’m sharing these experiences with you so that you will see that just as you bring your whole self into your classrooms—a self that includes your expertise on American politics, your passionate love for Japanese poetry, the last trip you took to Brazil, the fact that your father whom you love with your whole heart is dying, the fight you had this morning with your 14-year old about that ugly shirt he’s always wearing, and the fact that you’ve just been told you need to fork over $3,000 for a new furnace—just as that’s the self who walks into your classroom to give that lecture on the policy of containment—so do students bring their whole selves to class.

I think if we are all aware of that, it makes what happens between us better.

**What Can We Do to Help Our Students Learn?**

I’m not going to speak too long about this. I think I’ve hit two points that matter a lot.

We need to challenge students and help them meet those challenges

And we need to be more explicit in what we are asking students to do and why, in how our disciplines operate and how that affects the papers we assign, the problems we ask students to do, and so on.

A third point, one that came up frequently, focused on helping students ask questions in class—particularly in large classes. Students are afraid to ask questions and that can hinder their learning.

I’ve brought two other handouts with me that address this question of what helps students learn.

Both handouts were inspired by questions on the course evaluation forms that students fill out for their classes.

In the first handout, there, you see the results from a question I asked students in interviews. The question was posed by a faculty member in psych, Lois McDermott. She drew our attention to an item on the course evaluation forms that asks students if they thought the prof cared about their learning. Lois wanted to know—what do you do to demonstrate that caring?

So we asked 85 students in interviews—What do professors do that leads you to think they care about your learning?

As you can see by this handout, students’ responses grouped into 11 major categories. I’m not going to read this to you, but I think you might find it interesting. Let’s just look at that first category—one that 87% of the students mentioned. These students said that when they are asked to interact in a class in a substantive way, they believe the faculty member cares about their learning. This quotation is a great example of these responses

*In class, they engage us in discussion and not just lecture at us. It’s not just ‘Here’s a bunch of information; test next week.’ We are called upon to voice our thoughts and perspectives. We are treated more like human beings. We learn to put into words things that we think. Testing is not just based on ‘Can you remember this concept?’ but ‘Can you think, can you write, can you formulate ideas?’ That brings out the better part of students. I feel more acknowledged as an intellectual mind when I get to express myself.”*

The interesting thing about the results on this handout is that they are supported by research on learning. That is, if you are doing these things to make students think you care about their learning, you are likely to actually improve their learning.

Now let’s turn to your second handout. On course evaluations, students are always asked how much the class advanced their education. We’ve learned that if students feel that the time they spent on a class advanced their education, they will give that class a high overall evaluation. The problem is that we didn’t know what students meant by “advanced my education.” So we sent out an email to all the students still in the UW SOUL in Winter 2002. 182 students defined this term and used two of their courses to illustrate their definitions. So if you want high scores on your evals—this handout is for you!

**Again, I’m not going to read the handout to you, but in general, it shows that to advance their educations, students want:**

* Challenging assignments that are designed to teach them something and that ask them to use course material.
* They are most interested in applications that are relevant to their majors or careers, but they also want applications to real-world problems. Students say that interaction and class discussion, as well as class time that challenges them to think, advance their learning.
* They also point to organized, effective, passionate, professors.

We need to be those professors for them.

1. These numbers reflect enrollment at UW’s Seattle campus only. See <https://www.washington.edu/diversity/files/2016/03/2016-02-11-State-of-Diversity-report-New-Template.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A study entitled *“Unknown” Students on College Campuses* (James Irvine Foundation, December 2005) found that a large proportion of the students who choose “unknown” or “other” for their ethnicity or leave the space empty are Caucasian students. See <http://www.irvine.org/publications/by_topic/education.shtml>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A cisgendered breakdown of gender at UW is obviously a bit problematic, but a general sense of these demographics can still be useful. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This data is from 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 1 <http://www.washington.edu/oea/evaluatn.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)