Appendix iv: LIT 190, Reflective essay assignment, Spring 2010

Write an essay of five to seven pages in which you reflect broadly on your undergraduate education.

Before you write this essay I'd like you to think first about your sense of what you think your major means to you. Undoubtedly, you've been asked about a million times, "What are you going to do with a major in literature?" Presuming that what you learned here will bear on your answer, what is the value of your education? What have you learned? What have you learned how to do? How do you imagine using both the knowledge and skills you have learned in your life, including both your professional (whether or not you contemplate further education) and your private life?

Then, I'd like you to think about a few of the objectives that the LIT faculty have been developing for the major. While these were not officially public when you began your studies, they articulate what we think we've been doing all along:

Literature and Culture learning outcomes:

Literature and literary criticism are significant parts of an ages old, continuing conversation about what it means to be human and what value humanity has. Unlike scientific or social scientific approaches to this conversation, literary discourse emphasizes the particular in the dialogue between particular and universal. It always arises out of specific times, places, and cultural traditions, and it often gives powerful voice to cultural differences and individual differences against the backdrop of larger, homogenizing forces. Moreover, literature has traditionally fore-grounded questions of value over questions of definition, or rather, sees questions of value as central to the definition of humanity itself.

The study of literature enables one to engage this conversation richly, both for personal development and for the ability it gives one to be a responsible agent in the many societies each person inhabits. Moreover, literary study gives one insight into how cultures operate in such a way as to facilitate ethical cross-cultural interactions. Literary study facilitates such agency by teaching readers how to inhabit and then critique literary artifacts, and then to apply the complex understanding—an understanding that engages intellectual, ethical and aesthetic faculties—that arises from the shift between inhabiting and critiquing.

The successful student majoring in Literature and Cultures will be able to participate in this larger conversation. More specifically, the successful student will be able to:

- Interpret texts with due sensitivity to both textual and contextual cues;
- Appreciate the aesthetic qualities of texts and the cultures from which they're drawn;

- Judge the ethical value(s) of texts and contexts;
- Apply interpretive strategies developed in literary study to other contexts;
- Articulate, cogently and with sensitivity to context, in both speech and writing, her/his interpretations and evaluations.

(If you're curious about how we plan to "assess" majors in the future, please see the assessment plan in the resources section of this web-site. I'd love any feedback you'd like to give.)

Now, in five to seven pages, write an essay that describes the impact your major has had on you. Please cite any resources you use (in MLA or Chicago style) and append any papers you've written, any assignments that you want to comment on, etc. In other words, you'll need to support your argument by drawing on your own performance in particular classes, and you'll need to document the particular items to which you refer. Appended items do not count in the page total.

I hope you find the page limit daunting, that you think you need books to answer such a question, but I'm giving you just five pages for several reasons: One, to focus you on the most important points. Two, to help you prepare to answer such questions when you apply for jobs, for placement in graduate programs, etc. Three, to give you a sort of outline or compendium that will stick in your mind, helping you to structure your memories and thus make them more useable in many different contexts over time. Four, to make it possible for you to write, and me to grade, the essay in the short time we have available.

This essay is due on April 21.

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Gregg Camfield

Lit 190

Reflection Essay

The Reasons I Chose to Become a Literature Major

I decided to become a Literature major during the end of my sophomore year after I had taken Lit 30 and 31 with Jan Goggans. My favorite readings include “The Yellow Wall Paper,” “The Goophered Grapevine,” “Coyote Tales” and much more. To understand why I chose the literature classes that I have taken at UC Merced, you have to know my history.

I come from a French Creole family on my mother’s side; we have mixed blood of the African American, French, and Native American race. My mother’s family is very light-skinned, so I imagine that we are mostly white, but they choose to be labeled “African American.” My mom comes from a family of two brothers and four sisters. My grandmother had to drop out of school in early to work, and she had her first child at sixteen with her first husband, a dark-skinned African American. Then she later married my mother’s father, a Creole man with white skin, and had my mother and two of her sisters. After they divorced, my grandmother found the love of her life, John Baquet, a light skin Creole man that lived next door, and she two more daughters and a baby boy. John was the father that my mother and her siblings were raised by, and unfortunately my grandmother and my mother’s father died at a young age.

Most of my cousins have black fathers with dark skin, so they have dark skin as well with black curly hair. My mother is the only one out her sisters to have a child with a white man, who has some Native American heritage. For me, it was difficult growing up being told I was black but not looking black at all. I also did not feel white because I was raised as black in black

culture, in black neihborhood. Thus, I have spent most of my life battling my identity as a mixed person. I grew up in South Central, Los Angeles and attended an all black and Hispanic junior high school. I was never really submerged into white culture until I went to Notre Dame Academy for high school. Being around mostly white girls and only girls was a new experience for me. I immediately joined in the "black" clique, comprised of other black Creole girls of various shades, but of course I was the lightest. My friends and I would laugh at the fact that we could easily count all of the black girls in our class, a low number even when you count the black girls in every class.

Because of the color of my skin and where I lived, I always had to deal with people's surprised reactions when I tell them where I'm from. The reaction that annoys me the most is when people insist that I'm not black and when my family insists that I'm not white. Everything had to be logical for me, so when my family said that I was not white, I knew that I was because I look it and I know my father's white even though I have never met him. I have gone through many phases from hip-hop to emo, black to white, and I continue to change. I have never really felt like I was black or white; I feel I am both and neither at the same time. I am never comfortable in groups of all black people and groups of all white people because I stand out either way. Its double consciousness, but more complicated because I'm mixed.

The racial confusion, tension, and prejudice that I have experienced throughout my life has greatly influence my choices in classes. I chose to study about women's rights, black culture and history, Native American and Colonial History. I remember reading Passing by Lora Nelson; I've never felt such a connection to character's in a novel before. It made it more interesting that the characters were white like me, and then I understood that I, too, have been "passing" throughout my life as black and as white. The way I talk and dress, and the kind of music I

listens to changes depending on how “white” or “black” I am feeling that day, and whether or not I am around mostly blacks or whites.

When I was younger, I found myself wishing that I was of Latino race; then I would basically be a melting pot! I also wanted to be a tomboy, even though in fact I was very girly. I hated the color pink because it has “girly” labeled all over it. I’ve always felt like males made better friends than females because they were more interesting to talk to, and catty drama did not exist. Sometimes I think about me when I was younger, and I wonder why I felt this way. I have realized I have been constantly trying to be someone else, or rather not embracing who I am. Unlike my family, I do not identify myself as African American, and I do not really identify as white either. When people ask me about my race, I just say “I’m white a little bit of black.” Because of my race difference with the members of my family, I have had a difficult time feeling like I am a part of it. Now that I have reached my senior year of college, I am learning to embrace both sides of my culture instead of compromising one for the other. I have also learned that I am not the only one who understands my situation; I know because it’s written in down in books! I have read accounts of black and white identity crises, Native American and white, Asian and white, and Latino and white, so somehow I do not feel as alone. All my life I have been asking myself why I must have such a difficult time labeling myself, but learning about minorities and the history of the race problem in America has made me develop a clearer answer on why my family has chosen to label themselves black. Even more so, I have become disgusted with my effort to label myself, because now that I am a little older, I realize that labels are cause root of my confusion, so why not get rid of them?

Labels only encourage racial stereotypes because we have the need as people to place everything into groups. So when we come from a country that has a history of racism and

violence, we label people of different races and cultures, etc. in negative categories. While labels are very useful for our brain functioning and our learning process, they continue to support prejudice.

When I learned about Eugenics for the first time I was deeply angered and blown away. I was disgusted at the fact that the American Government sterilized people of mixed race so that they would not be able to have offspring with whites. I was surprised that blacks and whites could not marry until 1967 because that really is not that long ago. Having been deeply affected by being of mixed race myself, I felt offended that the government could do something so awful such a short time ago. This made me think about my family. Eugenics occurred during my grandparents' time, and blacks and whites were still not able to get married until eleven years after my mom was born. People of mixed race were obligated to be black if they had any black ancestors in their bloodline, so my grandparents probably came from a family that chose to be black, because after all the government made them be.

When I was younger, my mom told me about the film *Imitation of Life* and how I reminded her exactly of Peola/Sarah Jane. She told me that I was rejected my race and my heritage, but I felt like I was being forced to reject my white race. My mother, just like Peola's mother, did not understand how silly I felt telling the public I was black. My grandpa even made a joke about it once when I went to summer camp. On the parental consent form you had to check the race of your child and my mother checked black. My grandpa laughed at her and said that if was to get lost they wouldn't find me because they would be looking for a little black girl. My family and others that relate to Peola's mother do not understand how we feel. Now that I have finally watched the movie, I was sad to see that my mother had missed the point of the film entirely, and failed to realize that she was allowing herself to believe that she had to "stay in her

place." "Staying in my place" is definitely not something I intend to do. At times I feel like my family is allowing themselves to become ignorant. What made things eve more difficult was the fact that my family taught me and cousins to love people for who they are, not what they look like, but even so, many family conversations revolved around blacks and whites.

For my family, the "other" is white and they are black. But for me, I feel I am a part of both, so when they talk about what the "white man" has done to the black race, I feel offended because I am a part of the white race. And no matter how uncomfortable I felt, no one seemed to care. We learn in history books about the prejudice and discrimination towards blacks from whites, but in my experience, I have never felt prejudice like I have when blacks talk about white people. I have listened to countless conversations in which my friends and family would put down whites. There was always so much anger and so much tension in their voices, and I wondered where it all came from. Listening to the anger made me feel more disconnected from them as well as the rest of the world.

One thing that I have also come to realize is that while Americans have a deep history of pain, prejudice is useful to the survival of white as well as minority cultures. If everyone in the world produced offspring with another race, 'black', 'Mexican', 'white,' etc. families would cease to exist, so while American history is painful, it is also very interesting, and both good and evil are necessary in the world. It allows us to grow as people; to make the decision to change and to spread more love than we do hate.

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Professor Camfield

Reflective Essay

17 April 2010

A Way of Living

My mother is not what I would call financially responsible, and when she actually held a job down she only made minimum wage, nowhere near enough to raise three kids alone. My grandparents and great-grandparents helped as much as they could with us, so I know we were better off than a lot of kids but it is not a life I wanted for my family or myself in the future. So despite my love for reading and writing, literature was not a viable career option.

My intention was to go to college, then medical school, and eventually live a comfortable, rewarding life as a pediatrician. I'm sure if I really pushed myself I could have stuck steadily to that exact path, but I started to question my choice in High School. I loved my teachers, their charisma and passion; I could see myself working with students, evoking the same passion I had for education and literature in others. But what kind of living would I make as a teacher? Could I support my family? It wasn't the plan.

I entered freshman year as a pre-med major with questions about where my life was going. Was money more important than finding a career you were passionate about? Semester one was filled with my duties as a pre-med undergraduate: pre-calculus (which I had taken in high school), biology, python programming, and writing 10. Biology proved to be tedious and uninteresting, aside from my professors French accent, which I was interested in experimentally utilizing in my writing. Computer programming was beyond frustrating, one comma,

parenthesis, or period missing in lines of code and nothing worked! Pre-calculus was easy. And writing proved a challenge, as I was nowhere near as good as I thought I was.

I could easily have continued on with my plans to pursue a pre-med degree but I knew already, and perhaps long before, that science was not where my heart was. I did fear the financial ambiguity that pursuing a degree in literature would afford but I wanted to love my work and I have.

Choosing literature as my field of study has been wonderful for me. My very first professor of literature was Linda Torres. I saw myself in her place after I had graduated, teaching at the college level, passionate about the materials, animatedly lecturing my students about the importance of reading the assigned text. She made me smile, if not laugh a little, when class discussions dwindled and she asked “Who finished the book?”. A few hands raised, maybe half the class, followed by an impassioned “Come on Guys!”. Then she would start explaining to the class why this book was important, how it present particular concepts, how the language was beautifully written. I would be that professor; the slightly overenthusiastic yet endearing (hopefully) one, who vehemently attempts to persuade students to see literature in the same passionate way I do.

Starting my second semester my college education is filled with numerous enthusiastic professors and a great deal of contentment. I felt like I belonged in the field of literature. I was happier and more open than I had been in a long time. Studying what I was passionate about was like opening a window in a stifled house, the fresh air slowly permeated throughout and soon the house was no longer stifling. I can’t imagine what my life would have been like if I had continued on as a pre-med major, but I doubt it would have held half as much joy.

My literature classes have afforded me more than contentment with myself, they have opened my eyes to lives and experience beyond my own. I can't say that I enjoy reading about travesties and genocide but I can imagine the place our world would be if no one did, the shallowness, the destruction, the chaos. It is an aspect of literature I try to remind students of constantly in tutoring, that fiction, even fantasy, may not be reality but it reflects it, sometimes you just have to pay closer attention.

I started tutoring writing the summer after my sophomore year. It has been one of the most rewarding decisions of my undergraduate education because it has cemented my decision to teach at the college level.

The two are not synonymous, as some might think, but the knowledge of how to teach writing skills is invaluable to literature students. In order to write well it is critical to know how to read a text closely and analyze. How to teach these skills is vital in teaching literature because while one assumes that if you can teach literature you can teach writing, it is not necessary true. I have worked in both writing classes and literature classes as a McNair Scholar; the two courses use very different teaching methods.

In the beginning of my Junior year I was excepted into the McNair scholars program. The goal of the program is to help first generation college students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds pursue a Ph.D. The McNair program has helped me develop networking skills and provided me with vital information on how to go about applying for my Ph.D.

The McNair program requires students to do a research project within their major. My research was sparked from reading the Brer Rabbit tales in Lit 20, which I vaguely remembered in some form from Disneyland. My Sophomore year I took a children's literature and film course

in which we studied the tendencies of Disney, and a few other children's film manufactures, toward degrading ethnicities. Due to the relevance of the Brer Rabbit tales historically I decided to research the impact of Disney's interpretation of Joel Chandler Harris's Brer Rabbit Tales.

After looking at the Brer Rabbit tales, Splash Mountain (Disneyland ride) and the film Song of the South, it was clear that Joel Harris's tales had been transformed into something which lacked its original integrity. I incite my readers to think about the possibility, and reality, of similar attacks on literature:

> How easily will our society submit to the silent attacks on these authors? Think deeply on that question, and recall that Disney *has* created a film compilation of Tom Sayer and Huckleberry Finn. Thousands of novels have been reworked into movies under the same smiling façade of corporate venders like Disney. Perhaps the question should then be, when will the silent attacks on these authors infiltrate our society and will it even be noticed? (Jolliffe 10).

The obvious destruction of this canonical novel, I feel, is a stepping stone for several repeat atrocities.

This research paper has preliminarily been accepted for publication in the University of California Merced's Undergraduate Research Journal, which I find a rather exciting accomplishment. One of many publications to come I hope.

Most helpful to me, from the McNair program, was the ability to do an instructional internship, which is like working as a TA without pay. I worked in the Native American literature class my senior year and facilitated class discussions on a few occasions. It was different from my experiences working in writing classes, particularly due to the fact that this

was an upper division course, but also because there was less of a “how to” feel and more of a discussion of text. I definitely prefer the feel of a literature class.

My senior year has been the most difficult. It has taught me the importance of time management but I’m still working putting those skills to practice. More than ever I am feeling the pressure of my work load, and while it is not unmanageable it is daunting when piled up toward the end of the semester. Important lesson for my last semester: figure out everything that needs to be done and figure out how to evenly distribute the work load.

While my final semester has been chaotic, I have enjoyed my classes - with the exception of logic and reasoning, which I find to be tediously boring – and the materials covered. More specifically, things like rereading the Scarlet Letter – which I have not read since High School – and finding my opinions on the writing and context much changed. Originally I disliked Hawthorne for his dry writing and plot, but I find the novel is spectacularly written.

Also the necessity of doing a senior thesis has given me a look into what I should expect in Graduate School. It is much more difficult than I expected it to be, perhaps because I am passionate about the subject area, but I find asserting myself as an authority is difficult. Also, structurally I find myself doing what I would in a research paper, and I do not think that is precisely what is expected. These are all things that I am extremely glad I came across as an undergraduate rather than as a graduate student, and while I am still working through these issues I will have had a good deal of experience with them should I come across them again.

Literature has gone from being a sideline passion and escape from life to being the center of my academic studies and thus a large part *of* my life. It is large shift but one which has benefited me in numerous afore mentioned, and likely yet unrealized, ways. I only hope that in

the years to come I can enrich the lives of students like myself, as well as my own family and friends, in a similar way. That, I know, is a goal worth dedicating my life to.

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Literature 190

Professor Camfield

14 May 2010

The Reflective Essay of an Undergraduate Literature Major

When I enrolled at UC Merced, I decided to go in as a History major. Reading has always been a hobby of mine, but I did not enjoy the English and Literature courses that I took in high school; I didn't find the concepts and tools that were taught in regard to studying literature interesting. I had always enjoyed my history classes, so naturally I decided to study what I was most interested in. During the second semester of my freshman year, I took History 17, a survey course that covered American history from Reconstruction to present day; I was surprised to see that there were a couple of novels on the course reading list. When we read and discussed the novels in our discussion sections, it helped me to realize how closely history and literature are linked. I was not taught literature against the backdrop of history in high school; instead, the curriculum relied heavily on conducting close reads of texts in terms of literary devices as symbolism, metaphor, etc. For me, coming to the realization that literature is an important social tool that can be used to examine history, society, and culture was incredibly fascinating. In the Fall semester of 2007, I took Literature 31 with Jan Goggans and was pleased to find that the class was like a social history class taught through literature. I took a strong interest in reading literature from the social historical perspective. This interest was further developed upon my enrollment in History and Literature of the 1960s. For me, this particular class served as a testimony to the interrelatedness of history and literature and influenced me to change my major.

During these classes, I also developed a better understanding of how to read and analyze texts in an academic manner. As a result of the numerous papers I have had to write over the course of the past four years, I feel as though I have learned how to better craft an argument and support it with effective and strong evidence. I believe that the bulk of my development as a writer has been fostered more so by the writing assignments in my literature classes than in my writing classes here at UC Merced. When I took Writing 100, the course was dedicated to teaching students to write in the manner in which I had become accustomed to as a result of taking so many literature courses. This was also the case in my Grammar and Style class. Much of the coursework revolved around analyzing works of fiction and nonfiction and writing about how style informs content and vice versa. I was the only Literature major in the class and the instructor told me that I was the only student who did not struggle with the assignments. I attributed my ability to fulfill the course expectations to a greater extent than the other students to the training and practice in writing and thinking critically and analytically I received in the literature courses that I have taken. I have realized the importance of writing and its pervasiveness in nearly every career field through the curriculum that constitutes the literature major.

Another significant aspect of my experience as a literature major was the semester that I spent doing research for a chapter of Jan Goggan's book. This provided me with an insight into the work of academics and really forced me to conduct a deep amount of research that I had not been accustomed to. It was a very interesting process to witness and I acquired somewhat of a grasp of what it is like to work on a lengthy, in-depth piece of scholarly writing. I also developed a greater understanding of the malleability and pervasiveness of literature by

witnessing Jan's examination of Dorthea Lange's photographs and Paul Taylor's research and writing. This also reinforced my understanding of literature as a branch of social history.

In addition to these realizations, skill acquisitions, and research opportunities, I have been exposed to a very diverse body of literature and have read numerous novels and poems that I probably never would have picked up on my own. In classes such as Environmental Literature and Native American literature, I acquired a new perspective on social issues that I had never really taken the time to look into on my own. The Native American Literature course in particular presented a wide array of in-depth social issues centering on the Native American struggle with preserving their culture in a nation where they have been systematically oppressed. Leonard Peltier's book *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sundance* was one book in particular that resonated deeply for me because it exposed many of the injustices that had been carried out against a particular minority.

The Literary Genres course that I took helped me to acquire a better understanding of how content and style are related. Our close study of sonnets provided me with knowledge that was transferrable to a paper that I wrote for African American History about Claude McKay and his subversive use of the sonnet form to protest the racial injustices in America during his time.

My strong interests in social history and literature have made me aware of the many existing social and economic inequalities in today's society, and these interests have also led me to pursue a legal education that will provide me with the necessary knowledge and skills for a career in public interest law. As an avid reader, my political and social views have been shaped by books that provide insight into the reasons why these inequalities exist among socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups today. Through my academic focus on literature and history, I have had the opportunity to take classes that have reinforced and broadened my knowledge of social

and cultural infrastructures. Classes such as African-American History, History and Literature of the 1960s, and Native American Literature provided concise overviews of the significance of legal battles in the struggle to effect social change. These classes taught me to analyze historical studies such as Robin D.G. Kelley's *Race Rebels* and novels such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* in terms of their social and cultural meanings and relevance. My academic background has continuously ignited my curiosity and forced me to ask questions about how these social problems can be solved and I have come to believe that best way to do so is to work through the judicial system. In a 2002 interview with Charlie Rose, Jonathan Franzen stated that writing novels serves no utilitarian purpose. After studying and analyzing many novels over the course of my undergraduate education as a Literature major, I have to whole heartedly disagree with that statement. The literature curriculum here at UC Merced has taught me that novels are a significant aspect of our understanding of society and have the ability to make an actual difference in the world.

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Professor Camfield

Literature 190

21 April 2009

Reflective Essay

As my academic journey as a literature scholar comes to an end at the University of California Merced, it is almost inevitable to contemplate what my chosen major has contributed to my life's goals and career. Upon entering this university, I believed I was going to be a public school teacher and use my degree in literature to aid me in teaching a high school English class. However, before I can say how literature has helped prepare me for such a career choice, it is valid to first define how literature has shaped my own perspective of life; how I now see and interpret society and culture through the tactics I have learned as a literature student. The study of literature has contributed immensely to not only my knowledge of historical and cultural artifacts (such as literary movements and pieces), but this realm of study has also greatly influenced me see the world through different eyes as I have obtained new skills of dissection and interpretation in both text and culture in society.

Throughout my literary study, many have confronted me and proposed the idea that literature is "easy" because all literature students do is simply "read novels". Not only does this unfortunate argument deem itself naïve due to the fact that literature students do more than just "read", it initiates further contemplations of the matter. On the contrary to those arguments, the study of literature has only challenged and expanded my perspective of how to study life, society, and culture in general. These types of discussions with people outside my major only

provoke me to further examine what the literature field has contributed to my knowledge of life outside the classroom.

One thing I learned from the study of literature is how to go beyond the text and analyze the context of a piece. Instead of contemplating how much I simply enjoyed a piece of literature based upon the entertainment aspect, literature studies have been able to allow me to study concepts that are imbedded within the story of a novel, short story, or poem. As a literature student, I have been provoked to go beyond what is in front of me in a book and to ask questions such as *why* a literary piece is so significant; why is it studied? Such questions only imply the need to look beyond the surface of the written word and to delve into many other factors such as history, society, and culture in order to attempt to respond to such inquiries. These factors challenge and provoke a unique attempt at studying literature and force a student to delve into a realm of academia that incorporates much thought, analysis, and critique. This type of study is what truly makes this field an art rather than a science. It is a personal attempt at understanding and comprehending a piece of text that has withstood generation after generation. The possibilities of critiques and perspectives are immense.

Such critique and analysis that I have learned to apply within literature can be found within many realms of literary pieces. From comedies to tragedies, romance and gothic horror, any piece of literature is fair game to analyze and dissect for a deeper and more influential understanding. One example of going beyond the text and into a deeper discussion of a piece was when I analyzed a small excerpt from the Spanish epic Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes. The quote from the novel states:

> In this interview, she will immediately fix her eyes upon the knight, who at that instant shall be gazing at her, and each will appear to the other, something

> supernatural: without knowing how, or wherefore, they will find themselves presently caught and intangled in the inextricable net of love…(Cervantes 187)

In this scene, the delusional Don Quixote day dreams about meeting a fair maiden for the first time and then believes they will immediately fall in love with one another based upon the "supernatural" qualities of love. Although this scene may be short, it is one out of the many countless romantic excerpts that have been derived from the novel. This may come off as romantic and entertaining to the average reader, but I have learned as a literary student to depict these romantic patterns and in turn critique and analyze them based upon my own understanding of what I have gathered from lectures about feminism and the qualities of romanticism. I have critiqued such a scene from a previous paper by claiming:

> …as this passage adds to the colorful day dreams of the romantic hero, it produces a tension on the portrayal of women. It shows that romantic ideals significantly reduce a woman to the simple image of a beautiful, agency lacking princess. It shows that romanticism does not allow for females to be strong, open minded, or convey of a sense of agency that is found in most male characters of the novel…This romantic example conveys a sense that all a beautiful woman needs is to look at a successful man and then immediately fall for him. It ignores the female's individualistic desires and contemplations. (Avila Romanticism)

Such an analysis has been developed from many lectures and discussions from the literary realm depicting romance and females. As I have learned and developed ideas contemplating these contexts, I have applied them to instances such as the one found in Don Quixote. Although this piece was written in a time where the romantic style was abundant, I am still able to respect such an era and go beyond the text to comprehend and analyze the emotions

and substances lying beneath the surface of a scene. Such a critique has made it possible to open doors to more analysis and dissection of literary studies in other pieces of literature.

Another concept I have learned from my major is the idea of being able to contemplate society and culture surrounding a piece of literature and apply it to today's modern society. Often times I have been given a piece that spans over many generations, yet thanks to literary study, I am able to depict the concepts that stand out and apply it to today's world and culture. By doing so, I am able to understand the significance of a piece of literature and how or why it is studied in the modern day; even if it is very old and contrasting to today's lifestyle. This is another art that the literature field has taught me; that I am able to comprehend beyond the context of the story and apply the significance to today's culture. By performing this analysis, I am able to not only analyze literature, but as well as dissect and contemplate today's culture and society and then apply it back onto the text.

One example of such a literary tactic was when I analyzed a character named Ahab, a captain with much psychological and emotional turmoil from the American classic Moby Dick. At first I illustrated a concept derived from another character named Ishmael and then applied it to Ahab, which would lead to an overall discussion of society and humanistic qualities in general. I stated in my paper:

> As this is my first time reading Moby Dick, I must admit it is quite amusing to see the sexual innuendos scattered throughout the novel. However funny and entertaining it may be, I remain certain that there are indeed some deep humanistic approaches to the novel's tale. One example stood out to me as deep and thoughtful as it was found in Chapter 58. It is here where Ishmael recounts the idea that the ocean hides a lot of mystery beneath the surface, whereas on land

> everything is clear and visible. Ishmael notes that this is similar to the human soul; that as people we have a small piece of land that is visible to our peers, but the rest is mysteriously hidden like the depths of the ocean. Our soul's small visible piece of land is peaceful, but our soul's mysterious ocean is disconcerting and unsettling. (Avila The Human Soul)

I was then able to apply the concept of the human soul to Ahab by showing his internal pains and struggles that corresponded to Ishmael's contemplations. As Ahab's character is disturbed and strange by only focusing on revenge by killing a whale that bit off his leg, Ishmael's interesting idea goes hand in hand with the struggling, vengeful character. I was able to use literary technique to apply Ishmael's concept of the human soul onto Ahab and even go beyond the text itself and apply the same concept to society and culture. I did this by saying in my paper:

> We [the audience] never fully grasp their [Ahab and other vengeful characters] whole persona as they only focus on revenge. We only get a glimpse of their peaceful past before their current struggle; we lose their humanistic qualities due to the violence of vengeance. Their stories, their loves and joys, fall and become hidden beneath the surface of the soul's mysterious ocean. This reminds me of the common saying "don't judge a book by its cover" as we are so quick to judge actions that we forget to see beyond the outwardly appearances. We forget that there is an ocean within; hiding the mystery of a person's true identity and passions. (Avila The Human Soul)

Although another small example of the capabilities of literary analysis, it is a fair one as it is able to show that such literary tactics are not found within the sole confines of the written

word. My major has shown me that literature speaks out beyond the novel, beyond the story, and beyond the walls of a classroom. Literature exists and speaks out into society as the text itself is a cultural marker and reflection of human society. The literary field has taught me that literature is a very humanistic study as it incorporates such factors into the realm.

One other tactic that literature has taught me is the capability of being able to openly communicate my ideas and perspectives of literature and society to others. By participating in open discussions, writing many research essays, and giving presentations in front of my peers, the literary world has shown that it is a space that is open for communication and discussion of one's perspective of literature and cultures. One example of such a tactic was when I presented my research paper to my environment literature class in the spring semester of 2009. By doing this, I was able to openly communicate with my peers about the significance of a literary piece to modern day society. I developed my own thesis and supported by claim by stating:

> Leslie Marmon Silko, the author of the highly acclaimed novel Ceremony, uses Native American storytelling to help depict the life of Tayo, a traumatized war veteran fresh out of Vietnam who struggles to connect with his environment and goes through a deep and spiritual healing process that allows him to find his center in the world once more…Reflecting Silko's beliefs on the importance of storytelling, the act of storytelling plays a big part in connecting readers with the environment. It can be found in books as well as in movies, which produce a modern way of telling stories and connecting viewers to the environment. Like Silko's belief that storytelling can connect people, books and movies are significant ways of storytelling and both can influence people in today's society to find a connection with the environment. (Avila Storytelling)

After countless hours of reading, studying, discussing, and researching, the study of literature has shown that it is both challenging and interesting to dissect, analyze, and interpret the context of a literary piece. By studying literature, I am now able to analyze beyond the words and story plot. I am able to delve further and gather significant factors imbedded within a piece and connect it to modern day times and cultures. By doing this, I learn to see and understand history and society differently as literature opens up new ideas and perspectives to realize. I am able to communicate my ideas and perspectives of literature and society openly to my fellow scholars. Literature is truly a distinguished art that allows for individual, unique critiques as well as special attention to the world and cultures surrounding us. It opens the door to seeing text in a new light as well as perceiving society and culture in new ways that greatly influence and shape the human mind.

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Professor Camfield

Literature 190

21 April 2010

Oh Wait, Before I Go…

Reflective Essay

I am a changed individual. I entered my studies at the University of California in Merced in the Fall of 2008. Since then I have felt an extravagant transformation in every aspect of my life. Before I began my studies at UC Merced I had studied English at Merced Junior College for two and a half years, in which time I felt myself laying a foundation for the future of my academic progress. However, my study of Literature at UC Merced has impacted me in so many ways that I find it fairly difficult to trace back the baby steps I was taking at the Junior College. The five years I have spent in college have been much like the life of a growing child. First, crawling was necessary. Then came the baby steps accompanied by a few stumbles and spills. And finally, when I transferred to the University, I was able to take long strides as a growing student. I think the best metaphor to relate to my academic growth is the shaping of a piece of clay. I know, this is almost too cliché for me to write, but in the case of my progress as a student and as a person I feel that it is absolutely fitting, so I'm going to use it to represent my scholarly growth and morphology.

I started out as several scattered pieces of clay, and then slowly rolled these separate pieces into one ball through my studies at the junior college. However, it wasn't until my

transition into the University that the details of my persona began to take shape. The clay of my being was handled by several remarkable professors, each etching fine, detailed lines into the clay of my life. The first classes I attended at the University sent major shock waves through my expectation. I felt that I was already extremely knowledgeable in most fields of reading and writing, but the conversations throughout the first several weeks of my attendance left me feeling as if I had not accomplished anywhere near what I thought I had as a student up to that point. Many discussions confused me, the vocabulary was heightened beyond my understanding, and the readings were far more complex than I had imagined. Reality struck me like an iron fist to the gut. I had much room to grow and little time to do so.

Luckily, the professors were extremely open and enthusiastic about helping their students grow and learn. Each class became a new detailed slice into my continuously transforming piece of clay. We studied books I had never imagined myself understanding and wrote on topics I had never contemplated before. My vocabulary was steadily growing and my knowledge of the past and present was constantly building upon the literature I was studying. Novels such as Nella Larson's Passing, Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar, along with plays like Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice and Arthur Miller's The Crucible have allowed me to study and understand the past in a much more concrete way. My knowledge of American history has increased dramatically through my study of literature. I have gained a stronger understanding about topics such as Plath's focus on the lives of women in a male dominated society, the political undertones of Twain's writings along with his endless focus on adventure in American society, Shakespeare's unmatched poetics in his explication of courtly love, and Miller's metaphoric use of the Harlem witch hunt to portray the Red Scare of

the 1950's. These are just a few examples of how literature has helped me grow as a person and gain a better grasp on the history of our country.

The transformation, however, did not stop there. My focus on Literatures of the English speaking world allowed me to take courses that specifically related to things that have affected my life. In the Spring of 2009 I studied California Literature under Professor Jan Goggins. This course was especially helpful to my academic growth because, as a California native, I was able to relate the literature to the life I had been living for 22 years here in the west. Joan Didion's Run River helped me understand how important the rivers and water sources are to California and how the water supply is not just a modern concern but a battle that has been going on for decades. In today's day in age the ideas of drought and decreasing water supplies are very serious topics, and through literature like Didion's we are able to see how water has always been a prime resource for this great state. Many of the same issues that we see with the water supply today are clear themes in Run River, a novel that focuses mainly on the Sacramento River and its impact on the lives that it "runs" through. Another example of my growing knowledge can be seen through my study of Paul Beatty's White Boy Shuffle. This contemporary novel allowed me to examine the complexity of race in such a diverse place like California. The main character unconsciously labeled himself "the cool funny black guy" in the predominantly white community (Beatty 27). Beatty's writing style also helped me grasp an idea about what it takes to write a race driven novel, much like the way one acts in certain race driven neighborhoods. My growth as a person was escalating from the readings I was constantly engaging in.

I have also learned how novels such as Twain's Roughing It are prime examples of how the migration to the west affected the entire country and how people adapted to the changing land and growing populations. What strikes me as remarkable about Twain's works is how

accurately he is able to depict different types of characters in different settings and situations. Mark Twain was able to create characters so real and place them into stories that are 'stretched' to the extent that you have to ask yourself, "is he for real?", but because of the realistic elements he places into his characters you believe that he is indeed 'for real'. What I learned most from the works of Twain was that we live in a storytelling world full of white lies and misinterpreted words, but we need to be able to decipher through the bullshit and take away the useful meanings of the stories, although in Twain's case sometimes the bullshit is the most fun to work with. These types of techniques can be seen in lines such as, "At the break of dawn we were always up and running foot-races to tone down excess of physical vigor and exuberance of spirits. That is, Johnny was-but I held his hat" (Roughing It 85). Twain's comedic approach is American in every sense, and his writings can teach us all we need to know about being American, in a weird way.

Coming back to the idea of my life at the UC relating to the molding of a piece of clay, as I come to the end of my senior year I can truly see how much I've been shaped and how sharp my skills have become. I have come to realize and appreciate not only how much my reading skills and critical thinking has improved but also how much my style and writing techniques have been transformed. I don't want to think that I was ever a horrible writer, but I now know that I have improved immensely throughout my studies at UC Merced. Writing has, in my eyes, always been one of my stronger points. So to realize that this skill has improved in the ways that it has makes me sincerely appreciate all the help and guidance I received from my amazing professors. One of the things constantly touched on by several professors throughout my studies here was my sentence structures and the lack of depth that many of them carried. I have worked extremely hard to improve on my sentence structures and I feel that I have made strong progress

toward perfecting my writing. I now feel extremely confident in my abilities to write a solid formal paper on any topic that is thrown in my direction. Throughout my writing improvements in the last few years I have recognized my deeper understanding of what a good paper should look like and how it should be structured.

My researching abilities have skyrocketed along the process as well, allowing me to be confident in teaching myself on topics I am unfamiliar with. Throughout my study of Literature I have been forced to connect topics of novels with sources outside of the literary world. So for one to assume that a literary major is only versed in literature is a painstakingly misguided assumption. In my first semester at the University I took a course with Professor Greg Camfield entitled *Literary Genres*, in which we completed several assignments that focused on relating literature to the modern elements of the world. For example, when studying Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice and Aeschylus' The Oresteia I wrote an essay that connected many of elements from the theater to the modern day Television Sales. The world is reflected through the works of literature, and studying these great works of art at UC Merced has given me the ability to see the world in new and exciting ways.

Shakespeare's Sonnets, along with the study of poets such as Robinson Jeffers and Walt Whitman, have given me a great deal of appreciation for the art of words. I wrote a paper explicating a Sonnet written by Christina Rossetti in November of 2008 and another examining William Blake's *The Divine Image*. In these essays I touched on many topics such as meaning, structure, rhythm, and symbols. Before my studies at UC Merced I would not have known where to start the breakdown of a sonnet, let alone even know what a sonnet was. Assignments like these have helped me to look deeper into what an artists' purpose truly is. Looking beyond the basic words the author chose to write the poem is critical in understanding political, social,

religious, and personal meanings. Understanding when the poem was written, why it was written, and why it was written in the form chosen by the poet are all factors that must be considered while trying to understand poetry.

This type of analysis carries over into every aspect of worldly understanding. There are always elements that lie beneath the surface of a situation or conflict, and as a literature student I have learned how to dig into these buried elements to gain a better understanding of purpose and intention. For example, when a presidential speech is given there are often overlying issues and factors that have caused the speech to be given in a certain place, at a certain time, and to a certain crowd. Analysis of poetry is a useful tool that I have learned to integrate into the world that I live in each day. Although Shakespeare is remarkably rewarding to read, learning how to understand his words and meaning go just a little beyond pleasure. Literature has given me tools that allow me to become an active part of a dynamic society.

As I come to the end of my days at UC Merced I truly feel that my study of Literature has molded me into a complete human being, an active member of a forever changing society, and a bright young man with great ambitions heading out into a world that is better understood through the works of literary geniuses such as Twain, Blake, Shakespeare, Plath, Faulkner, Steinbeck, and many, many others. The knowledge I have acquired through literature will surely carry over into whatever field I choose to apply my skills. My progress as a writer along with my analytical skills have shaped me into a man that I never thought I could be. Literature, in itself, has given me the knowledge I would have gained in several other majors such as history, anthropology, biology, and sociology, just to name a few. The literary major has given me the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of great authors of the past and present and relate their works to the modern world in more ways than imaginable. The world has never seemed brighter to me,

and I thank all the literary professors for their helping hands in my molding process. I also have to thank UC Merced for offering such a remarkable major. I can honestly say that no other major would have helped me grow in the ways in which literature has. I look forward to applying these skills into the modern world and will always appreciate what this major has done for my life.

"Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree"

-Ezra Pound

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Lit 190
Spring 2010

An Exercise in Moral Uncertainty:
Or, The Value Of An Education in Literature

I'm not sure what I've learned as a literature major.

In short: I decided to study literature because reading stories seemed easy, enjoyable, and (apparently) worthwhile enough. In practice, I didn't especially value trying to find concrete meanings for texts. I can't think of any reasons for pursuing this major, besides some practical ones: Firstly, a college degree. Secondly, cultural education. Third, practicing a certain skill: observing, and making observations about, situations people find themselves in (usually in novels); in practicing this skill, theoretically making it stronger, to be used in a "more important" part of life. (Woe betide they who study poetry: they must say that they practiced gleaning value from situations [poems] whose construction is often less than straightforward [not prose].) It would be nice if I could say that these practical values didn't really matter to me, and ultimately I studied Literature because I enjoyed (dare I say, loved) it; maybe I did.

What is a Major in Literature? As I see it, there are are two parts to this definition. As with laws, the "letter" and the "spirit" of a Major in Literature are two distinct things. According to "the letter", someone is/has a Literature Major if they are either enrolled in the appropriate School of study (as a student), or if they own an officially-certified Diploma. The "spirit" of being a Literature Major does not mean something supernatural. Perhaps it makes more sense to refer to this as the "intent" of being a Literature Major. Compared to the above, this term is more difficult to define: indeed, one of the functions of a diploma is that a diploma is a simple, condensed, and tangible representation of this other, less-easy to define thing.

Say a person were to purchase a Literature diploma, and bureaucratically registered

themselves as having a Literature major: many would say that by "the letter", or officially, they had a Literature major - but they weren't a Lit major "in spirit." On the other hand, say someone sat in on all the requisite courses, did all the requisite work, and got all 'A' grades - but they never officially enrolled in any course. Some might say this person was in the opposite circumstance - a Literature major "in spirit", "everything but officially".

The "official" impact of my Literature Major is easy enough to describe. I will have a college diploma, whose authenticity is backed by the solemn institution of the Universities of California (or Regents thereof). I spent four years in Merced, going through the requisite motions in order to obtain this UC-backed document. With a moral certainty, I will be able to state this diploma on my resume. I've been told that seeing a college diploma on my resume will make employers more likely to hire me, *and* more eager to pay me elevated amounts, than they would have otherwise.

And yet, there's more. The *other* impact of being a Literature Major; what my diploma "represents"; "the spirit" and not "the letter": what are these, exactly?

To approach an answer to this question, I will, apologetically, complicate my example of a Lit major "in spirit". I still say that the hypothetical "purchaser" of a diploma - who in other words, achieves it by no other means than a one-time, monetary transaction - only has that diploma "by the letter". But someone who gets a diploma by more traditional means - taking and passing the required courses - *could* still be condemned as not having a diploma "in spirit". The deciding factor - by no means the only one, but this is what I perceive to be the opinion of most people - would be if that person took & passed their classes "mechanically", or "humanely". The former generally does not reflect upon their assignments: the latter generally does. One may be reminded of the saying, "reading without reflection is like eating without digestion".

Nonetheless, there is a value in going through one's courses mechanically (which a person who does their work does, whether they reflect upon it or not). Namely, the acquisition of rote training: the ability to dedicatedly get through mechanical & repetitive work one may find before them. In other words, by reading a lot, a person develops the endurance to read a lot in the future. Possibly, this endurance somewhat carries over to other tasks. By being able to read very much, a person may perceive themselves as possessing the more-generalized ability "to get through tasks which take a long time". This perception may give them the endurance to do other tasks which appear to require the ability "to get through time-intensive tasks", whether the task be found in their personal of professional life (for example, playing with the cat of one's boss until the cat, not themselves, is tired).

Personally though, this has only happened to me to a slight degree. Yes, as a literature major I have read longer chunks of text than I have ever previously. However, this fact does not have much of a psychological impact on me. Someone else could be greatly impressed by realizing they can read - if not do - this much. The way they honestly see themselves could change; they may begin to realize that they have the sincere capacity to do large amounts of work; and so on.

Thus far, I have repeatedly been describing the benefits one technically acquires from gaining a Literature major. In fact, the benefits described (rote skills, the prestige of a college degree) could be said to come from any college degree. Interwoven throughout my description of these two benefits, I have repeatedly reminded that there are other, more-intangible benefits gained from a Literature major (and perhaps, from any college degree). I will now attempt to describe these other benefits. I will stress the benefits I personally have gained, rather than the gains which I theorize a Literature major might gain.

I seem to have improved in my essay-writing skills. My evidence is that when I look over my old essays now, I find myself noticing ways I could improve it. Perhaps I improved, and perhaps because of my work towards a Literature major. However, that may not be the case. The reason being, I generally do not revise my essays after completing them: I "revise as I go", and generally only apply tweaking to the final product. "Now" is, in effect, the first time I have looked over my finished essay; perhaps I would have seen the same revisions had I proofread long ago, so therefore perhaps I have not improved in my writing.

The figurative list of "books I have read" has increased. With this, I belong slightly more to a literary community, wherever one may form. For example, one belongs more to an unofficial, worldwide "society of programmers," the more they practice, know, and are generally acquainted with programming languages. Likewise, I belong more to whatever unofficial, worldwide societies may spontaneously form in social circumstances, whose requisite to belonging is having read the kind of books I've read.

In disciplines which seek to instill a certain body of knowledge into its students, "what was learned" is very obvious: in theory, a student who passes Human Biology has acquired a large amount of data (in this case, about how the human body seems to work). To an extent, I also acquired some data as a Literature student: I certainly learned the plots of all the things I read, and at times I was taught (or further read about) the historical backgrounds to these texts. In addition to this, I heard people talking about what they got out of the same books that I had read. I can even remember what other people said sometimes, and I apparently had an emotional response to what they mentioned. These are all experiences which happened to people (either of this world or that of books); whenever I may talk to someone, I may remember one of these experiences, and tell them about it - to whatever effect.

You could say that as a Literature student, one does more of the kind of thinking that can't quite yet be reproduced by a machine. (In comparison, one might generalize that much of the work done in the sciences could be done by a machine, or could conceivably be done by one.) Now I like this statement conceptually, when the subject is some hypothetical student. However, it just doesn't ring true for myself, and my own circumstance. Or perhaps, maybe I just have issue with a conclusion someone might draw: "I liked the way I thought in my literature classes, and I can now think in that way better than before." Maybe I've just not been keeping track, but I can't think of a way that I've really 'improved', as a result of being in a Literature course, which makes sense to me.

Perhaps it makes sense to say that because I was a Literature major, I became more able to perceive things accurately - and more able to perceive a greater *number* of accurate qualities of things (rather than a perspective which is certainly accurate, but is more limited in its scope, and therefore might make inaccurate speculations). Again, I'm not sure if this is true for me. Making insightful observations is largely "what I do"; I would probably be doing it whatever my major was. I guess the activity of making insightful observations (rather than memorization) is more encouraged in Literature courses, so I suppose I had more opportunities to exercise this activity than I (perhaps) would have in other majors; perhaps exercising this faculty made it work better somehow.

However, it seems that investigative observations are encouraged in all disciplines. In other disciplines, it seems like that inquisitiveness serves the purpose of better-understanding (and therefore, mastering) the material being studied. Personally though, it feels like in any discipline where I made astute observations, I would ultimately be asking the question (probably of myself), 'What is it all for? The ultimate end you seem to be after in this discipline - I'm not

sure I want that.' For the mind that asks this question, what better major than Literature? The Major of Literature is (apparently) constantly, implicitly being challenged as being useless. A useless (or perhaps better put, enigmatically useful) major can stand best under the scrutiny of "what is it all for?", because it (or should I say, a given spokesperson) (generally) doesn't propose a clear-cut answer.

Although - come to think of it, an honest-enough person - in any discipline - could give their discipline the same enigmatic value as Literature. They need only say: 'Yes, this field has some practical applications, and may give you a certain kind of life in the future. But, I can't tell you why those things are useful - if usefulness is what you're after. Behold this discipline: what it studies, what it does, and where it may take you. It's here if you want to follow it, for however long that may be.' Under this perspective, no field is more or less useful than another. Every field has certain uses; it is the occasion of a person which gives them value.' (They would then be impressed by their poetic-ness and be overjoyed for a minute - but I digress.) If this logic can be applied to any major, then perhaps Literature is not the refuge for they who don't see value-*enough* in certain fields of study.

Then again, maybe it is. Maybe the kind of people who are preoccupied with the ultimate value of their field, find one of the offerings of a Literature major particularly appealing. In my case, I think I was drawn to Literature because it suggested a kind of thinking I didn't really find in the other disciplines. The other disciplines seemed, in short, too focused on achieving a methodical and scientific understanding of things. I prefer a kind of thinking which keeps my options open. I think studying Literature provided that. Longer, better-sounding, and perhaps less accurately: Studying Literature let me practice a kind of thinking which is less about trying to pin down the way things are, and more about exploring possibilities: possible ways of thinking;

possible conclusions you can draw. Possible ways of dealing with the thing that's before you. Working *with* the text (or anything else, for that matter). *Not* saying that so-and-so has one true meaning - And when that meaning doesn't hold up, figuring that you just didn't get the *right* one-true-meaning, instead of figuring that perhaps - really, *perhaps* - the system of getting-one-true-meaning doesn't work right now.

I've reflected broadly on my career as a Literature student, less-so on my undergraduate education. I think I've yet to finalize my thoughts on the matter; I'll probably think about it in the future. I realize that I may have to explain the value of my major to someone in the future - most importantly when applying for a job. It would be nice to have an explanation which convinced my prospective employer that I was a person who by divine providence would be a good-enough fit for the job I was applying for. It seems this explanation would have to positively affirm the value of my education. At the same time, I would like to give an honest answer. An answer that does both: have I gotten closer to finding one?

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Camfield

Lit 190

4/21/10

Reflective Essay: On approaching the Completion of a Degree in Literature

What good is an education in literature? In the most reductive approach, an education in literature benefits the "successful student" (i.e. me, if I can only finish my thesis) in two primary ways: by teaching them critical thinking skills and writing skills. This means that we should be able to sufficiently analyze literary artifacts and then communicate that analysis to others, which skill should ideally be transferable to other cultural arenas outside of literature. The emphasis is on skills acquired, not on information assimilated. The Literature and Culture learning outcomes don't say anything about memorizing the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. And yet, all anyone wants to know when they learn you are a literature major is who your favorite author is (and of course what you will do with your degree). Well I don't have a favorite author. I usually answer Hemmingway, which doesn't score me any points with the hipster set for obscurity or degree of author's marginalization. But I digress. As I have said, this is a reductive analysis of an education in literature. Besides, I have written about the utility of studying literature in a general way already (see attached essay) and I will try not to repeat myself. In that essay I

outline that utility in general and quantifiable terms and I will try to focus on the qualitative aspects here as well as provide some of my personal experience and work as proof of having benefited by an education in literature. As I hope to demonstrate, the benefits of such an education are not entirely reducible, which is why studying literature is hard to talk about in utilitarian terms and thus why it is frustrating to answer questions regarding how I intend to use my degree. After all, it is not, in my opinion, as important how I use my degree, as it is how I use my education.

First, in addressing the benefits of my education I should address my "success" as a student. To show that I have developed the skills described in the outcomes for the major I've attached "Criticism of In B Flat," a paper I wrote for the literary criticism course offered last semester. It is about postmodernism and the Internet. I've chosen this piece because I believe it most adequately shows a fulfillment of several of the learning outcomes. In it I apply some of the techniques of literary analysis to a non-literary artifact and defend that artifact against some of the more cynical postmodernist critics, particularly Baudrillard. In addressing those critics I display an ability to interpret the texts that they have written, "with due sensitivity" to both the cues therein and the cues present in the postmodern society that they critique. I also touch on the aesthetic qualities of the artifact and examine the ethical dimensions of cultural production in the Internet age. This piece of writing and others, I believe exhibit my ability to articulate myself in writing, "cogently and with sensitivity to context."

I do not wish to dwell on these points, as the paper should speak for itself. However, I should mention speech as well. In regards to articulating my "interpretations and evaluations" in speech, aside from having demonstrated this ability in numerous class presentations, I co-presented my analysis of an experimental class curriculum in studying the life and literature of Mark Twain alongside Dr. Gregg Camfield at the American Literature Association conference in Boston. The invitation to attend the conference and my performance there, which both Professors Camfield and Goggans can vouch for, should prove my merit in this aspect of my academic accomplishment.

I would also be remiss if I didn't mention the benefit that studying literature has had on my creative writing. I have attached a poem of mine, the abridged title of which is *The Rites of Spring*, which I hope exemplifies some proficiency and creativity in the practice of that form. (A comparison of old and new work might be more illustrative of an improvement but would require more space than I care to invest) In addition to being able to make cool allusions, like the one in the title to Igor Stravinsky's musical composition, which I learned about in the class Literary Genres, and the one to William Butler Yeats' theory of historical motion, I have improved in my execution of poetry. The same is true for fiction, non-fiction and of course essay writing, which is creative at its best. My letter writing, however, could stand some improvement. But as I mentioned in the essay on the utility of studying literature, citing the experience of Benjamin Franklin, there is nothing like reading good writing to improve your own.

Speaking of Benjamin Franklin, there's a benefit to one's sense of history to be had from an education in literature as well. Not to mention one's sense of psychology, philosophy and the sciences. Better, perhaps, to say that one partakes in studying all of the humanities when one studies any of the humanities. Nevertheless no subject is as gregarious as literature, and its reach extends beyond the liberal arts. I have studied environmental literature, which incorporates biology and theories of ecology. I have read a Thomas Pynchon short story about entropy. I have read the autobiography of the slave cum free man Frederic Douglass and the letters of Dr. Martin Luther King. I learned more about the state of California, where I have lived all my life, in a literature class than I had ever previously learned. In a class about Greek and Roman mythology I learned a great deal about humanity and art.

And that's what is really important to keep in mind when considering the value of my education. What is it really all about? It's about studying art; a certain kind of art in particular, but as I have demonstrated the same techniques of study and analysis learned in studying literature can be used elsewhere. Art is what humans do. That's all there really is, whether it's baking bread or making a wind-mill out of a bicycle (some art is functional). If all of the world's problems were solved tomorrow, or if a global catastrophe were to destroy civilization as we know it, we would still be making art the next day, and the day after that. So in studying literature, I'm studying and interpreting the value of what humans produce, and in turn what I produce and the myriad connections in between.

All of this adds up to making me a more well rounded person. Having studied literature will indubitably inform my choice of a career and it has already shaped my future prospects but that is a bi-product, or perhaps a co-product. The way I see it, I could be an auto mechanic and still benefit from my education. In fact, I think auto mechanics should benefit from my education. I think it makes better people. Am I being egalitarian or presumptive? Anyhow, an analogy: The philosopher Allan Watts said that the way yoga is sold in America is that it is supposed to be good for you. But, he contended, it is the one thing that is absolutely not supposed to be good for you, that is its own end. I'd like to think of a liberal arts education in similar terms. It is its own end. But of course, in both cases that's rubbish. Yoga is good for you and so is higher education. But if you do one to become more flexible and the other to get a higher paying job then you're missing part of the point. Life should be rich, and studying literature has enriched my life. I'll show you what I mean.

For a long time I couldn't imagine why I would go to college at all, let alone what major I might choose if I did go. The reasons for this ambivalence might form another essay entirely, so suffice it to say for now that I was unaware of any adequate incentives. Ironically, it would take going to college despite my reticence to find out why I might actually benefit from the experience. The knowledge gained would be *a posteriori*, as most knowledge may turn out to be, contrary to my naïve conception of the world. Thus, if life is what I make of it then I must seek out the raw materials for myself; they will not come to me. A friend of mine once said that in life, bad things happen to you no matter what but that you have to work to make the good ones come, by and large. Studying literature has been for me a way to figure

out what the good things are and to see how I might come by them. That is, the greatest thing I've learned in college is how to learn. I may retain some particulars but no erudition is justifiable in and of itself; no raw material is worth more than the will and wisdom to shape it.

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5/14/2010
Reflective Piece
Lit 190

You would never think it, but at first I was a biology major. In highschool I had developed some sort of fascination with pharmaceuticals and had convinced myself that biology was the correct path for my life plan. In fact, that pushed me to apply to UC Merced in 2005. Unlike so many others, I actively chose to come here. That initial venture ended no less than glorious failure and a shattered vision of the future. So when asked, what my major means to me, I must honestly admit that it was a back-up, but not a mistake.

Frankly I still love science. My favorite magazine is Discover, and my favorite novels are largely set in the far, *far* future. What I had forgotten, or perhaps, what I had not really considered was my history with literature. I was always a heavy reader regardless of how good of a student I was. So after I flunked out of the UC, I decided to rely on something I already knew I was good at. Rather, I would rely on something that I already *thought* I was good at.

Being a readmitted student means my education in literature is divided. To give a proper understanding of how my major has affected my life at the UC requires that I at least give some background information. Specifically, the time I spent at Pasadena City College was seriously instrumental in how I perceived my own ability, and how I transitioned to the University.

Prior to getting kicked out of the UC, I wrote and read purely for fun. English classes were always a breeze because most things we read were interesting enough, and writing about them came easily to me. As a result I always had confidence in my writing, even going into college. What PCC did introduce me to was this idea of discussion. Unlike the UC, and even further away from high school, my classes varied largely in composition. Also we spent a lot of time discussing what we have read, this was especially true of the English classes that focused on literature. The first challenge though was in a half-semester intensive course. The class periods were long and our instructor was strict. This was the first class that I had that actually challenged me as a writer. We had to write essays, in class with references to the novels we were reading on in class on a twice weekly basis. It was actually difficult, not just keeping up with the work load, but that course was the first time I had ever received less than a B on something that I had written. Since then, I've received poor marks on essays, but those papers I pay little effort. In her class, I faced real criticism.

After that my writing got better, and soon my grades went up as well. Largely I imagine this being a function of me doing something that I didn't hate, but i'll give credit to the great professors I had at the community college as well. Eventually though, I had to return to Merced.

My education here, since i've been back has been nothing short of phenomenal. My first literature class coming back was with Linda Torres who was, an extraordinarily interesting person. The one class though that I really enjoyed thuroughly was Lit theory with Manuel. Never before in a class had I been so involved. I suppose I just found it really interesting. More than that, I felt it was useful. Understanding how people understand writing will inevitably make you a better writer I felt, and I still feel that holds true today.

It's difficult for me to come up with a thing that I really wish was different about my time in undergrad in this program mostly because all my frustrations and bad spirit are directed to the administrative side, my professors have been *fantastic*. Frankly that is the most important part of school, and the professors have been the most important part of my education bar none. Getting

the chance to read so many different books (some I didn't think i'd care for and liked, other I thought I'd like and found awful), and have discussions with people willing to think is nice. If there's anything that I might wish that I'd been prepared for that I don't think I am: its readjustment training.

[redacted]
May 14, 2010
Senior Thesis
Camfield

Literary

My experience with and within the literary field is complicated at best. I arrived at UC Merced with the notion that college was merely a tool, a way of ensuring that I would be financially secure. My freshman year was tortured, as I found myself truly struggling with the idea that higher education was not something that was to be enjoyed, but endured. I took my first literature class as an elective in my second semester, an introduction to American literature. As we learned about the jeremiad, the captivity narrative, and the volatile relationship between the European settlers and the native filled America, I felt an anger. It was nothing short of life altering. My highly romanticized notions of what it means to be an American were completely shattered as I learned about some of the darker times in America's history. I'm from Monterey, a highly conservative, community oriented city where slavery had maybe two paragraphs of coverage in “social studies”. The disparities were entirely jarring.

At the same time a morbid fascination settled into my new found critical eye. I was completely intrigued with the ways in which superiority was established against the native inhabitants. I learned that power was indoctrinated at the time, that the written words of newspapers, laws, and propaganda were the foundation of making the general population of European settlers truly believe that the dark skinned was congruent with evil savagery. Native tribes were simply unable to spread the word and the European communities were simply linguistically inclined in double speak and propaganda. As a biology major who had, for the past fifteen years of his life, the idea that simple words on paper could control the entire fate of a people was utterly baffling.

For the next year or so, I inched slowly out of the school of natural sciences, at one point switching majors back and forth. One literature course was not enough and I found myself always making room in my schedule for at least one, sometimes two literature courses. I hadn't admitted to

myself quite yet that I had, in a sense, rejected the foundation of my education.

By the time I took creative writing in my junior year, I had already switched my major from human biology to psychology. As this was still science oriented, I was comfortable with it. Results were generally predictable and the scientific method still applied. I enjoyed learning about the mind but there was still something about the experiment process that seemed so impersonal. Experimenters were expected to remove themselves from biases and now I view that as something completely inhibitory to myself and the way I think. Over the course of creative writing, I learned the importance of really being honest with yourself and your work. Most learned people (or people in general really) can smell contrivance a mile away. This is when I learned to stop imitating academic rhetoric and just start writing what I actually thought.

At the conclusion of my junior year, I had accepted that I was most comfortable in the humanities. Coincidentally, the 2008 elections pervaded most of my life at this time. As an active member and officer of the Lambda Alliance on campus (the LGBT club) I was busy with campaigning and picketing. My experience with the written word allowed me to really analyze the propositions legal jargon and the opposing campaign's propaganda. I was also, at this time taking Jan Goggans' protest literature course. The eerily close parallels I was able able to draw from the process of protest and my every day life gave me great insight into the functions of literature and history as a field of study. Activism and literature have been connected for me ever since. Most notable of this class was my admitted obssession with *The Jungle* and how it eloquently, yet powerfully addressed social and ethnic issues in the early to mid 1900's. Protest and social activism became the focal point of my life and I attribute that solely to the effect of that book on my tender young mind.

It was my first week of my senior fall semester when my academic adviser called me into her office for a routine evaluation on where I am in my four (or five) year plan. She explained to me that I had as much psychology as I had literature credits and that if I was to receive any kind of degree within the time I had allotted myself, I would have to choose. I took a day to mull it over and realized that

there has to be reason why, through my constant switching of majors, that I've always made it a point to take literature. For once, logic supported my decision and when I returned to my adviser the next day, there was no question about it. I chose literature with almost no hesitation.

It was at this point that my adviser told me that I was to take Literary Theory with Manuel Martinez-Rodriguez and that it would be a make or break class for me in terms of succeeding as a literature major. Slightly intimidated, I went through that class with a genuine interest in structuralism, postmodernism, and post-structuralism. Queer theory was touched on, but only briefly towards the end of the semester. While I only grasped each theory on a basic level at best, I was able to excel in my application of them to works of literature and film that I had encountered before.

My writing minor was also a contributing factor in my guilty attraction to literature. Minor, however is the wrong word for my actual interest in it. Biology has very little room for exploration often minimizing emotional content by means of preserving objectivity. But the way I write has no place in this field and it was absolutely stifling. As an openly gay man, it is difficult to look back at my early college career and see myself still in the closet. My written work was the first means in which I expressed my deeper, innermost feelings regarding my sexuality. My first confessions came in the form of a Writing 10 prompt that had us write our own autobiographies. This would become the first among many essays in which I explored what it means to be gay. This would become the first time I was truly open and honest with myself and with other people. The reading and comprehension of literature has taught me more about history, society, and life than any other field I have encountered has. These, I feel are the most conducive to being an effective writer.

Up until this moment, defining exactly what my literature major means to me is more than difficult. It's almost impossible. But I suppose I can attribute this to the fact that I have only skimmed the surface, that I have only begun my literary journey. My experience as an actual literature major has so far, only been a year on paper, but the intention has always been with me on some level. In my Writing 100 course, we were given four or five consecutively open ended essays, the best of which was

a prompt that said “Do something important. Write about the before, the something, and the aftermath”. This course was also the first course where we were required to read our essays aloud. The subject of my piece was simple. By this point I had accepted my queer identity. My important “something” was living my life, day to day, not caring that what I was wearing or the way I expressed myself might be perceived as effeminate or overly flamboyant. I attributed the importance of such a mindset to the ways in which I am helping and representing all of those people that cannot, the unlucky majority whose circumstances completely prevent freedom of expression.

I suppose it could be said that I did not have to deal with some of the criticisms of being a futureless literature major as extensively as some of my classmates have. But literature's effect on me transformed my views on education and learning on a much deeper level. I realized that I'm not going to college to gain status or recognition or job opportunities. I'm not going to college for my parents or their bragging rights. I'm going to college to better understand myself and to understand the world in a way that acknowledges subjectivity and the value of such. More importantly, I'm here to realize why I am pursuing education in general and to appreciate its mind-opening properties. I can't contribute to anything until I can understand where I come from and what has come before me. There is no power to a word that has had no meaning, no history, no blood or tears on its letters. If my major has taught me anything over the course of my fickle time in Merced, it is to never deal in absolutes, that only bad things can come in seeing the world in extremes. But, if you *do* decide to deal in absolutes, make sure you, at the very least, have a couple of quotes to back it up.

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Lit 190

April 21, 2009.

Reflective Essay

Throughout the past four years, I have been in various literature courses here at UC Merced, and one of the most important things I have learned during my studies is how literature can have an impact on the society it was written in, as well as society now. In my English courses throughout high school I learned how literature changed throughout the years, and why authors wrote the stories that they did, but it was not very clear why these texts were so important to read no, other than keeping track of history.

One of the books that I remember the most from my freshman year here at UC Merced is The Bell Jar, by Silvia Plath from the literature 31 class taught by Jan Goggans. It reflected how women at the time were trapped by the social roles they were forced to adhere to. I could also see how this book could have an impact to women now as well. It was in these courses were I learned one of the reasons why it was so important to study literature. It reflects on the various problems within society at the time, and they can also show problems that occur or reappear in society later. The Bell Jar shows a woman trapped within a social role, and it could encourage various types of responses from people now who are dealing with, or know someone who is dealing with the same issues.

I also remember studying Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower. This was taught in my Core 1 class, and it was taught again in my Literature of the Environment class, which was also taught by Jan Goggans. In those classes I learned how Butler was able to use science fiction to convey what could happen to the world and environment. I also enjoyed these classes because

these were one of the only ones that used any books within the science fiction genre. Before I was debating on whether I should continue onto graduate school, or try to find a job; but after I began seeing how I could further study science fiction and fantasy in graduate school I began to want to go to a masters or PhD program after graduation. After I graduate I would like to become a professor teaching and conducting research on science fiction and fantasy, as well as write my own fantasy novels. When I first came into UC Merced I knew I liked reading, but it took me several literature courses that had science fiction texts in the curriculum to figure out that I wanted to read, study, and write about science fiction and fantasy as my profession.

One thing that I would like to see improved within the Literature department is to see different genres of books to be taught within the literature courses. There are many genres of books taught, but one that I noticed is not touched on very well is fantasy and science fiction. I am hoping to be able to focus on fantasy literature in graduate school, and I am finding it very difficult to analyze these types of text now because I have no experience in them from my literature courses. I can compare some of what I learned from the science fiction books, however, a lot of the subject that I am using from the fantasy books are completely different from the books that I have analyzed in my other classes.

One thing that may help the literature department prepare students to do their own studies or research is to ask what types of literary genres they are interested in researching and including a book from some of the genres into some of the courses. This would enable to some students to gain some experience in analyzing texts within the genre that they would like to research later. It would also help if those were books that are not constantly used within classrooms, or in the cannon. This would enable students to learn how to analyze books and do research on books that may not have many articles written about them.

Two classes that helped me prepare for the Senior Thesis class is literature 100 and writing 117. Literature 100 was analyzing various literary theories, and we then conducted research on texts and the literary theories that they proved or disproved. In writing 117, research for the School of Social Science Humanities and Arts, I learned how to conduct research for Literature. These classes helped me start to understand how to conduct literary research; however, it was very difficult to conduct the writing 117 research because of the various types of research that were being conducted by the students of the class. I believe it would help if literature professors were more involved with the writing 117 course. I was able to get help from my writing professor in this course; however, it was difficult for me to conduct my research because I was one of the only literature majors taking the course. I think that it would have been good to have literature student's referred to literature professors to help them fully analyze the texts they chose for their research.

I am currently using recently published fantasy literature that does not have any research published on it yet. There are also very few examples for me to look to in order to find examples to analyze the texts that I am using. This makes conducting my own research very difficult. It would still be difficult for me to conduct if I had received a little more training in analyzing texts within the fantasy field, but it may have made it a little easier.

During my first year here at UC Merced, what I remember disliking the most from my courses was how we were taught "the cannon." I hated the canon because most of the books it excluded were books that I enjoyed reading and wanted to research. There were no fantasy books within the canon and only a few science fiction novels. This was why I had "Undeclared" as my major, I enjoy reading; however, the books that I enjoyed the most were not usually taught in the literature classes I was taking. It wasn't until I took my Chicano literature class were I learned

that there could be multiple cannons, and what is put into the cannon varies based on the person constructing it.

Within my Chicano Literature course I learned of many Chicano writers who were rediscovered after they had been lost for many years. It is here that I learned how the canon can be changed as texts are made or rediscovered, and even if they are not a part of the academic canon, they could still be a part of the canon within their own genre of literature. This is what helped me decide to choose fantasy literature as the focus I would like to study in graduate school.

Another thing I would like to see for future or potential literature students would be a workshop where students can learn the various jobs or programs they can get into after they graduate with a literature degree. One of the reasons I was hesitant in choosing literature as my major was because I wasn't entirely sure what I would be able to do with this degree. I just knew that I liked to read and analyze certain types of books, not what I would be able to do job wise once I received a degree for literature. I think this would make it a little easier for students who are debating between majors to choose easier. This may not be something that would work for the Literature Department to change in its curriculum, but it could help some chose their major quicker, in order to take the classes they need to graduate on time. I am also hoping that there will be more classes that variety on subject matter in the future, but I understand that that is based on how the school will grow in the future.

Overall, I think the Literature Department here at UC Merced is structured very well, and I have really enjoyed my time studying here. There are only a few things I that need to be improved; like studying more genres within courses or having students do more research papers that are longer in order to prepare for their senior theses, but it is a very good program. I think

some of the other improvements, like getting more literature courses, will only be resolved as the school gets larger and is able to get more professors and classrooms to have these courses.

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Prof. Gregg Camfield
Literature 190
April 21, 2010

One Million and Counting

I remember a few years back when I first started school I really wanted to be a Civil Engineer, work with public structures and what not, however during my junior year of high school my concentration shifted from doing well in math to doing great in writing. I made part of an academy, it is a smaller group of students with in a high school that have specific teachers through out three of their four year run in what ever school they may be in. The main reason our school had these academies was to help students make it past a high school diploma, there was a statistic for male Hispanics in my school one out of every five of us will end up in jail. So I entered my academy during my sophomore year and slowly but surly I began to work more on my writing than on my math. It was not really my choice our teachers wanted our personal statement to be as close to perfect as possible. By the time our college application were due my junior year I was not able to do much but write, skipping my senior year to make this long paper shorter. Some how I was convinced to come here to Merced and study, at first I tried my luck with the basics for any engineer: CSE, pre calculus but at the same time I was taking writing and my first literature class. I passed CSE with a D because I had friends that could talk to computers better than with humans, pre calc was the same deal except I pulled this off by studying more than I would normally do. As you can assume writing was a breeze and literature was pretty interesting, I heard stories I could never had imagined because I never took Spanish literature in high school.

As school continued I showed more interest in writing and after the second semester I tried talking to my adviser about a writing major. Sadly he informed me that there was not going to be a writing major until more students showed interest in such a field. My second year came by and I hoped by this time more people had at least talked about making a writing major a possibility but still nothing

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happened. I believe by this time I had taken two literature classes, one was the Spanish lit and the second was the Hispanic lit. I had lost complete interest in engineering by this time, I found it much too hard and I was apparently far to behind in math to start understanding it or to even begin a proper engineer school career. I picked up more literature classes because I thought I could write more but I neglected that it was literature, I mean I neglected the whole reading part of literature. I know that writing also involved a lot of reading but I was more interested in the technical part of writing. Now I've never been a big reader even with school work in high school, so when I started to really get into the reading I never did much of it. When ever I had to write any research paper for any of my literature classes I had to pick something about a specific of a genre or an author to write about, never about the piece of writing because it would involve reading it first.

Now to begin to address the prompt of this assignment I thought it was best to describe where I was coming from when I first considered becoming a literature major. Since I feel that I have covered the basics lets look at what I think my major means to me. Literature truly means much to me even though I don't show it academically. I could have done my general education here and then transferred out however I have stuck with it and I have never looked back. I'm not sure what it was that kept my interest, I know it was not all the reading because it has been more than I have ever wanted to read nor all the writing I had to do because combined with my writing minor I've considered just dropping out and not worrying about school. The one thing that I can say that held a big part in me sticking to this was the fact that I could read some of these great pieces of arts to my children/grandchildren. *Don Quijote* is a perfect example of what I mean also including *Lazarillo De Tormes*, or more like the genre of “La novela picaresca.” Stories like these where perfect for their time and like *Don Quijote* continue to be a influence in many aspects of life and considering that its right behind the bible in the book most printed out there.

Now for the million dollar question of what am I going to do with my literature major? Truthfully I have no idea, like I said before I came here to study one things but choose another and was shot down. I had to pick something I would be capable of doing with out having to work too hard, but I was completely wrong. However I can't say that it has not open any doors for me, I can get my teaching credentials at a different university and become a substitute teacher in my old school district or possibly go to different state where teachers are in need because of now I really don't have plans to attend graduate school. I can't say I will never attend graduate school but when I do its not going to be for literature, I want to return and either do botany or psychology, I know they are different but botany was an interest I had during high school and psychology I picked up during college. But I digress, I continue to not have an idea about what I plan to do with my degree. However I must say that one of the biggest reasons I did come to study was to prove to people that it is not difficult to stay in school and get some form of title.

Now how much do I value my education? I would say about twenty five thousand dollars in student loans, but with all jokes aside I can say that I cannot put a price in what I have learned in the past five years and a long five years it has been. I have had my ups and downs both academically and socially. So far I have yet to look back on any decision I have made when it comes down to taking classes and picking research topics. I wish to add some example of work I have done but sadly it has been lost, my computers data has been destroyed more than I would like to mention. But surprisingly it happens at the most convenient times of all, first time it was at the end of my sophomore year, second was after my junior year and the most recent one was during winter break of my second senior year. Can't say I was not mad every time that happened, I had friends look and try to save everything on my computers but no such luck. Which has made me try to work as hard as I can to make at least one person appreciate my work, I have no problem losing it as long as it has been read. One more thing that I can truly say makes me value my education is going back home. I don't go home very often but

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when I do I can see there is a difference between my friends that started working after high school and never attended college than those who did. Not to sound like some one with their head stuck in the clouds but I see and hear things much differently now: music, movies, books, anything that comes from and or relates to literature, reading between the lines has become something I enjoy. There is a different lens in my telescope than in everyone else and I am happy with this new perspective.

Now for using the knowledge and skills I have picked up during my stay here in my privet and professional life, well I really have not thought past my graduation. My plan is to graduate, have a bit of fun and the start working, that is my basic plan. Where I want to work is not something I have really contemplated until a few paragraphs ago, however being able to understand writing, music and movies better than others is always something I have prided my self in. After taking lit 100 I was unable to look at any movie, new or old, the same way. My ability to understand and analyze has been stretched far beyond what I had ever imagined. The one thing I really liked about that was going through all the different literary movements and being able to see how one genre helped developed the next and so on, there was a sense of history to each movement that made it that much more interesting. And as for skills I can say that my research skills have never been as good as they are now, but I cannot say they are the best, I tend to continue searching instead of sticking to one article that maybe with in my interest. I always feel the need to find more and more until I have exhausted most of my resources, at times this can be good, it allows for many perspectives on one subject but it can also be another form of procrastination and that is something I am great at. I really cannot see my self doing this much out side of a school type of setting because there is not much need for actual academic resources to prove something but I can see how it would be much more credible if it was from a academic source. One skill that I do know I will take with me forever is going to be the ability to write, at first I did not think it was a big deal but as school continued and I had to write more and more every time my friends would always comment on my being able to write long papers. I did not think much about being able to write until one semester during finals, I had neglected my writing journals for my writing and core class, some how I was able to pull off over thirty pages in one night of no sleep, a lot of mountain dew and the fact that the dead line was that afternoon. Now involving literature in my writing is very important especially when I take a romantic citation and write it in my letters and such.

After looking at objective you and your staff has set forth to help us learn I must agree with the definition and description of the literature and cultures major. It is necessary for a person to be able to read, understand, analize and comment on a specific work of literature while taking into account what was going on during the time that specific artifact was writen, not until I accutally thought about it did I realize why the major was Literature and Cultures. To be able to fully comprehend a piece of literature one must understand the culture from where it originated. Going back to one of my first example *Lazarillo De Tormes* was written during an excellent time, well for the piece not for Spain per say. Spain was not in a good place economically nor socially which was depicted perfectly in the suffering of the main character and also how his masters treated him. But if I could suggest one things to be different, I would say for there to be more classes like Lit 100, were the class takes a look at various genres maybe like an intro to literature. Or if not make a specific type of literature major that studies the genres because the way it is set up now there is no real way of going on to study say chicano literature, or maybe just golden age literature in Spain. Every time I have taken a literature class in spanish I always end up not being able to go into depth because the topic only last one semester. Other than that everything is running fine, I have come a long way and have been exposed to a lot and I have enjoyed my time here as a Literature and Cultures major. The only regret I have is not being able to go back and make copies of all my previous work.