

The background of the cover is an abstract composition of ocean waves. The top left corner features a greyish-blue textured area. The top right is a solid green block. The middle section is dominated by a large blue block with white, foamy wave patterns. A solid red horizontal bar spans the width of the page just below the main title. The bottom section is a dark, textured area with hints of yellow and green, suggesting sunlit water or rocks.

**2014/2015**

# **Excellence in First-Year Writing**

**The English Department Writing Program and  
The Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing**

Excellence  
in  
First-Year Writing  
2014/2015

**The English Department Writing Program  
and  
The Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing**

Edited by  
Dana Nichols and Jing Xia

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# **Excellence in First-Year Writing 2014/2015**

## **EDWP Writing Prize Chairs**

Danielle Lillge

Justine Neiderhiser

## **EDWP Writing Prize Committee**

Phil Christman

Ali Shapiro

Gail Gibson

Adam Snead

James Hammond

Megan Sweeney

Adrienne Jacaruso

Joanna Want

Aubrey Schiavone

Katie Willingham

## **Sweetland Writing Prize Chairs**

Dana Nichols

Jing Xia

## **Sweetland Writing Prize Committee**

Louis Ciccirelli

Stephanie Pappas

David Gold

Simone Sessolo

Shelley Manis

Naomi Silver

Christine Modey

## **Administrative Support**

Hanna Linna

Laura Schulyer

Aaron Valdez

## Winners List

### Feinberg Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing

Casimir Stone “Chasing the Stardom”

*nominated by Scott Beal, English 125*

Jackie Murray “A Guide to Dealing with Your Classmate’s Death”

*nominated by James Pinto, English 124*

Minna Wybrecht “A Tale of Two Ice Cream Stores”

*nominated by Ali Shapiro, English 125*

### Matt Kelley/Granader Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing

Anna Silver “The Force of Violence; The Power of Forgiveness”

*nominated by Carrie Wood, Great Books 191*

Ardie Kamran “Keep Walking, Just Don’t Cry!”

*nominated by Scott Beal, LHSP 125*

### Granader Family Prize for Excellence in Multilingual Writing

Xiaoman Gan “Socializing is Not an Easy Thing”

*nominated by Scott Beal, Writing 120*

Ziyan Yang “The Power of Attitude in Comparative Advertising”

*nominated by Lori Randall, Writing 120*

### Granader Family Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio

Akemi Tsutsumi “Akemi Tsutsumi’s E-Portfolio”

*nominated by Gina Brandolino, Writing 100*

Kate Vogel “Kate’s Collection”

*nominated by Jennifer Metsker, Writing 100*

# Nominees List

## Feinberg Family Prize nominees

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Instructor Name</b>
Ahsan Ansari	Heidi Phillips
Dani Averill	Jessica Wiederspan
Ashley Baker	Lauren Benjamin
Olivia Barahal	Sharon Pomerantz
Halley Bass	Ryan McCarty
Lizzie Bedrick	Leigh Korey
Christina Benson	Lillian Li
Alissa Chan	James Pinto
Tess Dewulf	Vedran Catovic
Ronald (RJ) Duquette	Aubrey Schiavone
Sydney Farrington	Melinda Misener
Hannah Feather	Leigh Korey
Jared Feldman	Lauren Eriks
Corinne Florie	James Hammond
Julia Gwizdz	Shira Schwartz
Amanda Hibbler	Claire Skinner
Austin Hill	James Pinto
Kira Hooker	Patricia Khleif
Alex Ingraham	Alice Tsay
Stephen Johnston	Carolyn Dekker
Alec Josaitis	Pam Wolpert
Sara Katje	Vedran Catovic
Doyle Lang	Lillian Li
Elise Lawrence	Colin Corrigan
Mandy Luo	Scott Beal

## Feinberg Family Prize nominees (continued)

Student Name	Instructor Name
Andrew Malik	Greg Schutz
Emily Mantlo	Bonnie Tucker
Giovanni Martinez	Heidi Phillips
Sandhya Medapuram	Lauren Benjamin
Jackie Murray	James Pinto
Zachary Nerod	Carolyn Dekker
Alexis Nowicki	Melinda Misener
Jesse Offenhartz	Sahin Acikgoz
Sean Khan Ooi	Bonnie Tucker
Gloria Park	Pamela Wolpert
Courtney Parr	Aubrey Schiavone
Shivam Patel	Rebecca Tutino
Erinn Promo	Lauren Kasischke
Liza Rosenbloom	Shira Schwartz
Ryan Rosenheim	Patricia Khleif
Anum Shahab	Melody Pugh
David Stimson	Lauren Eriks
Chad Stone	Scott Beal
Helen Tan	Sahin Acikgoz
Justin Williams	Jessica Wiederspan
Minna Wybrecht	Ali Shapiro
Kai Chen Yeo	Alice Tsay
Emily Zuo	Patricia Khleif

## Matt Kelley/Granader Family Prize nominees

### Student Name

Olivia Barahal  
Alec Chapman  
Tess DeWulf  
Ronald Duquette  
Cameron Gagnon  
Elana Goldenkoff  
Anna Haritos  
Joseph Iovino  
Stephen Johnston  
Ardie Kamran  
Sara Katje  
Jamie Kim  
Ari Krumbein  
David Mintz  
Julia Muntean  
Zach Nerod  
Courtney Parr  
Neena Pio  
Ferial Presswalla  
Erinn Promo  
Liza Rosenbloom  
Anna Silver  
David Sokol  
Kirsten West  
Claire Wood  
Sean Yanik

### Instructor Name

Sharon Pomerantz  
Duygu Ula  
Vedran Catovic  
Aubrey Schiavone  
Alisse Portnoy  
Bret Bohman  
Lisa Nevett  
Adrienne Jacaruso  
Carolyn Dekker  
Scott Beal  
Vedran Catovic  
Scott Beal  
Virginia Murphy  
A.E.T. (Tiggy) McLaughlin  
Adrienne Jacaruso  
Carolyn Dekker  
Aubrey Schiavone  
Dave Karczynski  
Michelle Jacobson  
Laura Kasischke  
Shira Schwartz  
Carrie Wood  
Alisse Portnoy  
Duygu Ula  
Joseph Groves  
Richard Janko

## Granader Family Multilingual Prize nominees

### Student Name

Junjie Dong

Xiaoman Gan

Yusheng Jiang

Mai Nguyun

Karin Pangestu

Daniel Vargas-Leon

Zhichun (Martin) Wang

Ziyan Yang

### Instructor Name

Scott Beal

Scott Beal

Jing Xia

Jing Xia

Scott Beal

Jing Xia

Lori A. Randall

Lori A. Randall

## Granader Family Portfolio Prize nominees

### Student Name

Eric Chapman

Nadja Drott

Jennifer Emery

Jack (John) Griffin

Connor Johnston

DewRina Lee

Aditi Rajadhyaksha

Talis Rehse

Bekah Ruetz

Kenny Stamper

Akemi Tsutsumi

Katie Vogel

### Instructor Name

Gina Brandolino

Scott Beal

David Ward

Paul Barron

Kodi Scheer

Ali Shapiro

Stephanie Pappas

Julia Babcock

Ali Shapiro

Stephanie Pappas

Gina Brandolino

Jennifer Metsker





# Introduction

Every day, students at the University of Michigan work hard to develop their skills as writers. Every winter, we have a chance to sample the fruits of this labor as we select winners for the first-year writing prize. The English Department Writing Program and the Sweetland Center for Writing established a first-year writing prize in 2010. With generous support from the Sweetland Center for Writing, Andrew Feinberg and Stacia Smith (both of whom earned English degrees from the University of Michigan), and the Granader Family, we have developed a tradition of honoring students who produce writing of exceptional quality.

In this collection, we share the writing of prize-winning students so that other writers may learn from, and feel inspired by, their examples. The award-winning essays are shown to best advantage thanks to the careful editing of Dana Nichols and Jing Xia and the design work of Aaron Valdez. The featured essays illustrate how writers formulate compelling questions, engage in dialogue with other thinkers, incorporate persuasive and illuminating evidence, express powerful and poetic insights, and participate in meaningful conversations.

Many writers were involved in discussing and selecting these prize-winning essays. Scott Beal, Dana Nichols, Stephanie Pappas, and Jing Xia read submissions for the Granader Family Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio. Louis Ciccicarelli, Shelley Manis, Christine Modey, Dana Nichols, and Simone Sessolo read submissions for the Matt Kelley/Granader Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing. Submissions for the Granader Family Prize for Excellence

in Multilingual Writing were read by David Gold, Dana Nichols, and Naomi Silver. Submissions for the English Department Writing Program's Feinberg Family Writing Prize were read by Danielle Lillge (co-chair), Justine Neiderhiser (co-chair), Phil Christman, Gail Gibson, James Hammond, Adrienne Jacaruso, Aubrey Schiavone, Ali Shapiro, Adam Snead, Meg Sweeney, Joanna Want, and Katie Willingham. We are deeply grateful to all of these writers for rolling up their sleeves and participating in the challenging but rewarding work of determining why particular selections merit prizes.

We are equally grateful to the many students who submitted essays for these writing prizes and the many instructors who encouraged and supported them. As writing teachers, we relish the opportunity to learn from the challenging questions, intellectual energy, creativity, and dedication that our students and their teachers bring to our classrooms. We hope that you will gain as much pleasure as we have from reading the writing contained in this volume.

David Gold, Acting Director, Sweetland Center for Writing  
Meg Sweeney, Director, English Department Writing Program

# Feinberg Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing

On behalf of the selection committee, we are excited to introduce the essays written by the three winners of the 2014 Feinberg Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing. In this way, we celebrate and honor the high quality writing that our students compose and our instructors support in the English Department Writing Program.

We feel grateful to have had the opportunity to read many of the 48 essays that were nominated for the prize this year. The judges made very difficult decisions in selecting only three winners; indeed, the strengths of the winning essays in many ways reflect strengths we saw across all of the essays nominated this year.

These three essays, however, stand out from the rest in the original and unique perspectives they offer. Each of the winning essays addresses its subject matter in a way that leads to a new understanding or insight. The range of genres and topics addressed is vast, including an analytic argument offering a close reading of a hip hop music video, a research-based argument exploring how two Ann Arbor ice cream shops manage to coexist side-by-side, and a narrative argument depicting the experience of dealing with the death of an acquaintance. These essays demonstrate the breadth and depth of the work that instructors and students complete in first-year writing.

In order to highlight the range of genres that students in first-year writing produce, this year we introduced three categories for judging essay submissions, each of which is represented by one of the winning essays. The first, analytic argument, includes essays that use analysis as the primary means

of argumentation. The second, research-based argument, includes essays that build arguments through original research. And the third, narrative argument, includes essays that rely primarily on narrative to build an argument. In designating these categories, we sought to represent the different ways that students “produce complex, analytic, and well-supported arguments that matter in academic contexts,” in line with the department’s goals for the first-year writing course.

Across these categories, we can see that students in first-year writing compose many different kinds of arguments and utilize a variety of evidence to support the points that they develop. We invite you to join us in exploring the similarities and differences in the writing included here so that together we can reflect on what makes arguments matter in academic contexts.

Danielle Lillge and Justine Neiderhiser

Co-Chairs of the Feinberg Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing Committee  
Graduate Student Mentors, English Department Writing Program

# Chasing the Stardom

Casimir Stone

*From English 125 (nominated by Scott Beal)*

One of Charles Simic's strange little prose poems in *The World Doesn't End* presents a jungle clergy of francophone lizards before concluding, "Not the least charm of this tableau is that it can be so easily dismissed as preposterous." The sentence catches the reader doubting the seemingly-absurd scenario and dares us, instead, to take it seriously. Casimir Stone's essay – written in response to an English 125 assignment to analyze a music video – pulls off a similar feat. Casimir acknowledges that Juicy J's "Bandz a Make Her Dance" video is ripe for dismissals as one more hip hop celebration of male braggadocio, misogyny, and materialist excess. Then he goes on to persuade us – through careful investigation of the video's many puzzling details – that a complex counterpoint is operating under the surface. And even if a skeptic might resist the notion that Juicy J and Lil Wayne are channeling Spenser's "The Faerie Queene" and Dante's *Inferno*, Casimir builds a compelling case that the video subtly critiques its own excesses to reveal that fame and fortune in the hip hop world comes at the price of sacrificing personal identity. The essay excels because it makes one risky claim after another, then earns those claims through close observation, clever deduction, and an imaginative synthesis which keeps adding wrinkles right through the essay's final sentence.

***Scott Beal***



## Chasing The Stardom

*“Chasing the stardom will turn you to a maniac.” -Kanye West, “Forever”*

First, nothing is seen but darkness and silence. The title of the song appears on the screen, along with a quietly nondescript, discordant wail. Then, splitting the total lack of sensory stimulation, comes the sound of Juicy J’s smooth voice crooning, “Strippers.” From there, Juicy J’s “Bandz A Make Her Dance” music video transforms into the ultimate trap and hip hop video. It boasts all of the elements for which this genre is acclaimed and criticized: open misogyny, gold chains and thrones, brand names everywhere you look, piles of money, and yes, strippers. In fact, if you believe Juicy J’s gloats, every actress who appears in the video hails from the world of pornography. At four and a half minutes long, it consists primarily of close-up shots of scantily clad women and filler footage of silhouettes dancing on cold, steel poles. For many years, hip hop artists have used such images to establish their fame, popularity, and extensive means. And by the simple sum of its parts, “Bandz A Make Her Dance” is all of these things; the quintessential hip hop music video. However, upon closer examination, other darker elements not often found in hip hop videos become clear, exposing a deeper meaning to the video. The “Bandz A Make Her Dance” music video utilizes imagery of death and allusions to Hell to symbolize the struggles of the artists it features (Juicy J, Lil Wayne & 2 Chainz): struggles with the death of personal identity and the metaphorical Hells that come with a life of fortune and fame.

Hip hop videos such as this one have been criticized constantly for their apparent misogyny. This criticism is not unfounded, although it has not always been so warranted. Old-school hip hop groups such as Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five and Run-DMC’s music videos featured simple shots of life on the streets and the rappers hanging out with their entourage, as well as more intricate and often humorous story lines. In fact, Run-DMC’s most famous

music video—“It’s Tricky”—features only one woman, whom the duo gallantly saves from street hustlers. However, in the 1990s, as hip hop’s subject matter expanded from political to braggadocio, the culture’s norm began to change. Take for example the lead single off of Snoop Dogg’s debut album *Doggystyle*. The rapper’s “Who Am I? (What’s My Name?)” music video features, in the place of clips of Snoop’s entourage, clips of strippers grinding against the heads of Snoop’s entourage. And, to drill the point home, these shots are juxtaposed against shots of dogs, as if to draw a comparison. Although this was doubtfully the first example of misogyny in hip hop videos, it is an important early example, in that it illustrates perhaps the reason why such misogyny emerged in the culture: the song itself is a boast track—its only subject matter is Snoop’s greatness—and the sole purpose of his bling and the sexist depictions of women in the video is to further his supposed greatness.

“Bandz A Make Her Dance” rips a page right out of Snoop’s book. The lyrical content is bare and superficial, but what is there is simply a claim of Juicy J’s enormous wealth:

*“Bandz [sic.] a make her dance, bandz a make her dance,  
All these chicks poppin’ pussy, I’m just poppin’ bandz.”*

What this chorus lacks in subtlety it makes up for in clarity: the women will keep dancing as long as Juicy J keeps showering them in cash. This theme is continuously highlighted in the visual component of the song. He sits on slick leather seats relaxing with countless beautiful women and stacks of money. In a video like “Bandz A Make Her Dance,” which depicts excess with such intensity, the theme of fame appears intertwined with all of the other visual themes, and therefore the message, of the video.

However, while at first glance this video appears to celebrate said excess, there is a much more bitter aftertaste to it than in most videos of the like, suggesting that J’s fame perhaps masks something darker. This is first suggested, before even delving into the visual imagery scattered throughout the video, by the implications of the lyrics themselves. As mentioned before, the chorus of the

song does not amount to much more than Juicy J talking about spending ridiculous amounts of money on strippers (the “bandz” in question refer to the rubber bands used to hold stacks of one thousand dollars in cash together). Yet, upon a closer look, the lyrics suggest unhappiness with this. The chorus is, “Bandz a *make* her dance.” The women’s dancing stems not from his charm, not from his good looks, but from his bands of money. As with other misogynistic hip hop videos, like the Snoop Dogg example mentioned earlier, the women are there as props to show the rappers’ worth. But, Juicy J’s lyrics suggest a recognition: that his worth—specifically, his net worth—is the only reason the women are there. His bands make her dance, not him. These lyrics can reasonably be taken as an indicator of the insecurity that accompanies wealth and popularity, and the negative effects it imposes.

The lyrics are merely the first of such indicators. From there, the video takes a much darker turn. The use of dim lighting in hip hop music videos is far from unfamiliar. Many take place in similar strip clubs to the one in “Bandz” and feature comparably dimly lit areas only brightened by neon lights highlighting the silhouettes of the dancers. However, this video takes darkness to another level entirely. There are numerous frames throughout the video that specifically conjure images of death and Hell, which link back to the proposed dark side of Juicy J’s fame. The first of said images is also one of the first frames of the video. Shortly after the aforementioned first word of the song, “Strippers,” a woman scrawls the word across glass with blood-red lipstick. However, the word in its entirety is never shown, but rather only the middle section: “R-I-P-P-E-R.” The word “Ripper,” another name for the grim reaper (a harbinger of death), first exemplifies the theme of death present throughout the video. The portrayal of a mere fragment of the word changes its meaning entirely, and feasibly reflects the message of the video itself.

The colors in which the word is written—red lipstick on a black background—also come off as significant. In fact, rather than the neon pink, green, and blue lights of most other hip hop party videos, the color scheme of “Bandz”

lies almost exclusively in black and red. Of course, other colors make appearances, but the focus in every frame is on pitch black—the strip club’s seats, Juicy’s black leather outfit, the silhouettes of the women, or just the nondescript darkness in the background of most shots—or on bloody red—the neon bulbs (red is the one color the lights take), the rappers’ t-shirts, or, most prominently, Lil Wayne’s throne. Black and red are commonly used colors in the depiction of evil and, more notably, Hell (black representing nothingness and red representing fire or blood), which suggests an entanglement between death and the message of the video.

The essence of the rappers’ clothing is another prominent signifier of death throughout the video. In hip hop apparel culture, death imagery—a staple of many genres, prevalent in the cattle skulls of country logos and the gruesome tapestries of heavy metal logos—is more often than not exchanged in favor of bandanas and chains, vice and women. So, when one of J’s entourage sports a t-shirt with a falcon clawing at a decaying skull, the presence of death in the video is implicated. But on a more blatant note, one of the most technically interesting clips is a black and white shot of Juicy J in a black leather jacket with a black backdrop and a spotlight speeding over him, illuminating various parts of his figure. Whenever the spotlight passes his face, his features become skeletal for a moment before fading back into his visage when the light departs. This implies, more explicitly than any other single image within the video, the link between the rapper and death.

But what is the purpose of death’s presence in a video that, as has been established, portrays excessive amounts of wealth and fame? We can assume it is not literal death, because the video remains, on the surface, a party exhibition and the rappers are celebrating throughout. But, since the video is linked so strongly to his popularity and since the lyrics suggest an apprehension regarding his wealth, perhaps the grave imagery represents a far more figurative death; one linked to the stardom that the video more prominently depicts. Perhaps the imagery represents a death within Juicy J: the death of his personal identity, as

brought about by his increase in popularity and the expectation of artists within the hip hop industry.

This interpretation of these themes of death may sound bizarre for a music video set in a strip club, but there is a plethora of evidence that suggests otherwise. Many times, a blurring of identity, literally or figuratively, manifests itself as a visual motif within the video. Leading these is the aforementioned spotlight creating a skull over Juicy J's face. This is significant because the skull is over J's face specifically. The face is one of the most unique and identifying features of a person. However, all human skulls look uniform—more or less the same. The projection of a skull over Juicy J alludes to the death of his primary physical identifier: his face. He becomes homogenous, one in many. Moreover, the choice of a skull to represent this signifies that his identity is not just naturally homogenous, but has died—decayed over time. And as fame is so tied to the message of the video, it is reasonable to assume that it was Juicy J's fame that brought on this decay.

Another visual motif suggesting death of identity appears frequently throughout the film: identical drummers with their faces covered and features blurred. An MTV tradition is to censor images within music videos, most often brand names and paraphernalia, in order to avoid copyright infringement. At first glance, "Bandz A Make Her Dance" appears to do just this. Images everywhere are blurred and the clips move by fast enough that the viewer does not immediately notice what is being censored. Yet, upon closer examination, brand names are *not* blurred within the video; in fact, they are very prominent. We Trippy Mane and TRUKFIT clothing, as well as the logo for the Brazzers pornography website, are constantly featured throughout the video. It may be that these brands sponsored the video, but regardless, many t-shirts of various other brands are not blurred and play a pivotal role in establishing the affluence of the people within the club. The blurs instead censor already brand-less drum major outfits worn by nameless dancers in the backgrounds of many shots. The drummers sport all white uniforms with an ivory helmet pulled down over

their faces, a single black slit running between the hat and the collar. As the one notable element within the video that breaks away from the red and black color scheme, the drummers uncannily resemble one thing: a grinning skull. As mentioned before, while all humans are unique and identifiable, in their skeletal form they become entirely alike. And in all ways, these drummers appear to be without identity. Faceless and skeletal, with unnecessary blurs to accentuate their lack of individuality, they are presented always as a backdrop, out of focus from the camera. However, when the rappers are on screen with the drummers, they too flit in and out of focus, weaving between the dancers. This visual gives the rappers the appearance of balancing on a fence, a fence between being an individual or just one in a line of skeletons. It suggests an animosity toward fame—they have become just one of many rappers, shooting meaningless videos in clubs, their individuality slowly slipping away.

While the death of identity theme plays out over the course of the entire video, another visual motif appears about halfway through to further accentuate the drawbacks of stardom. Namely, Lil Wayne's verse, over the course of which a shot of him perched on a red throne is featured prominently, recalls copious amounts of Hellish imagery, pairing the rapper's fame with Hell.

Firstly, the throne on which Lil Wayne sits bears a remarkable similarity to the throne of Satan, as characterized by various classical sources. In Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queen*, he writes of the Devil's cathedra, "High above all a cloth of state was spread/And a rich throne, as bright as sunny day" (Spenser, *The Faerie Queen* 1.4.8.1-2), a line which is later alluded to in many other sources of poetry regarding Hell, most notably Milton's *Paradise Lost*. There is no better way than that to describe Wayne's throne in the video. While the rest of the film utilizes an incredibly dark color scheme, the throne scene emanates light. Although the throne still sits on a black background, it itself is showered in a spotlight, reflecting light off of its shiny, red-leather surface. In fact, it is the one image throughout the music video that, indeed, shines as bright as a sunny day, and this is only emphasized by its black backdrop. The



fact that in an already death-depicting music video, a red throne attunes to a common classical portrayal of Satan's chair appears not coincidental, but rather a purposeful choice on the part of the artist to accentuate the challenges that fame can cause.

One could argue that the Hell imagery above is merely a furthering of the braggadocio of the video; perhaps Wayne's claim to the throne of the prince of darkness. Yes, Wayne often rhymes about dark themes and certainly does not go out of his way to project a good-guy image to the public. However, the video clarifies the rapper's status as being *within* Hell, rather than ruling it, with a simple editing technique: whenever the shot with the throne appears, it is shaking violently back and forth, and Wayne appears to be grasping at it, struggling to remain rooted. This image aligns itself with one of the most famous written portrayals of Hell in existence: Dante's *Inferno*. In the Italian epic, Dante Alighieri describes the punishment within one of the circles of Hell as a violent wind, throwing the condemned souls back and forth for eternity. This punishment occurs within the second circle, reserved for perpetrators of the sin which the rappers have been committing since the moment the video began: Lust. Wayne sits in a space within a strip club already established to resemble Hell, when he is battered by a well-known representation of the eternal punishment for lust. This, more than any other motif throughout the video, indicates that fame in the hip hop world consists not only of luxury and excess, but of pain and regret as well.

There is no doubt that the easy path would be to write off "Bandz A Make Her Dance" as a party song with a party video and move on. But the fact of the matter is that the bitterness indicated in the lyrics and the video is too clear to ignore completely. The lyrics themselves suggest a loathing attitude toward J's fame—that the "props" he uses to display his fame (chains, money, and yes, women) are only made available to him due to his affluence. But it is his music video that drills the point home. His world encompasses multitudes of money and women, but it is also a world of obscure identities, of darkness,

death, and damnation. The video indicates that J is fed up with fame, so rather than turn out a trap banger with neon lights and exploding melodies, he releases a dark, slow-burner with an eerie minor-key hook and a depressing music video. Did Juicy J set out to change the meaning of hip hop with this song? Did he intend to turn the entire genre on its head with an introspective look at the pitfalls of fortune and fame? The infamous line, “You say no to ratchet pussy, Juicy J cain’t,” so often derided in popular culture as the pinnacle of a meaningless hip hop line, suggests otherwise. But in spite of this, the grim undertone still exists, whether consciously or subconsciously created. As his verse slows to a quieter break, Lil Wayne murmurs, “What’s your real name? And not your stripper name?” Writing this, Wayne may have meant to churn out a funny and quotable line. But regardless, it presents itself to the listener as something else entirely: a desperate call for a sense of identity in the world of hip hop, a world without one.



# **A Guide to Dealing with Your Classmate's Death**

Jackie Murray

*From English 125 (nominated by James Pinto)*

Jackie wrote this essay for a section of English 124 that explored notions of wildness. Her prompt called for a personal narrative that would examine some aspect of the course's central themes and offer a sense of argument.

Jackie's essay looks at how an experience can fall outside of traditional, prescribed frameworks. As her opening makes abundantly clear, the Kübler-Ross model of grief cannot account for the writer's feelings after the death of a classmate—an awkward sort of acquaintance. By rejecting that model, Jackie's essay makes a new claim about what a certain kind of grief can look like. (And as such, this essay offers a surprising example of how a piece of writing can situate itself in relation to preexisting arguments.)

The wildness that Jackie is exploring, then, is that of behaviors that range beyond expected norms. And part of what makes this essay so delightful is the many ways that Jackie's essay itself pushes beyond our expectations. Indeed, this essay comfortably occupies several positions that border on contradiction: a deeply personal narrative written in the second person; writing about grief that forces its readers into guilty fits of laughter; prose that is vividly evocative while maintaining the stripped-down qualities of a how-to guide; a line of thinking that rejects a model, offers a model, rejects its own model. Perhaps most movingly, this work leaves no doubt about its author's firm, controlling hand at the same time that it acknowledges her vulnerability. The following essay introduces us to a unique talent, a propulsive voice, and an uncanny vision of a new species of grief.

***James Pinto***

## **A Guide to Dealing with Your Classmate's Death**

**\*\*Note: do not use this guide to get over a family member, best friend, or pet\*\***

Fuck the Kübler-Ross model. If that shit worked, then the sadness could be scraped out of loss like the dirt under your fingernails. Grief cannot be organized into five simple stages, and even if it could, the stages certainly wouldn't culminate in "acceptance." Instead, here's a model that will accurately describe the feelings you'll experience when you find out a classmate in your acting program has died:

- 1) Shock
- 2) Acknowledgment
- 3) Judgment
- 4) Guilt
- 5) Relief
- 6) Shame
- 7) Emptiness
- 8) Disorientation
- 9) Distraction
- 10) Sadness
- 11) Lingering

### **1. SHOCK**

Because, when you get the news, standing in a circle of your closest friends, listening to your professor tell you that your classmate has died, that she doesn't know how, that she can't tell you anything else, you might almost laugh.

Ha. Ha.

But you might, because it seems so utterly ridiculous. How does a nineteen year-old boy just die? It makes sense when your grandmother dies from old

age. It makes sense when your best friend's mom dies from a lifelong battle with Lupus. It's sad, but it makes sense. How does a young boy just die? So, she must be joking. This is a trick because he always misses class, right? Because he never shows up to anything? So why isn't anyone laughing? You'll look at your friends to find out who's in on the joke. But they have collapsed to the floor in tears, and you won't be able to relate.

You label it shock. Maybe you pocket the emotion. You're an actor; it could be useful. You've always heard about shock. So *this* is what that feels like. You can use it in your next role. Shock.

But no sadness. No tears for you. Not yet. Just wait.

## 2. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

They'll call in grief counselors. Maybe that's when it will hit you. Your classmate has actually died. This isn't a joke being played on you by the entire department. This isn't a test to see how much you actually care about your classmates. This is real. So real, in fact, that they've called other people in. Strangers. "Grief counselors."

"They're here to help."

Fuck that noise. Your professor asks you all if you would like the grief counselors to stay.

No, you most certainly would not. Not with their clipboards and their grief pamphlets at the ready, like they knew this was gonna happen. And how old are they, anyways? They can't be old enough to be actual doctors, professionals. And they don't know you. They certainly do not—*did not*—know him.

And then you'll notice liquid dripping onto your leggings and you'll look up for the source. And you realize it's finally happened—you're crying and your nose is pouring snot, and maybe you're starting to get it.

## 3. JUDGMENT

So you're crying. Good for you—you're showing some emotion. Is



everyone else crying? You'll stop your tears long enough to check. The boys flanking you sit there, stoic, with slight furrows in their brows. They are not crying. They are not looking at anything in particular. You deem their stoicism appropriate. His best friend sits there, his eyes welling with tears, but making a concerted effort to hold them in. Subtle and also appropriate. Across the circle, a girl who was not terribly close with him is also crying. Why the fuck is she crying? She did not know him that well. *You* get to cry because *you* did a scene with him in class once. *You* get to cry because *you* took a shot with him at a party. *You* get to cry.

Note: this kind of judgment will recur for the next several months, and maybe forever. Later on, months from now, when people bring him up without warning, you'll want to get very angry with them: they have no right to say his name. They weren't even that close with him. Saying shit just to get reactions out of people.

And then, all those kids who were really close with him... you'll wonder how he's not all they think about, no matter how many months go by. So you'll judge that, too. Silently, of course.

But in this moment, in the circle, you are crying, and as you judge everyone else's initial reactions, you'll wonder if they are judging yours, too.

#### 4. GUILT

Because all judgment stems from self-judgment. And with self-judgment comes guilt. So you'll think things like: You didn't really try to spend time with him. No one explicitly says this was a suicide, but if it was, you didn't do much to help.

You'll remember the time you sat across from him at lunch, the second week you were getting to know him. And how, as he went on and on about suicide and depression running in his family, you noticed a piece of spinach stuck between his teeth. You knew it wasn't the right time to interrupt him and let him know, so instead you just observed how the green speck stood out against

his off-white tooth. You were simultaneously so grossed out and enthralled that you completely stopped listening to what he was saying.

Then you'll regret not listening, not interrupting to tell him that depression and suicide ran in your family, too. If you had told him, maybe then he wouldn't have felt so alone. Maybe if you had tried just a little harder to connect—

Stop, *breathe*. This is not your fault.

But how do you know that for sure? Because you once made a comment to him about how he reminded you of your fucked-up brother. And you laughed at him when he tried to explain things to you. You had a tendency to turn him into a joke.

Once people die, it's hard to be honest with yourself about how you treated them when they were alive. Because all you'll want to do is stain your memories with smiles and roses. But that's not true. That's not how it happened. Why lie to yourself?

## **5. RELIEF**

Because, you know, he was hard to have in class—he'd refute any comment a teacher made and he'd ask questions that were off topic. He was disorganized and sort of lazy. And he should have known better than to be in such an intensive program. You'll think of how, if it had been anyone else, if another person in your class had died, you would have all reacted so differently. You won't let your mind venture to the twenty other classmates who...well, you'll just know it's true.

And you know that out of everyone in the group, he was a real pain—

## **6. SHAME**

Holy shit you're a horrible person. You won't realize the real depths of how terrible your thoughts can be until you have to deal with a classmate dying, but shit, you have really dark thoughts. Like the image of him lying in his bed,

dead, and no one knowing. Because no one heard from him that whole weekend, and he hadn't been in class on Friday, but he had made a habit of being absent so you thought nothing of it, and then Sunday night came around and his mother hadn't heard from him so she asked a friend to check up on him and that friend found him there. In his bed. His laptop open next to him. What was on that screen? You'd never been to his room, but you imagine his still body lying on gray sheets. How long had he been there? Had his olive skin faded to beige? Does skin color fade? How long does it take for your body to get stiff? For the liquids in your body to warm or cool or ferment? You would never, ever, bring these questions up to anyone, because it's vulgar. And you'd never Google the answers. It's just a thought that crosses your mind every once in a while that you're too ashamed to admit to anyone, even yourself.

But that first day, those thoughts have yet to hit you. You've lapsed back into guilt. But, no, guilt was more active, guilt felt more specific: you can explain exactly what causes your guilt. This feeling is shame. It's messy and comes from everywhere. You're ashamed of judging everyone, ashamed of crying as much you are, ashamed of not beginning to cry the second you heard. Ashamed of having to intellectualize to feel anything at all.

After sitting and sobbing there for an hour and a half, you'll leave the studio where you found out he died. All the upperclassmen will have heard by then and are waiting for you. And they're all actors, too, so they love to feel and empathize. So they'll expect you to be crying when you leave the room. But you just spent an hour and a half crying and you're kinda done for the moment. So you fake it. You'll let them embrace you, and whisper "shhh" into your hair while they stroke your back, and you'll just shake your shoulders in that crying way and hope they think you're crying—hope they don't think you're a complete bitch for not caring. Because you do care. Just, it's just—it's all too much in this moment. And you shouldn't have to explain that to anyone. You're grieving. You can grieve however you like. But you don't want to disappoint all the people who expect you to cry. Thank god you're an actor.

## 7. EMPTINESS

There will be food waiting for you downstairs. You will be expected to eat it because people got it for you and that was a nice gesture. Your classmates will try to categorize their reactions to the food in two ways: they're either so hungry that no amount of pizza could ever fill their endless pits of stomachs, or they won't be able to eat at all. So when you're perfectly in the middle, just as hungry as usual, you'll almost feel guilty. But at this point you've already felt guilt. And relief. And shock. And you're sort of just done feeling. So you'll lie on the floor, your head in someone's lap (you won't particularly care whose) and you'll stare at the walls. White walls. Your cheek will feel itchy against this person's pants, so you'll adjust. You'll notice the ceiling is made up of squares. You'll begin to count them: 1 square, 2 squares... but you'll stop when you reach twenty-one: the number of kids in your class just a few hours ago. So you'll turn your cheek back to the itchy lap and stare at the wall again.

## 8. DISORIENTATION

A professor announces that freshman classes are canceled for the day. So when your schedule is suddenly free, you'll be confused. Where are you supposed to go? You'll stay with your friends. You'll all go to Starbucks. You'll go to a dorm, not your own. Or is it your own? Should you be alone in your room? Or is that weird and dramatic? And would it be rude to leave the group?

You definitely don't want to be with outsiders; you know that much. Because no one else will understand what you're going through. You don't even understand—not really. Because you haven't lost your best friend. Or your grandmother. Or your dog. You lost an almost-friend. An acquaintance who had a tendency to bug you. A scene partner who could never memorize his lines for *Oedipus*, no matter how many rehearsals you scheduled. A boy you once considered having a crush on, until you got to know him. A part of your acting family. But someone you had no real claim to. And, now that you think about it, do you have a claim to anyone in your class? Do you have any real friends

here, or are all of these people you're with just convenient?

Wait, who the hell are you with? And where the hell are you? You're on a sidewalk, nowhere near your dorm, and people are next to you, but not the ones you want to be with. Not the ones you were with when you left pizza. And they're all talking about how they feel. God, you're so sick of how people feel.

## 9. DISTRACTION

A sophomore boy will suggest touch football to lift everyone's spirits. So you'll go to the field and play, and you'll suck so they'll let you be the one who squats and throws the ball between her legs to the people who actually know how to play. And you'll feel some sense of worth, so you're less lost. And, Jesus, this is fun. Maybe you should've played sports instead of doing theatre. And it's really cold out, because it's November in Michigan, but the wind whipping you in the face feels surprisingly like relief.

It's your turn to have the ball again! And your team is losing but you don't care because this is fun and all the upperclassmen are fun and they're actually talking to you and noticing your existence and this is great.

But someone checks his phone. The sophomores' acting class wasn't canceled. They all have to leave. They will all get docked down an entire letter grade if they don't go today. *What an asshole of a teacher. He's a part of this family. He should know.*

He should know... that someone died. So that fleeting gift of distraction is stripped away and you're stuck remembering the reality of the day.

## 10. SADNESS

Well, the real sadness had to come at some point, right? It's not depression; it's slightly more active than that.

Someone has asked your class to host a vigil for the community that night. And when people arrive, they'll stare at you and your classmates, because despite your grief and exhaustion to the point of apathy, they will expect you to have a plan.

*How do you, the hurt ones, want to honor his death?* So you'll light candles and say a few words in a circle outside. That's what mourners do, right? And people who never knew him will speak. Because everyone wants to belong. And it'll annoy you but you can empathize because you're sad too. And who are you to judge someone else's sadness? Besides, you've already done that. Everyone should speak, everyone should feel welcome.

Someone will mention how he walked from toe to heel, rather than heel-toe. And some stranger will say she once sold him a ticket to a concert at the Blind Pig, and your whole class will burst into laughter and remember how many times he tried to get you to go with him to concerts and gigs, and how you all always refused. And then someone in your class will mention the fight he once had with your professor over the meaning of "Ancient Greek Theatre" and you'll all laugh again, even though it's at his expense. And people who aren't a part of your acting family won't get it, but they'll chuckle, because when you're sad, you'll find any excuse to laugh.

And so you'll stand outside in the cold November night for hours, because everyone wants a chance to speak. And you'll huddle close in the circle in an attempt to keep warm. And one by one, each person at the vigil will place a candle on the ground—for him. But this moment that is supposed to be symbolic of his light will be cut short by the wind that refuses to quit, and in turn blows out each tiny flame, a blatant reminder that no matter how you try to keep his memory alive, he is, in fact, dead.

## **11. LINGERING**

And then there will come a point when you are no longer trying to keep his memory alive. A week after that first day, people will stop actively asking how you feel and if you're okay. People will begin to think that if you ignore it, the feelings and reminders will go away. But, of course, they remain—they haunt you. Memories of him will continue to stain your everything. Not just in the coming weeks, but always. And weeks later, when you go back to Studio

Two after winter break, your class will make the silent, collective realization about what happened that one time you were all in that room together. And when you have “mourning” day in Movement class a month later, the day when you rehearse the archetypal Greek tragedy death scene, and you are supposed to cry in character, you’ll cry as yourselves because you know what it feels like to really mourn in that room.

You’ll text his phone number three times. Long texts filled with things you wished you had said. And they will show up as “not sent” because the number is disconnected. Except, the third time, it will send. And you’ll realize someone else has his number. So you’ll apologize and stop texting him.

But sometimes, you’ll be sitting alone in your room, late at night, and you won’t know why you’re still awake, and he’ll float into your consciousness. And you’ll speak to him. And you’ll imagine how he would have laughed and responded. And then you’ll realize you never spoke to each other all that much in the first place, so you have no idea how he’d respond. He definitely wouldn’t have laughed. Even as a fantasy, you don’t know him.

But you’ll continue to see him. Because you never got closure. Because eventually you were supposed to get over it on your own. Because he was just a classmate, not your best friend or dog or grandma. He was just the boy in class with big eyes, a pretty voice, and a funny walk.

So, in one more attempt at closure, you’ll write an essay entitled “A Guide to Getting Over Your Classmate’s Death,” but when you’ve finished writing it, you’ll realize you’re no closer to “getting over” it than you were before. So you’ll call it something else. A Guide to *Dealing with* Your Classmate’s Death. Because if death was something you could just “get over,” you wouldn’t need a guide like this.

## A Tale of Two Ice Cream Stores

Minna Wybrecht

*From English 125 (nominated by Ali Shapiro)*

Minna wrote this essay in my Living Arts section of English 125. The prompt asked students to investigate a local phenomenon using primary and secondary research methods.

Each investigation starts with a driving question. Many students inquire about phenomena that are already the subject of heated debate—the relative merits of Greek life, for example, or the effects of the most recent affirmative action ruling on U of M’s campus climate. Minna’s question, by contrast, strikes me as boldly...quotidian: she simply wonders, “How can Stucci’s and Ben & Jerry’s coexist on State Street?”

While great essays can emerge from either approach, I admire Minna’s question for two reasons: first, because it stems from genuine, unselfconscious curiosity; second, because it reflects her confidence as a writer, researcher, and critical thinker. She trusts that no matter where she starts, the process of academic inquiry will lead her to discover something cool.

Lo and behold, it does. Like all good driving questions, Minna’s leads to more questions; like all good researchers, Minna looks for answers in a wide variety of sources. She digs deep into financial data and branding strategies. She conducts interviews and surveys. She goes undercover to “see for herself” what distinguishes each store. And she weaves together all of this information—hard facts, canny observations, and humorous experiences alike—into a single essay, demonstrating her impressive command of voice, tone, and narrative structure. Ultimately, she arrives at a nuanced, complex argument about the appeal of “local” businesses, the power of familiarity, and the true cost of convenience.

*Ali Shapiro*



## A Tale of Two Ice Cream Stores

Somewhere tucked inside my vague memory, I remember Asia City Restaurant opening for the first time after a large-scale renovation. A few months before it had opened, another Asian restaurant, Hibachi Grill, had its grand opening down the block.

Asia City and Hibachi Grill seemed dead set on outdoing each other in terms of business and attracting customers. Asia City added about twenty more new dishes. Hibachi Grill redecorated its restaurant. Both of them offered outrageously generous discounts. There was no way a buffet could survive off of those prices. As a customer, it was awesome getting to eat all-you-can-eat Asian food for “only \$4.99 per person!”

I probably gained five pounds before Hibachi Grill finally raised a white flag and declared bankruptcy. At that point, of course, Asia City buffet raised its prices back to their regular levels so that the restaurant could actually survive financially.

I found this to be a thought provoking situation, but ultimately, it made sense: Hibachi Grill and Asia City were competing businesses. They battled until only one of them remained. After this event, I assumed all competing businesses inevitably went through a similar process.

That is, until I encountered Stucchi’s and Ben & Jerry’s on State Street.

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The intersection of State Street and East Liberty in Ann Arbor is a lively area. It is where popular stores such as Potbelly’s, the M Den, Five Guys, Starbucks, Chipotle, and Urban Outfitters are located. It’s a place filled with a diverse group of individuals with diverse intents: people looking to listen to street musicians, get good food, visit the State and Michigan Theatre, and generally satisfy their undying urge to spend a ton of money.

Amongst all the liveliness, on the corner of this intersection, Ben & Jerry’s and Stucchi’s sit side by side. For the thirteen years I have lived in Ann

Arbor, I have lost track of how many times I have heard someone wonder out loud how it is that the two stores can be open right next to each other.

Ben & Jerry's and Stucchi's have relatively similar prices for their products, and the products themselves are essentially the same things: ice cream, sorbet, sundaes, milkshakes, smoothies, and cake. Both stores also stress an environmental component. The stores, in other words, seem almost identical in terms of both products and mission statements. So what could possibly allow them to coexist financially in such a tight space?

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The situation became even more puzzling to me one late-summer evening as I was walking arm in arm with my best friend down State Street. Her silk scarf complimented the late-summer atmosphere. I had not seen my friend in months and she was only in town for a couple of days. The occasion called for an ice cream celebration, and the conversation went something like this:

"Ben & Jerry's or Stucchi's?" I wiggled my eyebrows playfully.

But then I stopped short: her expression was a sudden crude painting of shock and disapproval. "Minna. *Stucchi's*," she said, as if she were correcting a child who had unknowingly said something terribly offensive.

Then began the rant of *Stucchi's all the way*. I personally had no overarching loyalty to either store, so I was a bit taken aback by her response: "Stucchi's is an *Ann Arbor* thing."

This sparked my interest. Did she have the answers to the question I had been wondering for over a decade? "What do you mean, an *Ann Arbor* thing?"

"Yeah, it was founded in Ann Arbor."

"Really?" That didn't make sense to me. I had passed by Stucchi's many times in my life and I had just assumed that it was all over the U.S.

But Stucchi's was *local*.

.....Stucchi's was *local*? The "coexisting" situation had only made sense to me when I still thought that Stucchi's and Ben & Jerry's were two large,

competing corporate businesses. But a small, local branch competing with a large corporate business? Doing *equally* well? What was going on here?

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The thing is, both Stucchi's and Ben & Jerry's appear to be exceedingly successful. According to the Michigan Daily, "Stucchi's is an exemplar of that rare native Ann Arbor business that has continued to be a city staple over multiple generations" ("Best Dessert/Ice Cream: Stucchi's"). They have been open in Ann Arbor since 1986. Ben & Jerry's, on the other hand, is "one of the most popular and recognizable ice creams in the country" ("Marketing Lessons"). Their Annual sales revenue total \$132 million ("Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream"), and in 2013, they were one of five leading ice cream brands in the nation ("Leading Ice Cream Brands").

One large difference, however, is their marketing strategies. Ben & Jerry's sells their products in supermarkets. You can see them in the freezer section of Meijer's and Kroger's and various convenience stores. I have seen Ben & Jerry's products in Vermont, Michigan, and Taiwan. They're all across the nation and in 33 different countries. Ben & Jerry's corporate parent, Unilever, spent \$1.3 billion on advertising Ben & Jerry's, Dove, Lipton, and TRESemmé brands in 2011 (Austin). On the other hand, according to Stucchi's owner, their "main marketing strategy is *word of mouth* and *some* social media" ("Stucchi's Ice Cream Store," Italics mine).

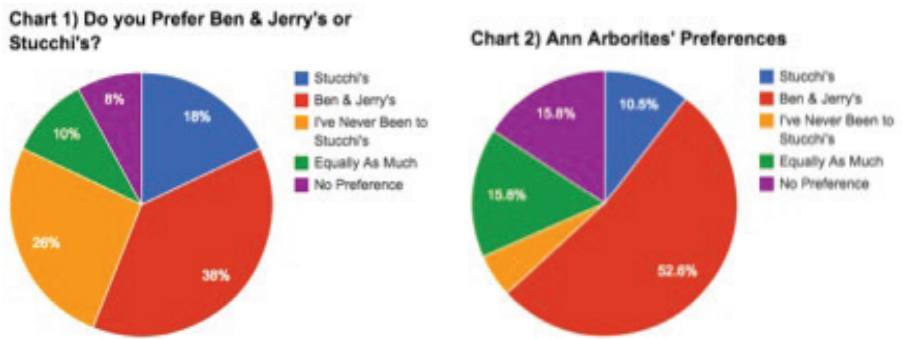
Advertisements play a crucial role in marketing. One of the most successful businesses in America, McDonald's spent "more than \$988 million on advertising in 2013." The total U.S. ad spending was \$140.2 billion in 2013 ("McDonald's"). If advertising and familiarity are so effective, then why can Stucchi's owner confidently write to me that "there has not been a noticeable change since Ben and Jerry's moved in" on State Street? ("Stucchi's Ice Cream Store.")

Apparently, there's much more going on than just advertisements. Stucchi's owner wrote to me, "Ann Arbor residents and businesses like to take pride

in local retailers” (“Stucchi’s Ice Cream Store”). Did locals, like my best friend, support Stucchi’s more than Ben & Jerry’s because of its connection to Ann Arbor?

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To test this hypothesis, I conducted a survey and posted it all over Facebook within the University of Michigan community, friends, and family. The idea was to maximize the responses, especially from people who had been in Ann Arbor for a while. I asked questions like “Do you prefer Stucchi’s or Ben & Jerry’s,” “How long have you been in Ann Arbor,” and “What do you think about either store?”

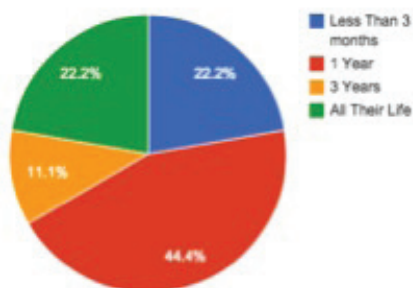


Overall, I got 50 responses. I defined people who had lived in Ann Arbor all their life or four or more years as “Ann Arborites.” Out of the 50 people who took the survey, 19 of these fit this criteria.

I broke the data down slowly. First, I categorized my results into preferences for one store over another (as seen in “Chart 1”). Then, I narrowed it down to Ann Arborites’ preferences (as seen in “Chart 2”).

There was no immediate connection between the length of time someone spent in Ann Arbor and their support for Stucchi’s. In fact, the results of the survey showed that the length of time someone spent in Ann Arbor had *no correlation* to their preference of stores (as seen in the large variation in data in “Chart 3”). Apparently my hypothesis was wrong.

Chart 3) Stucchi's Lovers: How Long They've Been In Ann Arbor



Hmm...what now? What could possibly explain this “coexisting” phenomenon?

I took another look at the data that was collected, and interestingly, I noticed that a pattern arose in the reasons people gave for preferring Stucchi's. The people gave reasons such as “local stores are the best, so I always go there,” “best in Ann Arbor,” “local ice cream...atmosphere,” and “hometown feel.” There is a general consensus that Stucchi's represents Ann Arbor, and that people like that “local feel.”

But what exactly is a “local feel,” anyway? I decided to go see for myself.

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It was a typical, cold, fall day as I biked across the University of Michigan campus. I was on a leisurely mission to visit two ice cream stores—places that housed the products that average Americans eat 24 pounds of in one year (“What the Average American Eats”).

Sure enough, as I neared the intersection of State Street and East Liberty, Ben & Jerry's and Stucchi's sat side by side.

I parked my bike, and my field work began.

In my head, I was trying to think of the least awkward way of touring each store without emptying out the entirety of my wallet. I walked into Stucchi's first, and out of politeness and sudden desire for a smoothie, I purchased a strawberry-banana flavored one.

As the employee made it for me, I went around the store and took pictures of the decorations, prices, and ice cream selections. One thing that jumped out at me was a big mural on the wall, depicting Ann Arbor landmarks and people walking around eating large scoops of ice cream in sugar cones. The next big noticeable thing was that Stucchi's left wall was mostly covered by

chalk boards, where customers were free to contribute their ideas and drawings. There were also University of Michigan decorations *everywhere*. Maize and Blue Ms were pasted on the ice cream display freezer. U of M football pictures were framed on the walls, and right when you walked into the store, you could see an aerial picture of the Big House—the Michigan stadium.

While mismatched U of M decorations made the store feel a little more crowded, it also created a “lived in” feel. It felt like a private tour of someone’s room, where they had collected sentimental decorations through the years of their life. Every decoration had a story and some sort of nostalgic, meaningful value to Ann Arbor.

Once my smoothie was ready, the employee rang up my bill. I paid and picked up the fancy, clear container of my smoothie and felt the cold, slushy-like contents. I lifted it up and swirled it around in my hand, and noted that the container had no logo on it. The employee also handed me a “Boo Bucks” coupon to get five dollars off my next purchase. I noticed that “Boo Bucks” sounded a lot like “Blue Bucks,” a popular currency for U of M students to purchase campus-related products from designated stores. Coincidence? Perhaps not.

My next stop was Ben & Jerry’s. This time, I felt more comfortable about taking photos around the store without making a purchase because the employee was already preoccupied with another customer. I noted how there really was no customization of Ben & Jerry’s to Ann Arbor. They had a mural and decorations as well, but all of them were customized to represent the Ben & Jerry’s company. The store had a light color scheme of white, light green, and light blue. The giant mural depicted black and white cows, green grass fields, and light blue sky. There were no spontaneous decorations: that is, all the decorations had a very clear purpose of either informing or familiarizing the customer with the label, or had been chosen to fit the color scheme. Everything, from the mission statements on the walls, to the refrigerators, was customized perfectly to represent the company.

*Coexisting...coexisting...*

I could feel a breakthrough trying to burst out of its shell. It was so exciting. I just needed more direct visual comparison.

So, like a dumb spy, I went back and forth between the stores, trying to lay low about it in order to avoid awkward confrontation. I imagined that the store employees would ask me, “Uh, can I help you?” And I would respond: “Oh, don’t mind me, I’m just taking pictures of every corner and dust particle in your store...”

Back and forth I went.

Then it hit me.

Stucchi’s is focused on the *right here* and *right now*. From its U of M decorations, to its logo-less smoothie container, to its chalk boards, Stucchi’s is firmly rooted in its current location: Ann Arbor. Even the Boo Bucks coupon is a direct connection to U of M. Stucchi’s reflects its surroundings, making it a true, local, Ann Arbor thing.

Ben & Jerry’s, on the other hand, has no connection to Ann Arbor. Their bare light green and blue walls, and their logo of black and white grazing cows, could be representations of countless places in this world. But what Ben & Jerry’s sells, precisely, is its logo. It’s a universal symbol that would mean the same thing if it showed up in Hawaii, Taiwan, Switzerland, or Australia.

Ben & Jerry’s and Stucchi’s each have their own unique styles and traditions. The two companies stress different styles in creating a welcoming environment for their customers: “lived in” feel versus “universalized” feel. Even so, both play on the power of familiarity. Ben & Jerry’s relies on the familiarity of its customers with the label; Stucchi’s relies on people’s love and familiarity for the city.

The overarching success of *both* stores reflects our constant need to feel connected with our surroundings, and the different ways that we can find that source of familiarity, connection, and comfort. The thing is, at our core, we as individuals are all trying to find comfort in a place. Our driving sense of comfort affects everything we do. Where we go. What we buy. Which store we buy it

from. And why. Who we are affects the way we look for that sense of comfort—and whether we buy corporate or local.

The dividing factor between corporate and local businesses is that one stresses conformity while the other stresses individuality. Local stores have more freedom. They have more flexibility in making their own history, their own unique standards. They can do more experimentation and not worry about acting in synchronization with the hundreds of other chain stores that already exist. Corporations, on the other hand, have reputations to uphold, overarching mission statements, and specific styles, color schemes, and logos to decorate all over their products. Their universalized reputation and logo is convenient. Customers can find comfort in knowing exactly who these stores are, what they stand for, and the quality of their products.

But convenience comes with a price. It compromises the culture of an area. Do we truly want everywhere to look the same? Have the same *familiar* stores, the same *familiar* logos? No, maybe not. Monotony gets to be kind of boring. Similarly, having *only* all local, unique stores—each just as unique as the other—would create a sense of chaos.

And ultimately, *that's* why Stucchi's and Ben & Jerry's can coexist. With every ying, there's a yang. With conformity, there needs to be individuality to complement it, and the other way around. Unlike Asia City and Hibachi Grill, Ben & Jerry's and Stucchi's are *balanced*. And with the right balance, anything can coexist.

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# Matt Kelley/Granader Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing

For many students, the first-year writing requirement is the most diverse class they encounter at the University of Michigan. Students across Literature, Science, and the Arts come together to talk about writing with fellow freshmen they may never have met otherwise. Those of us who love teaching first-year students can speak to the joy of what happens next—the exchange of ideas, the intense conversations, the deep listening, and the learning that isn’t always captured on the page. The freshman experience changes students, and it’s an honor to witness their transformation.

The diversity of the first-year writing classroom is reflected in the range of student work instructors nominated for the Matt Kelley/Granader Family Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing. Students mastered new genres for new audiences, and exceeded their instructors’ expectations by producing essays on topics ranging from Greek tragedy to Disney’s *Mulan*. Anna Silver and Ardie Kamran’s winning essays demonstrate just how elegant and engaging a freshman essay can be. This year we are pleased to add a new prize: the Granader Family Prize for Excellence in Multilingual Writing. These students were nominated for their work in Writing 120, a course designed for students who feel most comfortable reading and writing in a language other than English. Our multilingual students face an additional set of challenges negotiating linguistic and cultural differences at the university. We are thrilled to take this opportunity to honor our winners, Xiaoman Gan and Ziyang Yang, and all multilingual students for their excellent work.

Perhaps the most adept chroniclers of that busy first semester of college are the nominees for the Granader Family Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio. Writing 100 students think deeply about what it means to be a student

and writer at the university, and how the realities of student life can differ from our expectations. Akemi Tsutsumi and Katie Vogel's sophisticated electronic portfolios give us a view into how students find a foothold and thrive at the University of Michigan.

The Writing Prizes are not possible without the generous support of our colleagues in the Sweetland Center for Writing. We would like to thank this year's judges: Scott Beal, Louis Ciciarelli, David Gold, Shelley Manis, Christine Modey, Stephanie Pappas, Simone Sessolo, and Naomi Silver. Finally, the Writing Prizes would not happen without the invaluable work of Laura Schuyler and Aaron Valdez. We offer them our most heartfelt thanks.

We hope you enjoy these essays, and feel, as one of this year's judges put it, that "this was a great reading experience!"

Dana Nichols and Jing Xia

Lecturers, Sweetland Center for Writing

## **The Force of Violence; The Power of Forgiveness**

Anna Silver

*From Great Books 191 (nominated by Carrie Wood)*

Starting with the question of forgiveness for crimes committed during the Holocaust, Anna's essay admits her own difficulties with the moral dimensions of this topic. She continues with an insightful and open-minded account of how reading the Homeric epics has changed her ideas about forgiveness. A very attentive reading of the texts she juxtaposes, and one that illuminates the works themselves, as well as offering an eloquent description of the complexity of forgiveness.

*Carrie Wood*

## **The Force of Violence; The Power of Forgiveness**

In the Genocide class I took last year in high school, I studied human ethics through the lens of the Holocaust, among other genocides. In one of our final classes, we discussed the roles of mercy, forgiveness, and punishment, and particularly whether one should forgive, whether it is one's place to forgive, and whether extreme punishments such as the death penalty should be used on criminals undoubtedly guilty of heinous crimes. In one case example, a Gestapo member set a locked barn containing many Jewish families on fire and idly watched his victims burn to death, even witnessing some parents throw their flaming children from the barn windows to abridge their suffering. Years later, the Gestapo officer was tried and sentenced to death. As he lay in his jail cell, hours away from punishment, a Jewish man unrelated to the murdered families passed by while visiting the jail, and the officer begged for forgiveness so that he could die in peace. The visitor, taken aback, felt he could not offer forgiveness, and left the Nazi there to die.

After considering the scenario with my peers in class, I decided I agreed with the Jewish man in that he did not carry the power to offer true forgiveness, as he had not been directly and personally effected by that Nazi's specific crime. I also felt that the death penalty seemed a fair punishment, as I saw no reason for a man guilty of such a crime to remain on the Earth. Finally, I remained undecided as to whether one should forgive in such a situation, assuming it is his or her place to do so, fearing that forgiveness in some way pardons the crimes of the Holocaust. Yet, my study of Achilles' merciless killing of the Trojan warriors and mutilation of Hector's body, and Odysseus' equally relentless slaughter of his wife's suitors in Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, respectively, has shifted my opinions on forgiveness and punishment.

To begin, one must establish the context of the men's rampages, noting in particular their excessive nature. In Achilles' case, he forgoes mercy as he kills countless Trojan soldiers and drags Hector's body through the streets of Troy.

Meanwhile, Odysseus withholds forgiveness from the suitors who plagued his family in his absence. Both men savagely kill their enemies, prompting readers to question the necessity of such extremes. In Odysseus' case, at least, he only shows mercy when "inspired" by Telemachus, to save Phemius (*The Odyssey* 449). Without his son's interference, Odysseus would undoubtedly have killed Phemius, erroneously painting him with the same level of guilt designated for the other suitors. This episode suggests the excess in Odysseus punishment, as he seeks to kill even those who could be pardoned without repercussion. If such drastic measures were not necessary, then, why did Odysseus, and, by extension, Achilles, kill so mercilessly?

To answer this, we must consider the men's war-filled lives, which were darkened by the very PTSD and dearth of happiness that fueled their brutality. The society in which both warriors mature emphasizes the nobility to be gained in war, and the entire premise of such war hinges on revenge. Paris' "abduction" of Helen sparks the Trojan War, and catapults the Greeks into a ten-year act of retribution. Likewise, a cycle of smaller-scale revenge killings comprises war, as soldiers passionately target the man responsible for felling a brother or friend in order to advance the battle and honor loved ones. Aeneas illustrates this notion as he attacks Idomeneus, noting that "the war mattered to him now" that his heart was "wrung" by his friend, Alcathous', death (*The Iliad* 253). After the war, the effects of PTSD compound this instinctual need for revenge, an impulse ground into the warriors since their youth, erasing normal limits from the men's psyches. The scars of PTSD resurface as the men mutilate their victims, with Achilles "piercing [Hector's] tendons" and "letting Hector's head drag" through the dust and Odysseus "[tearing Melanthius'] genitals out for the dogs to eat raw" (*The Iliad* 435; *The Odyssey* 454). The punishment and need for revenge are extreme in these examples, but they underscore the dark roots that produce and potentially even justify such violence. Acknowledging this prompts a questioning of the death penalty, today's institutionalized form of revenge killing, and our modern ode to Homeric society. It seems that operating

with this innate need for revenge grants power to the very violence we seek to condemn by allowing the criminal to lead us down a path of similar hate-filled destruction.

Apart from societal standards, the warrior's violent rampages also stem from lives in which hardship leaves no room for comfort or kindness. The rage that propels Achilles' slaughter stems from his own leader, Agamemnon's, unjust demand for his war prize. After Agamemnon claims Chryseis, Achilles erupts, complaining that, "I do all the dirty work with my own hands... [while] you get the lion's share and I go back to the ships with some pitiful little thing, so worn out from fighting I don't have the strength left even to complain" (*The Iliad* 6). The young warrior, who has been subjected to a life of battle and all its horror, must now deal with insults from his own leader, only intensifying the hardship he endures. Similarly, Odysseus suffers for an additional twenty years after the war, separated from loved ones, and at times from the comfort of even another mortal's presence. Indeed, Odysseus' journey home emphasizes that Zeus himself shows "no mercy for men, giving them life [himself] and then plunging them into misery, brutal hardship" (*The Odyssey* 417). Having never known mercy themselves, the heroes can hardly be expected to recognize its power, let alone know to use it. This tragic lack of joy in the men's lives underscores another reason to strive for forgiveness. We must break the cycle of suffering that engulfs Odysseus and Achilles, blinding them to the potential good in life and in fellow man, by offering forgiveness whenever possible and thereby inspiring others to do the same.

Just as important as understanding the causes of these rampages, of which I have listed but two of many, is examining the effects of such brutality. Study of such reveals that Achilles' and Odysseus' pursuits of revenge reduce the warriors to a grossly carnal level, in which each has dehumanized not only the enemy, but himself as well. In Odysseus' slaughter of the "dogs" that have infiltrated his house in his absence, each suitor is reduced to the same base level, even Leodes, who "tried to restrain the suitors," and begs on his knees for mercy

(*The Odyssey* 449). This dehumanization of the enemy culminates with Odysseus “splattered with bloody filth like a lion that’s devoured some ox of the field and lopes home, covered with blood” (*The Odyssey* 451). The beastly image that depicts the avenger in his wrath is hardly desirable, and emphasizes that even if we feel we are doing good in administering a harsh punishment, we often instead reduce ourselves to the same ignoble level of the enemy, relinquishing the very decency we hope to salvage.

Meanwhile, in *The Iliad*, Homer offers an unexpected angle on Achilles’ slaughter when he sings of the River’s cries of agony. After Achilles destroys the lives of several young Trojans before finding Hector, the blood from the fallen seeps into the earth, permeating the soil with its brutality. The River calls out to Achilles, lamenting that “my beautiful stems are clogged with dead men, I can no longer pour my waters into the sea, choked with corpses... I am stunned” (*The Iliad* 409). Though not explicitly stated, this passage seems to suggest how unnatural murder is, in any form, and reminds us that humanity’s purpose is not to drown the world’s beauty with our capacity for ugliness; rather, we must strive to contribute to the beauty that is the fundamental nature of our world.

After considering these elements of Achilles’ and Odysseus’ rampages, I have altered the views with which I left my Genocide class last year. I still believe that only those personally affected by a particular injustice have the power to offer true forgiveness. I also remain undecided as to whether forgiveness should be granted in all cases. In Odysseus’ case, the suitor’s trespassing may seem a somewhat minor theft, and we may be inclined to expect Odysseus to easily forgive them. Yet, looking through the lens of Homeric society reminds readers of the gravity of this crime and justifies Odysseus’ profound anger and inability to forgive. Similarly, I still struggle to forgive the perpetrators of the Holocaust, unable to forget the heinous crimes Nazis committed, and the many family members I will never know because of their hatred. Yet, my readings of these epics have reminded me of the power of forgiveness. When we forgive, we rise above the very violence that has governed the lives of our enemies and choose



instead to contribute to a world of good, decent people. So, while I strive for the ability to forgive, I must also admit to the difficulty with which I perform this noble act. Finally, considering the results of the men's brutality has completely altered my original opinion on violent punishment, such as, but not limited to, the death penalty. Initially, I hesitated to condone the death penalty, but without a solid basis for this tentative decision. Now, I see how completely savagery overtakes the administrators of such punishment, and how this violence grates against the natural beauty that comprises life in this world.

Odysseus' short speech to Penelope after he finishes his slaughter summarizes this point perfectly. He demands, "No cries of triumph now," remarking, "It's unholy to glory over the bodies of the dead. These men the doom of the gods has brought low, and their own indecent acts. They'd no regard for any man on earth – good or bad..." (*The Odyssey* 452). Odysseus derives no satisfaction from his brutality, reinforcing the fact that the perpetrators of violent punishment gain little from harsh revenge. He also fails to realize that his description of the suitors simultaneously describes himself. Carried away by his anger, Odysseus too fails to discern the good suitors from the bad on his own, and instead kills all, even Leodes. Today, we must work to achieve a different retribution, one that seeks to unearth the decency woven through the soul of every man, and ennoble the decency in ourselves.

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## **Keep Walking, Just Don't Cry**

Ardie Kamran

*From LHSP 125 (nominated by Scott Beal)*

Ardie's essay is full of intellectual risks that pay off. He chose his texts for comparison within a truly narrow range – 3 ads from a single campaign – which required him to read deeper and further into the details and differences among these ads. His observations are sharp, well-read, and well-organized, and if at times his conclusions may seem like a reach (for example, when discussing the implied work ambitions of the figure in ad #2), they remain impressive in their ingenuity and their coherence with the larger themes he unpacks. The biggest surprise and delight of Ardie's essay comes in its conclusion, when he connects the sophisticated argument he's developed about the implications of the walking man – his unswerving forward motion, his invulnerability to obstacle or pain – to the implications raised in his introduction about the product itself. Here Ardie unfolds a bold, fresh claim about how men become convinced that alcohol consumption is integral to masculinity.

***Scott Beal***

## Keep Walking, Just Don't Cry

Whiskey, especially scotch whiskey, carries a deeply-routed historical reputation of being a “man’s drink”. Culturally, beverages that have a more bold and strong kick tend to appeal to a more masculine demographic, while sweeter drinks were more often consumed by females. Drinking stronger beverages requires a certain pain tolerance for the harsher taste. The expectation and stereotype that men should be able to endure the pain of drinking harsher beverages is one example of the masculine stereotype of toughness that is promoted among men. Growing up, men are taught to develop a physical and emotional toughness, an idea that has resulted in the virality of the phrase, “big boys don’t cry”. Johnnie Walker’s “Keep Walking” advertising campaign enforces the stereotype that all men should be invulnerable and mask any expression of emotional or physical pain.

The phrase “Keep Walking” is a command that implies a prior hardship that must be overcome. Synonymous for “continue”, “keep” has a more aggressive and commanding tone than “continue”. For example, “continue” could regularly appear on a car’s automated GPS attempting to sound respectful and formally sophisticated. “Keep”, on the other hand, would likely be heard by a high school basketball coach preluding the word “pushing” as the players begin to show signs of fatigue through an extremely tedious and slightly outrageous sprint exercise. “Keep Walking” deserves to be spoken, if not yelled, repetitively. A group of fatigued, dehydrated soldiers trekking through a scorching desert would regularly think “Keep Walking” as a motivational boost to fight their fatigue and discomfort. Similarly, in *Finding Nemo*, Dory and Marlon repeatedly sing “just keep swimming” to battle Marlon’s discomfort in deep, dark water and despair, wondering if he could ever find his son. Like the examples mentioned, each advertisement contains some sort of symbolic hindrance or hardship that is successfully overcome by the “striding man” logo.

The three advertisements I have chosen all come from the “Keep

Walking” campaign. All three ads, in congruence with the entire campaign, feature a yellow Johnnie Walker logo situated on the left edge of the advertisement with a yellow line marking the trail he has been walking on. All three advertisements contain the slogan, “Keep Walking” and the brand name, “Johnnie Walker” situated fairly close to the striding logo.

The first and most aesthetically simple advertisement depicts the Johnnie Walker silhouette logo as the logo and his trail over a pitch black background. On the right half, a large, thick, sharp-edged brick wall situates itself on the yellow line, implying that the striding logo has somehow walked through this brick wall and has continued on his path. This tall and thick brick wall is composed of very sharp, crisp lines that symbolize its strength and reluctance to negotiate. Symbolically, the advertisement implies that the logo endured some sort of hardship and came out undisturbed. One could argue that this advertisement symbolizes simple perseverance; however, the implied physical contact and endurance apparent within the imagery clearly specifies a more rough tone that makes that argument facile. The advertisement displays a specific type of perseverance that is physical toughness, an implication based on the aggressive imagery and implied physical contact of the man and the wall.

The implied toughness of the logo in these advertisements is almost cartoonish and absurdly unrealistic. When looked at closely, the advertisement displays a superhuman toughness possessed by the logo. After enduring the brick wall, the logo looks absolutely unfazed. He seems balanced as he takes his next step forward. So balanced, in fact, that his cane is confidently raised off the ground completely. The advertisers’ could have easily shown a worn and deteriorated logo to imply perseverance. Their choice to exclude any expression of suffering confirms their implication of invulnerability within the advertisement.

The color scheme of advertisement 1 isolates the logo, the brick wall, and his path from the outside world completely. Essentially, the solid black background serves as whitespace, making the loneliness of the objects and characters more noticeable. It gives the ad an outer-space aesthetic that further high-

lights the isolation of the logo from any outside help. The logo appears to be a planet, or an object, floating in space unaffected by the gravity of other objects. He strictly moves to his own gravity and momentum by his choice. He is essentially self-reliant for his movement and progression, even after the hardship that was the brick wall. Self-reliance and independence, in this case, are a result of his unrealistic toughness. By concealing any expression of suffering or need of help, the logo does not receive any help and appears independent and completely self-reliant. This image of independence, however, would not be possible without the image that he is emotionally and physically composed.

The second advertisement (ad #2) is placed on two pedestrian billboards of a Manhattan street corner subway entrance. The billboards are directed perpendicular to each other and stand a few yards apart. Protruding into the middle of the landscape is the corner of what appears to be a typical Manhattan office building that extends far higher than the captured perspective. A yellow line flows straight through the left billboard with Johnnie Walker written on the top left-hand corner, while the second (right) billboard features the logo and the slogan “Keep Walking” on the bottom right. The direction and shape of the advertisement implies that the striding logo walks into the bottom floor of the building, turns right, and walks out and away. The surplus of space between the advertisements collaborating with the in-and-out effect of the perpendicularity imply a time break that was likely spent for work inside the building. However, the logo did not spend his day in an executive office high above everyone else. The landscape cuts off abruptly after only the second floor of this massive skyscraper. The logo most likely comes into his lower-paying job where he dreams of one day seeing a top floor office for himself. His job consists of copying, scanning, filing, and/or cleaning. Essentially, he continuously answers to someone else’s orders, completing monotonous, repetitive, first floor work. I imagine him pouring himself countless cups of coffee just to make it to 5:00 pm. Yet when he exits, as it appears on the ad, he suppresses his negative emotions and moves on with his day as usual. He immediately revives the pep in his step amid

leaving the office and hides any dissatisfaction from the outside world. In this ad, the logo illustrates the stereotype that men, especially working, middle class American men, leave their work-related problems and hardships at the office. There exists an expectation in which all men possess, or appear to possess, an emotional toughness and stability. Society expects these men with unsatisfying jobs to forget about their hardships and “keep walking” through the rest of their day with a satisfied and content countenance.

The landscape captured in the photo emits a tone that is congruent with the theme of toughness and invulnerability. The entire landscape, including the sidewalk and outer walls of the building, are comprised of stone, brick, and concrete. The bland, gray, innocent walls stand guarding the contents inside like a city’s outer wall of defense. Occasional balconies protrude the walls’ facade resembling a balcony of a watchman or archer, armed and ready to defend. The landscape is almost entirely blanketed by a defensive brick or concrete shield. This shield resembles the emotional shield that stereotypical men tend to put up when disguising their emotions.

The third advertisement exhibits the logo displaying customary characteristics of physical toughness. At first glance, the advertisement seems to be an article dissuading people from opening a new bar in the current economy. However, the audience quickly notices the logo and trailing yellow line that cuts through the article’s jumbled text, implying the logo has made physical contact with and continued walking past the text. The five lines above and below the yellow line have been drastically disarranged. Individually, the letters are staggered and the words create curvy, broken lines rather than legible, straight lines. Collectively, the adjacent text appears dented, dinged, and smashed; similar to an automobile after a bad accident. However, the collision left a lasting mark on the text while the logo continues his stride completely unharmed. The contrast in physical damage to each party implies an abundance in durability apparent in the striding man that, when personified, appears to be strength and physical toughness.

Looking at minute details, it seems as though the logo maintained a brisk pace through the collision. The words, while jumbled, dented, and dinged, also seem to collide into each other while continuing their movement right. The text on either side of the yellow line appears to crease and curl right and towards the yellow line. Not only were the words struck, but also pushed significantly enough to the right to imply the logo's great speed throughout the collision. In his stride, the logo snapped the dividing black line separating the two columns of text in half. The curves of the line force the viewer to interpret it like a cut rope. It is worth noting that the upper line is still on its rightward swing. One would expect with the distance between the logo and the line that the rope-like object would be on its backswing, pointing left. However, this image implies that the collision had occurred within the last fraction of a second, and yet the logo has, in that extremely short time, managed to travel a significant distance, which mathematically equates to a high speed.

The logo's speed is significant in two places: before and after the collision. A high speed before the collision implies a lack of hesitation and fear, of severe, destructive physical contact. This shortage of fear when approaching physical contact requires an immense amount of physical toughness that manifests itself as an absence of ability to ignore pain. After the contact, the logo appears to continue in his stride without any hint of slowing down. This quick, almost instant recovery from the contact is reminiscent of a boxer who takes multiple punches, yet manages to suppress the pain instantly to defend or attack the opponent. The striding man, like most boxers, possesses an ability to recover quickly that is only possible due to his pain tolerance and durability.

The physical toughness involved with the masculine stereotype goes hand in hand with the expectation that men should be able to ignore and suppress emotional pain in order to live and act more normal and confident around others. The third advertisement features a young white man bar tending what appears to be his bar. His imperfect and unkempt hair drapes over his forehead sporadically.

His eyebrows are subtly raised and his gaze upward, indicating his feelings of slight helplessness and insecurity which are most likely due to the questionable future of his bar. He looks towards the article that points out, in detail, how and why his bar might fail. The direction of his gaze clearly indicates that the success of his bar troubles him. However, aside from his personal feelings, his overall body language and appearance conflicts with his emotional thoughts. His arms are spread wide as they tightly grip the bar's counter and support his slight lean forward. According to social psychologist Amy Cuddy, this wide pose is considered a "power pose", an aesthetic display of power, confidence, and raised testosterone levels through body language (Cuddy). By striking this pose, the bartender makes himself seem confident. His slight lean forward and wide pose makes him appear relaxed, confident, calm, and invulnerable, when in reality his gaze shows his vulnerable, worried, insecure state of mind. He hides his true emotions with a confident and relaxed body language. The man clearly exemplifies the stereotype that men should develop an emotional toughness and mental stability to ignore any negative emotions that they may feel.

In all three advertisements, the striding man looks exactly the same. His torso sits evenly balanced between his two legs displaying a consistent, healthy stride. His top hat is tilted forward implying the man's chin is slightly lowered; an expression of confidence and level-headedness. All three ads depict different scenarios yet the striding man appears exactly the same in each. Symbolically, this illustrates masterful and consistent composure. The severity and content of each incident on his path differs greatly, and each requires a specific emotional, physical, or combined toughness to recover and move on. In each ad, the striding man manages to exercise his abundance of toughness and ease to recover perfectly and return him to a uniform shape. It is almost robotic how efficiently he recovers from these experiences into an identical image each time. This consistency is an extremely hyperbolic demonstration of composure that correlates with the masculine stereotype. Society expects men to maintain a near perfect composure throughout every moment of their lives, and this expectation



becomes overly dramatized with the perfection and identicalness of the striding man.

Many argue that the “Keep Walking” campaign emphasizes ambition and desire to achieve goals. They argue that “Keep Walking” carries an encouraging tone with emphasis on the progressive tone of the word “walking”. For example, some could view the New York City advertisement as optimistic, that “Keep Walking” means to strive for a higher position up the corporate scale. With deeper analysis, this ambitious attitude becomes much more apparent.

When viewed in context, the color choice in these advertisements reveal a striving attitude present within the advertisement. The advertisement with the brick wall consists of three colors: a black background, white lettering for the words “Keep Walking” and the brand name “Johnnie Walker” and yellow to fill and outline the brick wall, silhouette logo, and horizontal line running from end to end about a quarter of the way up from the bottom. In real life, the Johnnie Walker logo usually sparkles in a silky metallic gold. In the advertisements, however, the logo lacks this metallic glare and instead blandly contrasts the black in a crisp and dim amber tone. As someone who has seen the gold Johnnie Walker logo before, I see the logo painted “not gold” rather than “yellow”. More accurately, the yellow looks more like “wannabe gold”. The viewers basically expect the color as gold and feel confused when they see yellow instead. The discomfort this sight can cause a viewer translates into what I see as the striving nature of the color yellow in this context. The color yellow appears to be striving for a gold sparkle.

In the context of these ads, the ambitious tone could represent the American Dream. The name “Johnnie” subliminally suggests a middle-class American atmosphere behind the brand and product. According to the 1990 U.S Census, John was the second most common male name in America (Mongabay). The “ie” ending of “Johnnie”, when compared to “Johnathan” or “John” creates an aura of informality that can be closely associated with middle class culture. Any viewer could easily associate the brand name, Johnnie Walker, with

the American middle-class. Some could argue, with the American middle-class perspective of ambition and success, that Johnnie Walker attempts to rekindle the “American Dream” ideology. The Library of Congress claims that, “...the American Dream has become the pursuit of material prosperity - that people work more hours to get bigger cars, fancier homes, the fruits of prosperity for their families...” (Library of Congress). By this definition, people following the American Dream are highly reliant on ambition to accomplish their goals.

In congruence with the American Dream, American culture appears to create a safe space to exercise one’s right to strive for their goals. Mike Maddock of Forbes magazine claims that, “Americans relish risk-taking and often celebrate the underdog who persists at all costs” (Maddock). This risk-taking behavior, however, requires the risk taker to successfully suppress any feelings of self doubt and failure potential. Approximately 90% of American start-up ventures fail and big business institutions constantly dissuade independent people from accomplishing their dreams through financial means. Suppressing these feelings of doubt, insecurity, and fear innately requires emotional strength and invulnerability. Entrepreneurs especially like the man in ad 3 must be unfazed by their insecure emotions if they want to fully exercise their ambition. By including a symbolic hardship that must be overcome, the advertisements focus on the hardships involved with the road to success. These hardships, as the advertisements depict, must be forgotten for someone to successfully “Keep Walking”.

The Johnnie Walker “Keep Walking” campaign lures in their target market with an aesthetically unique, simplistic, and freely interpretable advertisements. The male dominant target market, however, rarely sees the subliminal implications of masculine stereotypes in the advertisements. The advertisements I have chosen explicitly display a dramatized physical toughness that can be symbolic of emotional invulnerability and composure. American culture has always valued and often expected men to remain unfazed by any emotional or physical pain they may feel. The more one can suppress these feelings, the more they are perceived as masculine. However, this expectation is unrealistic; all men

cannot possibly maintain an invulnerable disposition at all times and many cannot completely suppress emotional or physical pain successfully. Consequently, many men, especially American middle-class men, choose alternative methods to better adhere to the stereotype publicly. According to research done on the American middle-class and alcohol during the post World War II era:

“Alcohol’s history reflects a larger trend in American cultural history: an overall retreat from social reform in favor of a ‘turning inward’. Drinking, with potentially disastrous side-effects, became the way many middle-class Americans managed and navigated the gendered requirements of ‘affective restraint’. Work required an input of emotion; marriage required it too. Men riskily shouldered those burdens by resorting to alcohol” (Rotskoff).

This cultural feat is the fundamental motive behind reinforcing the gendered stereotype of toughness because it allows them to manipulate customers more discreetly. In American culture, the “tough man” and the “drinking man” are essentially the same person, with the latter being a more concealed “side effect” of the former. By reassuring the stereotype that all men are tough, they allow culture to convince these men that they are “drinking men”.

# Granader Family Prize for Excellence in Multilingual Writing

## **Socializing is Not an Easy Thing**

Xiaoman Gan

*From Writing 120 (nominated by Scott Beal)*

Xiaoman's essay speaks eloquently to the challenges of being a multilingual student at the University of Michigan. Xiaoman describes how she anticipated that her biggest hurdles here would be academic, and that she envisioned that social life would naturally fall into place. However, upon arriving at the University she discovered that the socialization challenges she faced as a multilingual student were far greater than the academic challenges. Xiaoman breaks down the facets of her argument in a detailed, organized manner, then categorizes these challenges into two types and offers possible solutions for herself and others in her position. Her moves toward the end of the essay to acknowledge the limits of her authority on the subject, and also to put her challenges into perspective via a creative reading of an Einstein quote, give the essay additional credibility and depth.

***Scott Beal***

## Socializing is Not an Easy Thing

I have long assumed that the biggest challenge I would encounter here in America would be the academic one. Although the readings come one after another, I have managed to make ends meet through extra studying and strategic class choices. The thing that cannot be so easily made up through hard work, however, is social life.

Long have I thought that American life would be highly socialized and easy to fit into, with endless parties, sports, music and laughter. One typical picture in my mind was the cozy sunny afternoon on campus. People would cluster after classes and leisurely hang around. Sunglasses, comfortable jeans, glossy grass and cornflower blue sky would be elements of this American social portrait. I would be a member of them, I thought, before I came to America. I would elegantly pass along the sidewalks, to the retro graceful library with my close friends on a shining day. And I would cheerfully meet new people and become part of the group as we grew intimate. Lectures would be awesome with much more engagement and discussion about interesting topics. Everything would be fine as Americans are so outgoing and socialized, I thought. It would be tough, but would work out naturally and eventually, I thought. But it turns out that getting deeply involved in a foreign social network is much more difficult than *what I thought*.

The first and perhaps the most obvious challenge is language. Equipped with a satisfying TOEFL score, I was once confident about my language skills. But it turns out that outstanding performance in tests may not necessarily guarantee an equally brilliant mastery of daily English. I can clearly recall my first day arriving in Ann Arbor. I gazed at the menu, got totally lost among the eccentric sauce names and unknown recipes, and just tried my fortune with a sigh. SAT vocabulary may never cover the French or Italian name of sauces but such words are here greeting you every supper. Daily listening is a totally different thing from the listening materials I used to practice with TOEFL.

Just like in China, the vast territory endows America with colorful dialects, not to mention the deeply international and hybrid character of this country. Fast speed and strong accent sometimes make the content of conversation a mystery for me. Though I can read textbooks before classes to capture the flow of the lecture, it is certainly not the case when it comes to daily conversations. Slang, casual expressions and unique vocabulary are here so ubiquitous and frequent that you do not have time to look them up beforehand and catch them after. Besides the difficulty of understanding the content, it is also not easy to find a way to express my idea precisely and colorfully, which I can easily complete with my first language.

Different individual schedule has also made it even more challenging to establish a deeply engaged social life. Back in China, we have classes in universities, sorted by major. People in the same class will have their core courses together and organize mass activities occasionally. So the schedules of most classmates are the same, making it easy to maintain a relatively steady relationship and contact with people. But here in America, no two leaves are exactly the same. As we can register for totally different classes according to our own plan, friendships are challenging to grow up among the smashed time fragments. Lecture halls are as big as the auditorium occupied with 200 to 300 people. I guess it will probably take me a term's time to get acquainted with my "classmates" from every year and every major of the school. People here are very nice, as long as you get to know them. But we soon lose contact and get down to our own schedules. I have their phone numbers but there seems no particular reason to call them out under such a different and inconvenient schedule. As a result, I find myself at a loss among the vast ocean of people.

And the most intangible but vital part of building social life is common topics, or the resonance to develop a closer relationship. During the first two weeks of the semester, it is easier to meet new people and acceptable to ask about majors, years or dorms. But the embarrassing silence will creep in after the simple brief questions, which makes me hesitate to start the same story again. By

contrast, Americans find it natural to accomplish a conversation, usually an elaborate and durable one just about the crazy football game or pop singers, and talk like old friends with someone they just met minutes ago. But as for me, things are not that easy. One cultural difference is that I as a Chinese am relatively reserved and shy when I first meet people, and the other is that as an international student I still have difficulty in truly reaching the core spirit of an in-depth talk rather than just having the seemingly interesting but rather superficial conversation. In fact, I have also noticed that during the orientation and mass meeting here, international students and American students may try to greet each other when they first meet, but finally tend to get back to talk with their own fellow countrymen with whom they share the same language and similar cultural background. This phenomenon suggests that I still have a long way to go as a foreigner to build my own impression among Americans as a unique individual and really get involved rather than just being treated as exotic and international—in other words, to share the feelings within this culture not across culture.

It is sort of misconception, you may call it, between the assumed easiness and the real challenge concerning social life, both technically and substantially. By technically, I mean the language part including listening and speaking. And by substantially, I refer to reaching out courageously to meet new people and maintaining a long lasting relationship. I somehow assumed that my English will improve a lot since I will be immersed in the native speaker environment. But I found it is far from the truth since my chance to speak English won't increase significantly if I am not involved in American life. It is kind of a dilemma: I am afraid of talking to others for unconfident in language, but the language will not improve if I am afraid to even start a conversation.

So I have somehow anticipated the difficulty of getting into the American social life before I came, but misconceived about the true depth of this challenge. I think it is common for numerous international students like me, especially for people from Asian countries who are culturally more conserved, to underestimate the difficulty and face the same dilemma during their first few

months. Yet I am not writing to dismay you; my point is, being over prepared is always better than under prepared. Don't anticipate it to be easy no matter how much confidence you have in your scores: Squeeze time to enrich the vocabulary again, especially the daily ones. Join the clubs and meet people of the same interest, bravely say hello to people sitting nearby, and don't wait for next time. Actively prepare for every class and exams, ask questions, come to the office hours, and talk to your professors and advisors. Get a hump on American culture as much as you can... Things will be better only when we are preparing for the better. Just relying on Americans to talk to us will be too ideal. Dreaming of the panacea of environment or time is also nothing helpful to change the situation. We have to be diligent and courageous ourselves—that will be the only panacea of all.

Now, I know some people may be skeptical, I myself is still half way through the problem, how do I know these suggestions will work? Well, the bad news is that I cannot guarantee, either. But the good news is that since we know that we are not alone, we can try to figure it out together. And they are reasonably really good suggestions, aren't they? Numerous of students have made it through, why can't we? Anyway, however effective the suggestions are, you still have to experience it yourself, live through all the adversities and challenges, all the efforts and confusions, all the perseverance and achievements, always by and for yourself.

It is tough, but it is at the same time precious experience once we eventually conquer it. Toughness is not necessarily the bad thing. And the experience, I think, is part of the most important lesson we can learn from abroad studying. As Einstein once put it, "Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school." By this quotation, he originally emphasized the primary mission of education is to cultivate the ability not just about what to learn, but how to learn, such as critical thinking and exploring the world and solving the problem independently. Yet what he meant is still the academic part. I want to make a step further that education is also about the



ability to live, about how to get along with people, about challenging yourself in a totally different culture, about balancing yourself and finding the happiness, about realizing the problem, not discouraged over failure and always seeking for the better. That is also, and even more important, part of what education should endow us.

# **The Power of Attitude in Comparative Advertising**

Ziyan Yang

*From Writing 120 (nominated by Lori Randall)*

Ziyan clearly put a good deal of critical thought into this assignment, identifying a message in the ads that may not have been immediately apparent to others. She not only does an excellent job of analyzing this message but also uses language beautifully to describe the ads and to guide the reader through her analysis. I think you will agree that this paper is a true delight to read!

***Lori Randall***

## **The Power of Attitude in Comparative Advertising**

There is an interesting strategy in advertising we call “comparative advertising.” It is loosely defined as advertising where “the advertised brand is explicitly compared with one or more competing brands and the comparison is obvious to the audience” (T.E. Barry&R.L. Tremblay, 1975, P. 15-20). We can easily name some of the competing brands without thinking too much: Pepsi vs. Coke, McDonald’s vs. KFC, Adidas vs. Nike, Apple vs. Samsung, AT&T vs. Verizon and so forth. This type of advertising is deeply inserted into our daily lives. It covers almost all the product categories and we can see it from almost every means of media. With strong interest, I chose two advertisements of this type for further investigation. And I am delighted to guide you through the analytical process, during which we can explore how one company’s attitude towards its competing rival matters in comparative advertising. Furthermore, I am going to figure out how the public reacts to the very different attitudes. I believe you will be shocked when you finally find out that a respectful attitude towards a competing brand of the same product will earn the company a much better reputation than a disrespectful manner. What? You don’t believe it? Let’s look at the two advertisements first before finally reaching to the conclusion.

The first advertisement I chose is from the Pepsi Company. Not surprisingly, it points the gun at its “old antagonist”— the Coca-Cola Company. This advertisement is extremely simple. However, it makes its point clear and explicit through the simplified design. The background color of this advertising poster is royal blue, which is the theme hue for the Pepsi Company. I suppose this background color was purposely chosen so that everyone who sees the advertisement will find himself/herself immediately immersed in the blue “ocean” of Pepsi. And that’s certainly the effect this advertisement wants to achieve. In the forefront of this poster, two cans of cola are placed. The one on the left is the cola from the Coke Company and the one on the right is that from the Pepsi

Company. These two cans look exactly the same except for the minor difference in their packaging. In other words, we see no real difference in quality between the two brands by just looking at their packaging. Each brand has its unique way of designing the packaging. And as a customer, I consider both of them tempting to taste. Certainly, the Pepsi Company knows what we, the customers, are thinking about. So, it comes up with a comparatively creative idea to show its superior position in the cola competition.

Let's then go back to the poster to see what trick it plays. In the foreground of the poster, we can clearly see two straws, with one above each can. And it is the straws that convey the Pepsi Company's message. The straw on the right (above the cola of the Pepsi Company) is directly inserted into the can. However, the straw on the left (above the cola of the Coke Company) is split at the end point. Driven by the designer's imagination, the split parts turn into two hands. We can tell from the shape of the two hands that the straw "works" very hard to prevent itself from getting a single sip of the cola from the Coke Company. The advertisers personify our "innocent" straw, and use its "mouth" to tell the public: "Don't buy cola from the Coke Company! They suck." Of course, the Pepsi Company does not explicitly say that, but the words are spread to the audiences by these two "powerful" hands. Although Pepsi has already made its point very clear, it still placed its logo at the right corner of the poster to make the brand more prominent. And next to the logo, we can see a short sentence—"Enjoy Pepsi."

What do you think of this advertisement? Does it make you laugh by creatively using the idea of the straw? Do you feel annoyed by the concept of belittling its competing rival? Will you buy Pepsi after seeing this poster? Actually, this poster has aroused a heated discussion on RenRen, which is a Chinese social platform similar to Facebook. In reaction to this heated discussion, this website started an online poll on whether or not people like this advertisement. Guess what? The result was approximately 50% to 50%! That means nearly HALF of

the people think that this poster is not a good choice for advertising. Why do so many RenRen users object to it? In order to get an answer, let's look at the comments first.

The comments go towards two extremes on this advertisement. People who like this advertisement state that the poster is extremely hilarious. The use of personification in the poster makes the advertising amusing and lively. And the concept of comparison lets the advertising be more competitive and watchable. However, people who object to this advertisement argue that the Pepsi Company does not show respect to its rival. The advertisement is designed on the basis of belittling the Coke Company, which, in fact, does a pretty good job on the cola market. Moreover, they claim that this advertisement does not let the truth speak for itself. Instead, it uses emotion to make things up. In other words, the key element—the straw—of this poster is acting under the designer's will. It does not intend to reject that can of Coke, but rather, is manipulated by the advertisers. In fact, the reason for the advertisers to manipulate the straw is that they are eager to prove Pepsi does a better job than Coke. And they are eager to show Coca-Cola's "in-popularity" as well. It is this action that makes the Pepsi Company receive little acceptance. People dislike it, because they are tired of Pepsi's defiant and disrespectful attitude towards Coke. Clearly, if the Pepsi Company could correct its attitude, it would receive more supportive voices. And the comments would probably not go to the extremes.

After reading these extreme comments, I began to think about its universality. Is the Pepsi Company the only one that suffers from extreme remarks? Do other companies who use the strategy of comparative advertising face the same situation? In order to grasp a general idea of this topic, I looked into another advertisement which uses the same strategy.

The second advertisement I chose is from the Burger King Company. Being a burgeoning star in the fast food industry, it challenges the position of another popular company in the same field—McDonald's. The idea of the poster is, again, very easy to follow. The poster is set at a check-stand in a

Burger King restaurant. Looking carefully at this background, we can see that everything at the back kitchen is well organized: the meat in the oven is orderly placed with a sequence from small to big; the pies are stacked by different colors of the packing; empty cups are neatly placed side by side in a row; even the knives and spoons are put in the same direction. The fried chicken and beef meat in the poster look so delicious as if they are waving their hands and shouting “eat me!” to the customers passing by. Just by looking at its background, I have to admit, I get a strong desire to buy the products. Yet, when you divert your attention to the forefront, more attractive images can be found. In the foreground of this poster, an enthusiastic cashier with a big smile is standing behind the counter. She has long blond hair, big blue eyes and a tall figure. As a girl, I am so jealous of her! However, her appealing warm smile has erased away all my jealousy. Her big blue eyes blink, as if she is talking silently: “It is really my pleasure to serve you.” How anyone could not be attracted by this advertisement!

The Burger King’s Company must have worked really hard on creating this imagine. However, the real shining point of this advertisement is neither the well-organized check-stand nor the passionate gorgeous cashier. In front of the counter, we capture a sight of the back of a special customer. Guess who is this special buyer?—Yes, you are right! It’s Ronald McDonald. Ronald McDonald dresses in his usual outfit, but wears a camel top-hat and wind coat this time. He comes to buy Burger King’s products. From the tray that beautiful cashier hands out to Ronald McDonald, we can see that he ordered a cheeseburger, French fries and a large coke, which is exactly the same best sellers in McDonald’s. Since Ronald McDonald shows us only his back, we are not able to tell how he feels about the food. However, the smart advertisers leave us a message. At the right corner of the poster, two short sentences are written: “Mine is great. This just tastes better.” Wise move! And in order to reinforce the image of the brand, a logo of the Burger King Company is placed at the center of the poster.

You may wonder how the public reacts to this advertisement. At first, I assumed that it got the same type of feedback as the Pepsi advertisement

received. However, surprisingly, the comments on this poster seem to be all positive. The RenRen website carried out a similar poll, asking about people's different attitudes towards Burger King's advertisement. Only 5% of people disliked for this poster. People praise its creativity, stating that they enjoy this idea and the image the company creates very much. They show their affections towards the good-looking cashier, joking about trying to be her boyfriend. They are attracted as I am by the well-organized counter and the finger-licking delicacies. They like the idea of dressing Ronald McDonald in top-hat and wind coat, arguing that it makes him more handsome and virile. They respect Burger King's attitude towards its rival, by not underestimating the quality of products in McDonald's.

Even though there are still some voices placing critiques on this advertisement, those critiques have nothing to do with Burger King's attitudes. Instead, they are more about the "unrealistic" perfect image this poster creates. In the opponent's perspectives, this advertisement seems to be unreal because it is really hard for us to find such a neat and well-organized counter as it appears in the poster in real life. They dispute that the advertisement exaggerates the fact and may be considered as a cunning cheating. "Why does that matter" people who are in favor of this advertisement argue back, stating that a little exaggeration makes advertising a fine art. The discussion goes on and on; however, none of the criticisms lie in the Burger King Company's attitude. That is to say, both people who support this advertising and those who are against it are content with Burger King's modest and positive attitude towards its rival in the fierce competition. This advertisement is highly accepted because it shows respect to its competitors.

The two ads share an obvious similarity: the advertising strategy. The two companies both have a very good command of "comparative advertising." They know what they are supposed to do with this strategy and make their points clear and understandable. People who see their posters can easily figure out the messages they try to convey and nod their heads with knowing grins.

However, what interests me is that although the two advertisements use the same method to propagandize their products, they receive very different responses. What causes this to happen?

As far as I am concerned, the problem lies in their different attitudes towards their rivals. Pepsi's tactic is to belittle the value of the Coca-Cola Company. It sees the Coca-Cola Company as an enemy and tries very hard to put itself in a relatively superior position. Its attitude towards the Coca-Cola Company is negative. However, the Burger King Company acts in a very different way. It shows respect to McDonald's work at the beginning by saying that "[m]ine is great," using Ronald McDonald's tongue. Although "[t]his just tastes better" is the real message it wants to spread, it does not deny McDonald's effort of reaching excellence. Its attitude towards the competitor in the same field is quite positive.

Some people may argue that the purpose of making an advertisement is to promote sales. Devaluing the quality of one's competitor makes the brand more prominent. And thus, people will pay more attention to the brand and are more likely to buy products from the company. If one can earn more money in this way, why does the attitude towards its rivals still matter? This analysis seems logical; however, the truth does not support this point. If devaluing the competitor's quality can, indeed, promote sales, why are there still so many people who dislike Pepsi's advertising? In my point of view, attitude DOES matter because it shows how different companies react in the face of competition and it reveals the morals of these companies. Expressing contempt towards competitors will just show your arrogance. Not only the rival companies, but also people who see the advertisement will feel disrespected because you don't see the problems on an even perspective. However, acknowledging the quality of your rival's work at first will do a much better job convincing people to buy the products. People can see your modest attitude and will support your open mind for competition.

Take the Burger King Company's case as an example. If the advertisers only wrote "this just tastes better" on the poster, people would think that the



Burger King Company is blindly confident. I, as a potential customer, would think in that way too. Since McDonald's has already done a pretty good job in the fast food industry, there is no reason for Burger King to claim a superior position. However, if the company wrote "mine is great" first, the situation would be totally different. By admitting your rival's strength first, you show the customers your positive perspective on viewing the competition. Even if your main claim is to praise your own products, expressing yourself in this way will make both your competitors and the customers comfortable.

Isn't it magical that by only adding three words, the entire public reactions towards the advertising can be totally changed? If you think this phenomenon is interesting, well, you're in luck, you have a lot more interesting phenomena to explore in this field. Since "comparative advertising" is a really broad topic, by doing the analysis above, I just took a quick glance at one of its branches. Through the comparison of two advertisements in this type, I came to learn that one rule of doing comparative advertising is to respect your competitors at the first place. I really enjoy the process of finding the advertisements and expressing ideas on them. Following this manner, I believe more fun facts will be found on comparative advertising in the near future. And I hope I could find these fun facts with you, my dear readers!

# Granader Family Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio

**akemitsutsumiwriting100.wordpress.com**

Akemi Tsutsumi

*From Writing 100 (nominated by Gina Brandolino)*

Akemi Tsutsumi is an international student; she grew up in Mexico, but, as her name suggests, her father is Japanese. Our course topic, social class in the U.S., posed many challenges to her given this background. But rather than being tentative in her work, right from the start she demonstrated a zeal to learn that led her to take risks and seek connections between the culture she knew better and American culture. This approach makes her work unique, and she draws amazing insights from her special vantage point. This is apparent in all her work, but I encourage you especially to take a look at her reflection on writing the directed self-placement essay (which proved hard because it explores a subject with which international students don't have much experience), her personal essay "The Waving Power," and "My Mexican Social Class." These three pieces especially show how she turned a challenge to her advantage, finding a truly compelling perspective from which to write.

Akemi's papers are all excellent, but her reflections on writing these papers impress me just as much—as you read them, you will see a careful log of her developing writing process, her own assessment of her progress and what areas she still needs to work on. It is also clear that Akemi thought through just how to present these reflections with the reader's ease in mind—notice how she highlighted key words to make them stand out and help guide the reader. She also uses an amazing array of multi-modal components that complement her own writing incredibly well. It surely shows that Akemi worked on her e-portfolio all semester long, making thoughtful decisions about how to use the medium not only to collect all her work but to present it elegantly and in a way that will engage and even entertain her readers. She succeeded!

***Gina Brandolino***

## The Waving Power: Reflection

“Goodness is about character – integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like. More than anything else, it is about how we treat other people” ~Dennis Prager

Since social class is the topic for our class, we have been reading many essays and stories about how people think about and experience social classes. For example, we read about how social class affected Black and hooks’s college experiences; and how Price was not able to see his social class until he left for college. In



“Smile and wave, that’s all it takes” ~Martin Lemieux

this assignment we were asked to narrate our own personal experience with social class, and to explain what we learned from this encounter with social classes.

This essay was very similar to my really good story. First of all, it was



I took this picture during my Winter break in Mexico City. I was inside of an upper-class golf club. The two buildings are part of the golf club. In between the two buildings, you can see one of the poorest towns in the city.

completely based on my experiences. I could not quote or paraphrase any text to support my ideas. Since it was a very personal essay, I had to incorporate many of my feelings to make the story believable and interesting. Another aspect that was similar to my really good story was that it was a thesis-seeking essay, unlike the previous two assignments, which were thesis-driven. In a thesis-seeking you state your thesis at the very end of the essay, instead of stating it in the introduction. My really good story was thesis-seeking because I started in media-res and then went on describing what had happened, without telling

the readers the main idea of the story. I stated the main idea of the story in the last sentences. In this essay, it was the same way. I talked about my class encounters, but didn't present the thesis statement, which was what I learned from this experience, until the last paragraph.

My story described my encounters with social class in Mexico. Most of my readers are not from Mexico, and therefore there are some concepts they are not able to fully understand. For example, when I talked about public schools, they might have imagined public schools here in the U.S., but public schools in Mexico are very different from public schools here. Being able to tell readers a story about a topic they were not familiar with was the hardest task of this essay.

To familiarize you with Mexico before you read my essay, I included a slide show with pictures of different aspects of Mexican culture and attached a video (<http://youtu.be/ixWxmRlv8W4>) about some random facts you may not know about Mexico. Enjoy!



Mexico City. More than 8.7 million people live here.



Public elementary school



Flea market. You can buy all sorts of products here, including fruits, meat, seafood, and clothes.



Class differences in Mexico City.



Cancun is frequently visited by tourists. It is located in southeast Mexico, and it's very famous for its beautiful, warm beaches.



Palenque. Mayan pyramids.

## **The Waving Power**

Have you ever seen a person laugh without opening their mouth? It is likely that you haven't. Opening the mouth is something that every person does every time they laugh. Since it is something very common, people stop noticing this, or at least they stop thinking about it. The same thing happens with social classes. I was born in Mexico, the country where social classes are so evident that people forget they even exist. People tend to live in separate worlds depending on their class, and although these worlds encounter each other every day, the interactions are done as quick and superficial as possible.

I grew up in a house where the gap between the social class worlds was attempted to be covered. The two maids that worked at my house were considered part of our family. I loved and respected them as much as I respected my aunts. We would invite them out to dinner on Sundays, and we would go visit their houses around three times a year. In fact, I was very good friends with one of the maid's granddaughter. I was taught, and frequently reminded, that values, such as respect and honesty, rather than social classes are what define people, and that everyone should be treated the same no matter what they have or don't have.

My family was able to erase social class differences inside of my house, but outside of my house the difference between social classes was still very evident to me every day. I attended a private school, not one of those fancy ones where three cars full of bodyguards bring kids to school, but it was still a good private school. We had two soccer fields, a small library, a cafeteria, and many classrooms. Next to my school was a public school. This school just had a few old classrooms. No soccer field, no library, not even bathrooms. I was very young, but still able to notice that there was an invisible line, probably more like a border, between the two schools. The only interactions that occurred were when people from lower classes that worked in our school as janitors or gardeners went and talked to their friends, whose children attended the public



school. Some people from lower social classes did work in my school, but oddly, at least for me, no one from higher classes worked in the public school. Apart from these small interactions between the two worlds, communication between people from both schools was almost nonexistent. When kids from the public school walked past our school they would stare down at the floor, avoiding any eye contact with my school and its people. When people from my school walked by the public school they wouldn't stare down at the floor, but they wouldn't look at the school either. They just walked, like if the school was invisible, or maybe even nonexistent.

Although I was well aware that social classes existed, I never quite understood the reason why the two social class worlds were separated. I often felt that people from lower classes tried to avoid any major interaction with my class, but I couldn't figure out why. Whenever I went with my mom to the flea market (a place rarely visited by people from higher social classes) to buy fresh fruit, the workers would only ask us what kind of fruit we wanted and then told us the price. My mom would ask them simple questions like "How are you today?" And their response was never longer than "good, ma'am". I also noticed that if I smiled to the janitors at my school, they would look back to see if I was smiling at someone else, and when they saw no one was there they looked puzzled and confused. Also, my family would sometimes go to a church very close to my house. This church, although it was 5 minutes away from my house, was considered part of the lower class world, and whenever we went there people would look at us as if we were some kind of invasive aliens. I couldn't understand why they didn't like us. We were not mean or disrespectful to them, so I couldn't find a reason for their behavior. There were sometimes when I heard people saying "we have to understand, they don't have as much as we do", and I wondered if maybe jealousy was the reason they didn't talk to us.

School for me was a place to learn, to get my questions answered, but this particular questions could not be answered at school. Although this was never explicitly said to us, I clearly knew that social class was not something to

be talked about or discussed in school. Teachers would sometimes talk about how we should volunteer and donate to help the poor, but the poor were portrayed to us like people living somewhere in a mountain or in the middle of a jungle in the south of Mexico, which seemed too unrealistic and unimportant for my 7-year-old mind. That was the closest we got to discussing social classes. It was clear that if I asked a question about why the poor were mean and didn't want to talk to us, it would have been considered as extremely inappropriate and offensive.

Luckily, I didn't need school to answer my question. This question was answered during Christmas, with the help of a basket full of food and a doorman. For Christmas, my grandma always gave baskets with food to the people that worked in her apartment complex. She would go to Costco and buy rice, beans, cookies, and other seemingly simple food. Then she would spend about 2 weeks setting up the baskets. I would often ask her why didn't she give them candy instead of rice and beans. Her answer was always the same, "you know, they would much rather have rice than candy".

The day before Christmas, I accompanied my grandma to give the doorman his basket. When he received it he was really happy and said,

"Thank you ma'am! I always knew you were one of the nice ones".

My grandma, confused, asked "Nice ones?"

And the doorman replied, "Yes! You and your family are the only ones in the building that wave to me whenever you enter the building".

At this moment, I realized that it wasn't the low class being rude to my class. Instead, it was my class being mean to the low class, making them feel inferior.



## The Biased College Application Process: Reflection

Every time we finish writing an essay for this class, we fill out a survey that measures the improvement of our writing skills. At the end, there is always the same question: “how close was your writing process for this paper to you ideal writing process?” My answer for the first assignment was ‘not very ideal’. I hadn’t done an outline, I started writing my essay really late, it had taken me a lot of hours to write a short paper, my essay was disorganized, and both the introduction and the conclusion had to be revised. Clearly this was not an ideal writing process.

### The Writing Process

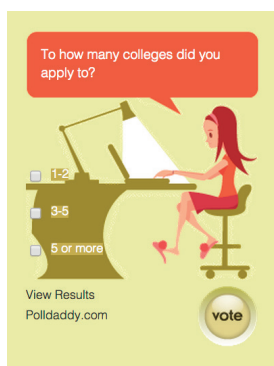


For the next two essays, my answer to the survey question changed to “somewhat ideal”. I was now doing a rough outline before writing my essays and it was taking me less time to finish the essays, but I still struggled with creating big pictures on my introductions and conclusions. However, I consider that my writing process for this fourth assignment was ideal. For this assignment, I was asked to write a 6-7 paged argument with sources. I had to choose any topic regarding social class, and then write an argument supporting my position on the chosen topic using at least five different sources. First of all, it took me less time to write it than any of the other essays, even though this was the longest one. Also, both my introduction and conclusion were clear and created a big picture, and I didn’t have to revise them between the rough and final draft. In fact, the revisions I did were not extensive at all. I just had to expand some examples, fix some typos, and make sure that my paragraphs didn’t end with a quotation.

I believe that the reason why the writing process for this essay was so

much better than the other was that for the first time, I created an extensive outline before starting to write my paper. My outline included my thesis statement and my conclusions. I also wrote down all my topic sentences and the supporting quotes and information for each sentence. In addition, I included my naysayer, the supporting quotations, and how would I defend my point of view. Creating an organized, detailed, and extensive outline was the most important skill I practiced in this paper. I had been stubborn on the first few assignments, arguing that I could write a paper without wasting time doing an outline. Yet, I realized that a good outline not only helps the introduction, conclusion, and organization of the essay, it also saves you time.

Extracurricular activities? What you did in the summer? Apply to 8 to 10 colleges? Is this really possible for everyone? Read my essay to find out!



View video at <https://youtu.be/i6zMfaMPpCE>

## **The Biased College Application Process**

During my senior year in high school, I attended several orientation sessions at different universities. All of them were pretty similar, they started talking about all the resources they had and all the opportunities they offered to you. Then, they explained their admissions process. They would always mention that everyone had the same opportunity of getting accepted, no matter their economical and social background or their race, that as long as you had a good SAT score and interesting essays, your application could be strong enough to be accepted. But then, contradicting what they had just said, they “highly recommended” doing other things that would increase the chances of being accepted. These recommendations included taking advanced courses during high school, taking as many SAT Subject tests as possible, participating in various extracurricular activities, being in a leading position of some organization, doing community service, and visiting the campus. Immediately after hearing all their recommendations, I realized that the application process was not fair and equal as they claimed it to be. Your chances of being accepted were determined by factors such as your social class and economic background. A college education is essential for class mobility, it enables people to get a degree, and therefore be able to get better paid jobs, but getting a into college is very hard for people from lower classes because most of the good and reputable colleges have an admissions process designed for people from the American upper class.

Education, especially earning a college degree, is necessary to move to a higher social class. A good example of how college enables people to move to higher social classes is the story of Della Mae Justice. Justice left her hometown “Pike County, making her way through college and law school – and moved up the ladder from rural poverty to the high-achieving circles of the middle class” (Lewin 64). Of course, many people will argue that you don’t need a college education to move upward in the social class system. Some, like Marche, believe that a college degree means nothing if you are coming from a low class because

you are destined to be in that class (Marche 267). I know that a college degree will not guarantee people from a low class, or from any other class, a good career and a high pay, but it makes success much more probable. Attending college gives people the knowledge and skills necessary to get good jobs, and it also increases the people's job application opportunities. One time, when I was waiting in line to go to the bathroom in a mall, I saw a sign looking for janitors to work in the mall. Since the line was going very slow, I read the requirements to apply for this job, and was surprised when I read that a college education was required to apply. Today, more and more jobs are making college degrees part of their requirements. If you go to college you will be able to meet this requirement, and the more jobs you can apply to, the higher the chances you will get a job.

Other people will also disagree with me, arguing that "Bill Gates, who started off squarely in the upper middle class, made a fortune without finishing college" (Scott and Leonhardt 10). Like Bill Gates, there are other well-known cases of people who became millionaires without finishing, or ever attending, college. But why are these cases so well-known? Well, it is because they are rare, and therefore very unlikely. There is a chance, an extremely small chance, that you'll become a millionaire without going to college, but it is too risky to not go to college and just hope that you'll become a millionaire. A college degree might not make you a millionaire, but it will help you get a job good enough to live a good life.

As I mentioned above, I firmly believe that college enables success and class mobility, but I believe that there are some flaws in the college application process that prevent lower-class students from attending college. Today, "more people are getting those [college] degrees than did a generation ago, but class still plays a big role in determining who does or does not. At 250 of the most selective colleges in the country, the proportion of students from upper-income families has grown, not shrunk" (Scott and Leonhardt 21). The college application process is biased against low class applicants in several ways. First of all, applying to college is very expensive. You have to pay for every time you take

the SATs, SAT Subjects and ACTs, and you also have to pay to send each score to each college. The fee to take an SAT is \$52.50, plus \$11.50 for sending the score to a college. This means that just to meet the minimum requirement to apply to any college, which is taking the SAT, you have to pay \$64. Let's say that a student takes the SAT two times, something that a high percentage of students do. This student will have to pay \$105. Then, if this student is applying to four colleges, he will end up paying \$151. To this, he will have to add the costs of the SAT Subjects. The basic price of an SAT Subject is \$26, and then \$16 for each additional subject you take that day. In addition to the standardized tests, the price of submitting an application to a college can go up to \$90. The CollegeBoard website has a section in which they offer advice and information for high-school seniors and high-school counselors. They recommend students to apply to 5-10 colleges. If a student applies to 10 colleges, and each application is \$90, the student will end up paying \$900 just to apply to college. You can apply to receive a type of financial aid for applications and standardized tests, but this aid is limited. For example, CollegeBoard offers a fee waiver. But not everyone is applicable for this aid, and if you are applicable, you can only receive aid for two SAT tests. So, if you want or need to take a third test, you will have to pay it on your own. If you don't have enough money, you will be at a disadvantage because you won't be able to take as many tests or to apply to as many colleges as people who do have the money.

People from lower classes don't always have the academic background that colleges look for. As a student from a low class, "you haven't had the chance to take the test-prep course. You went to a school that didn't do as good a job coaching you for the test. You came from a home without the same opportunities for learning" (Leonhardt 101). Low class students don't come from the best and most renowned high schools. As Publiski mentioned in his essay, "a private education would have been better than the education that would receive at a public school" (5), but lower class people are not able to afford pay for a private education or live in a prestigious school district. Also, their high schools

might not prepare them to take SATs or offer the same opportunities as other high schools, like APs. In her essay, Campbell mentioned that students from her school, which was considered a low class school, were not as prepared for college and for the standardized tests, as students from better schools were. She says that part of the reason she didn't feel very well prepared for the standardized tests was that since her school was a lower-class school, "the faculty-was a bit questionable" (Campbell 1). She also mentions that her school only offered one AP class, compared to her step brother's school, which was considered to be a "higher class" school, "offered about 40 AP classes" (Campbell 2). In the "Current Year Courses" of the CommonApp application, there is the option to choose the course level, some of which I have never heard before. Apparently a high school course can be accelerated, AP, honors, IB, or regents, yet Campbell's high school only offers one AP course. Schools are not the only reason why students from the low class are not as prepared for college as students from the upper class, families also play an important role. According to Leonhardt, upper-middle class parents, "understanding the importance of a bachelor's degree, spent hours reading to them, researching school districts" (91). This does not mean that parents from the low-working class do not care about their children and their education, it only means they don't always have the time or resources to get them ready for college applications.

Colleges also look for additional experiences and extracurricular activities. They are looking for "well-rounded" students, who were part, and preferably captains, of a sports team, practiced an artistic activity, such as music and art, and were involved in community service.

People from lower classes might not have the time or money to be involved in community service, sports, or other activities. Low class students often have to work, and their schedules are busy enough with work and school to be involved in other activities. For example, Madison Dutton said that after finding out she would have to pay for her education at the University of Michigan, she "picked up extra shifts at [her] job and ended up working about 30 hours a week

while still attending school” (Dutton 3). On average, Madison was working 5 hours per day, plus the 7 hours she spent at school. This means that each day, she only had 12 hours for homework, transportation, eating, sleeping, and spending some time with family. Therefore, she did not have enough time to be part of a sports team or a club.

College admissions offices, of course, may argue that they are aware of the different opportunities of lower classes, and are modifying their selection system to create equal opportunities for everyone. They may also state that they have increased their number of scholarships and financial aid in order to encourage more people to go to college. Today, “[c]olleges are not only increasing financial aid but also promising to give weight to economic class in granting admissions. They say they want to make an effort to admit more low-income students” (Leonhardt 95). But colleges still have big egos, and want to have good reputations and positions in college rankings. College rankings measure standardized scores of students, and graduation and acceptance rates. This is the reason why “at institutions where nearly everyone graduates- such as small colleges like Colgate, major state institutions like the University of Colorado, and elite private universities like Stanford- more students today come from the top of the nation’s income ladder than they did two decades ago” (Leonhardt 89). Lower-class students are more likely to drop out of school due to financial or class-related problems, such as those experienced by Black and hooks. If students drop out, the graduation rates of schools will lower, and colleges don’t want to take this risk.

Even though schools claim now to be equalizers because their “classrooms are filled with women, blacks, Jews, and Latinos, groups largely excluded two generations ago- but the students tend to share an upper-middle class upbringing” (Leonhardt 90). Marche claimed that social mobility didn’t exist because people were born to be in a certain class, but I think that the reason class why mobility is very limited is because the educational system is designed to help the people that are already in the upper class succeed. Colleges are now

“promising to give weight to economic class in granting admissions” (Leonhardt 95), but this is not a good way to solve the problem, because then the admissions process puts upper class students at a disadvantage. In addition, even if low-class students are admitted to colleges they are not as prepared as the rest of the students. To have an application process that is just for everyone, regardless of his or her social class, public school funding needs to change. Low-class and upper-class schools should have the same resources. Teachers should be qualified, facilities should be in good conditions, and the number of AP and college prep classes should be equal in every school. Another thing that needs to change are the standardized tests. These tests are achievement tests, meaning that they measure the amount of information a student knows or has learned. Achievement tests have to be replaced by aptitude tests. Aptitude tests measure the ability to learn or gain proficiency in a certain subject. This way, colleges will be able to see the potential of the students, rather than how much information have they memorized in their college-prep classes. As long as college admissions based their decisions on things like how many community service hours you did or how many clubs were you are member of, social mobility will appear nonexistent, and people will begin to believe that Marche’s theory of being born in a certain class is true, and they will lose all motivation to succeed.





**vogelk.wordpress.com**

Katie Vogel

*From Writing 100 (nominated by Jennifer Metsker)*

Katie's eportfolio impressed me because of her eagerness to improve her writing. She had an enthusiasm for learning that is reflected in her writing, her blog posts, and in her self reflections. I also felt that she challenged her own preconceptions, especially in the area of diversity. When her final essay lacked a counterargument about whether or not U-M was truly a diverse campus, she had to put aside her own beliefs and be open to the ideas of others who feel this campus is not diverse enough.

*Jennifer Metsker*

## Unlearning Essay: Reflection

### Evidence About Evidence



This is a picture of some of my friends from other countries and me in the homecoming parade. Senior year was judgment free!

For our first essay, we were asked to think about an experience, or collections of experiences that led us to change the way we thought about something. The goal of this assignment was for us to use specific evidence and be able to analyze it to convey how we changed to the reader. I chose to talk about stereotypes, and how meeting exchange students from other countries made me realize

that I was a very judgmental person, and a lot of what I “knew” about other people came from preconceived notions and stereotypes that I had grown up familiar with. As I wrote my essay, I analyzed how getting to know the exchange students really helped develop my understanding of other cultures, and the importance of getting to know an individual based upon who they truly are, instead of what others led me to believe about these exchange students, which was usually based on hearsay.

Although I felt pretty confident in my essay, initially it was difficult for me to notice my lack of evidence. After a peer review session though, I realized that I had written some parts of my essay as though I expected the reader to already understand what I was talking about.

For example, near the end of my first essay when I am describing how I unlearned, I simply included these two sentences, “The more I learned about my new friends from Exchange Club, the less tied down I felt due to having stereotypes. Every day I met new people, and although it was hard for me at first

to not have prejudgments about them, it felt really freeing to have absolutely no expectations about their personalities or cultures” (RD). Instead of expanding on how I got to know them, or what I learned about my friends, I only wrote, “every day I met new people”. This is a basic sentence, and in my writing process I learned that in order to make it more personal to my life I needed to explain exactly how I got to know people, and provide some examples of what I learned so that my peers would be able to better connect with my essay.

Although my next paragraph is a bit longer, it is exactly what I needed in order to pull this part of my essay together to enhance how far I had come as a person who is trying to learn about others before making up opinions about them. In my revised paragraph, I include more sentences about what I learned and how.



This was after our first soccer game together as a team! Adding this example to my essay of how I better connected with the exchange students is really a great way to show how much I learned about getting to know others.

“Over the course of my senior year in Exchange Club, I found that as a club we were doing so much more together. The exchange students and I hung out every weekend, and started having a really great time just by being ourselves. We went to movies, played card games and soccer, went out to eat, and after a while we were

completely open with each other, and I learned a lot of positive things about my new friends from around the World. I learned that in Switzerland students attend school longer in order to enhance their education. My friends from Brazil were some of the smartest teenagers that I had ever met. I got to know the one German girl who I expected to be rude, I felt absolutely awful when I learned about what a sweetheart she was after actually spending time with her and getting to know her” (FD).

As you can see, I was a lot more specific in detailing the process of how

I got to know the exchange students better. I wrote that “we went to movies, played card games and soccer...” which are strong, detailed pieces of evidence that actually demonstrate how I spent my time getting to know the students better. In my final draft it is easy to see how I progressed from stranger to friend due to my examples. In my first draft though the reader simply needed to trust that I did indeed do activities with the exchange students in order to get to know them. I have learned that it is much better to provide more evidence to engage the reader, instead of leaving something that may initially seem insignificant to the writer out. People say that less is more, but in my case I will have to say that including more evidence in my paper was key to having a well developed paper.

Rereading my two papers myself, I feel a lot more confident in my final draft. I enjoy reading it more, as with the specific examples I can exactly picture the times we spent together as friends. My first draft lacked this personal connection, and description of how exactly I was able to unlearn my stereotypes. It's more fun to read a paper that provides personal details, and I know now that the more evidence a paper has, the more potential it has to take a reader in a specific direction, or help to prove a claim. I learned a lot when I saw how positively I changed my essay by adding analysis.

## Unlearning Essay

### I Could Tell That You Are German

I have never been someone who easily learns in History class. No matter how many notes I took, projects I aced, and exams that I passed, I never remembered anything that I “learned” in History class. Unfortunately, many subject areas of history refer to different cultures around the world, which means that I never learned much about different cultures. The most important aspects of different cultures seemed to be taught to me through documentaries, whether they were for science or history, which would only focus on a certain area, on a certain topic. So it began that all I knew about other cultures was the very limited information that I had gotten from documentaries. Strangely enough though, I never realized that I was applying these very limited amounts of information to entire cities, countries, or nations. I think that once I learned something about a place somewhere, I felt as if I knew everything about the people in this place we “learned” about. This is how I came to develop many inaccurate stereotypes.

There are all kinds of stereotypes in the World, but what exactly is a stereotype? A stereotype is a perceived image of a certain type of person, place, object, etc. believed by many people that while commonly supported, may or may not be true. To enhance this definition, think of how one would view America if one lived in another country. The common American stereotype is believed to be that all Americans eat hamburgers, have barbecues, and are fat patriots. If this were all that one has ever known about America, this stereotype would become ingrained in their mind. As a young child, one grows up learning stereotypes based on their parents’ beliefs, and peers’ beliefs. Although stereotypes are not taught in school, kids learn to have stereotypes based upon a person’s reaction to a certain thing. It’s easy to learn stereotypes – they are everywhere. What is hard is unlearning stereotypes, which is what I slowly began to do beginning my junior year of high school. When one starts to unlearn a stereotype, it makes them realize that they had false beliefs about people, that their judgment was

wrong, that they are actually, quite ignorant. That is what I learned about when I formed the Foreign Exchange Club at my high school. In order to unlearn, I had to come to terms with the idea of “stereotypes” and the fact that I had stereotypes (which is something one doesn’t notice until their stereotypically opinions of someone are shattered).



One of the first activities that I did with the exchange students was walk with them in our annual homecoming parade at my high school. I didn’t know them very well then, so we weren’t actually that close.

I was a junior in high school, and I had just met an exchange student from Brazil in the Exchange Club that I was president of. We were sitting in class, at our uncomfortable tan desks, talking about what her city in Brazil was like, and I thought it was perfectly reasonable to ask her if monkeys

ran through the streets. I had watched a documentary on countries in South America, and one part of the documentary highlighted a city that had monkeys everywhere. From this one experience learning a little bit about South America, my brain ingrained this major generalization into my head. She looked honestly shocked when I asked her about it... I remember receiving a weird look, and a demeaning “no” from the exchange student upon hearing my question. It turns out that monkeys actually don’t run wild in Brazil, or at least her part of Brazil. I could not understand why she was chastising me for asking what seemed to be a completely sane question. I did not know that my question was stupid at the time though. What was I supposed to do? I could not take back a question so blatantly ignorant as that one in such a crowded classroom.

I made a lot of generalizations such as this one my junior year ranging from “Oh! I thought that people in Germany ate sauerkraut at every meal!” to “I’ve heard that the driving skills that you learn in Asia are very different than the ones you learn here”. As I look back on this now, I realize how awful these questions must have seemed. I have never felt so dumb for falling into the

American stereotype of being ignorant, which I will be the first to tell you is not just a stereotype, many Americans are ignorant, especially about other cultures! In all honesty, I feel extremely embarrassed when I think back to these situations. I used to consider myself a fairly intelligent individual, so when I learned that I had quite a bit of misinformation about people, I didn't quite know how to feel. It was hard for me to accept that there were no monkeys, as for some reason I had grown up thinking that there were. That's what a stereotype does for you. It is a pre-judgment or generalization of someone or something, usually biased, which causes you to believe a certain idea, which may have only a few facts to back it up.

After a few occurrences, such as the ones previously mentioned, I started realizing that maybe there was not something wrong with how people were responding to my questions, my stereotypical assumptions, but rather, maybe there was something wrong with my questions. What had caused me to believe in this false information about others? Why did I continue to still believe in my false information, even though on numerous accounts I was proven wrong?

At the end of my junior year, while many of my presumptions were corrected, I noticed that I was STILL making judgments about people. I still had these preconceived notions about how students from different cultures would act, how they would dress, how they would speak, etc. I had formed Exchange Club as a way to learn about other students from different countries, and be able to interact with each other. We had weekly meetings with about 30 exchange students, and we also planned events together sometimes. Unfortunately though, if I met a new student, instead of being welcoming, I was using my new stereotypes. Even though I did learn that my very first beliefs about many of the exchange students were wrong, I found myself forming new stereotypes based upon the students that I already met. I was a slave to stereotypes, and I learned that if I kept believing in these stereotypes, that I was going to become even more ignorant than I already was. The way in which I judged people before meeting them was completely inappropriate, and the questions that I asked were



just plain stupid. I didn't actually know anything about these students. I had formed stereotypes, and I thought I knew about the students.

There was one boy from Germany, Johannes, who was very self-indulged, and self-righteous. I coached a soccer team for the Exchange Club – Johannes never listened, and always tried to talk over me and control the team himself. I just let it slide though because I thought, “Oh, that’s just his culture! He’s German! Everyone from Germany acts like that”. I thought like that because the year before I had an exchange student from Germany, who acted in the same way, so I developed my own stereotype that Germans were not humble individuals.

The longer I continued with Exchange Club, the more I learned about other cultures and other people, but most importantly, the more I learned about myself. There was something wrong in the way that stereotypes ruined my first impressions of people. For example, I remember meeting a German girl for the first time my senior year and thinking to myself, “Why do there have to be so many exchange students from Germany? I wish that I could meet more exchange students from other cultures, the ones from Germany never seem to be the nicest.” I was basing this off of my stereotypes that I created after meeting my exchange student and Johannes.

Over the course of my senior year in Exchange Club, I found that as a club we were doing so much more together. The exchange students and I hung out every weekend, and started having a really great time just by being ourselves. After a while we were completely open with each other, and I learned a lot of positive things about my new friends from around the World. I learned that in Switzerland students attend school longer in order to enhance their education. My friends from Brazil were some of the smartest teenagers that I had ever met. I got to know the one German girl who I expected to be rude, I felt absolutely awful when I learned about what a sweetheart she was after actually spending time with her and getting to know her. I realized that by taking the time to get to know the German girl, whose name was Jennifer, that I was actually a lot

more happy than I would have been if I had believed in my stereotype I formed. I decided I needed to leave behind stereotypes no matter how hard it would be for me to not listen to everything that people told me, to not believe in everything that I saw. I had learned that people cannot be characterized by stereotypes, whether or not they are from the same culture as another person.

The more I learned about my new friends from Exchange Club, the less tied down I felt due to having stereotypes. Every day I met new people, and although it was hard for me at first to not have prejudgments about them, it felt



This was taken at prom, at the end of my senior year. These exchange students became my best friends, and I am still in touch with them today. I'm so thankful that I learned to not have stereotypes, because I do not know what I would do without this wonderful people in my life.

really freeing to have absolutely no expectations about their personalities or cultures. When I got to know people by spending time with them, instead of asking them presumptuous questions, I realized that I was a lot more educated, and that I became closer to the exchange students when I was more open-minded. I needed to unlearn stereotypes

because it made me feel very uncultured, ignorant and by having stereotypes I was hindering my abilities to make friends. I also have learned that I had a lot of stereotypes that weren't about other cultures as well, but rather about different types of people. I used to think that everything that I learned in school was true. I believed every single word of the documentaries that we used to watch. But I'm not that person any more. After learning in Exchange Club that I was a very presumptuous person, and that the views presented to me in my history and science classes weren't always right, I have tried to live with a much more open mind and I have opened myself up to a series of new opportunities thanks to my new, open views of the World.

## Research Essay Reflection

For our last assignment in our Writing 100 class we were required to write an argumentative paper, taking a stance to argue a point related to issues on college campuses, based upon research we conducted.



It was actually after a meet and greet with Dean Andrew Martin that I was inspired to write my paper about diversity on campus. The meet and greet turned into a Q & A session about diversity on campus, and it really made me wonder about whether or not everybody had the same stance, or if people's views on diversity could widely differ, similar to how all of the students on campus are different.

I chose to take a position on a problem and write my argumentative essay about diversity and how I believe that the University of Michigan offers a diverse campus to students. The argument becomes complicated though as I analyze that there are many different ways to define diversity, and that even though campus may be diverse we cannot ignore the fact that racial

oppression still exists on the University of Michigan campus.

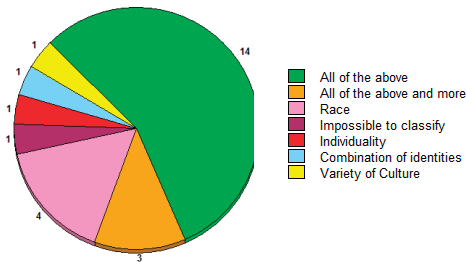
Similar to my experiences writing some of my other essays, such as my analytical essay of Hjordshoj's, "Footstools and Furniture", while writing my research essay I found that I didn't get my thesis exactly right until the very last edition of my paper. As I have already explored how writing a thesis is sometimes not easy until writing the entirety of one's paper, I would like to talk about the images I used.

At first I thought that it would be easy to analyze the images that I used for my research paper — a pie chart and a photo of a group of protesters on the Michigan campus. That was until I realized that although I knew what I wanted my reader to get from the images, I had to make sure that I described them well enough so that whoever was reading my essay would be able to understand the significance and relationship of the images to my paper.

Below is an image of the pie chart I created from student responses based upon whether students thought that Michigan's campus was diverse or not. The image on the left illustrates the results from the first time I conducted the survey, and the image on the right illustrates what the results were after I was able to get about 50% more people to respond to my survey.

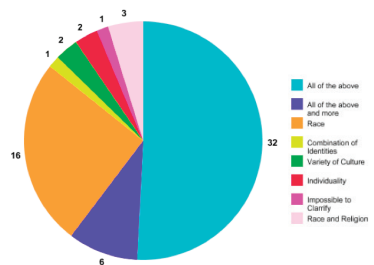
It was much better for me in terms of my paper to get more responses from students, because it allowed me a greater depth of analysis, whereas my results from only having a few people responded could have potentially seemed biased. As part of my survey students had to also include statements about why they thought campus was diverse or not. The second time around this informa-

**Diversity Survey Results**



As you can see from this pie chart, since I had not gotten as many results it almost appears that the number of people who don't believe diversity is defined by many different attributes is almost as many people as who do. Upon looking at this for the first time I think that the slices of the pie chart could mislead people.

**Diversity Survey Results**



Here I believe that the results are as descriptive as they should be. Since more people responded to the second round of the survey, the slices of the pie chart that only got one response are much smaller than they appear in the first pie chart. I think that this image makes it more clear that there is an imbalance between those who believe diversity is defined as a variety of different characteristics, versus only being defined by race.

tion was much more helpful as I was able to incorporate better quotes into my essay. I learned that when conducting research through means of a survey one needs to make sure that they can try and get as many people to respond to the survey as possible, in order to ensure that the data represented by the results comes from a widespread amount of people who have different beliefs.

I think that surveys offer a really great way to provide evidence in a paper and I hope that I will be able to conduct more research like this for future papers.

## Research Essay

### Diversity at The University of Michigan

The subject of diversity on college campuses has always been a hot topic. At the University of Michigan, one of the largest public universities in the United States, the emphasis revolves around number of people by race. Webster's dictionary offers two definitions of diversity: a) "the condition of being diverse (variety), i.e the inclusion of diverse people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization (programs intended to promote diversity in schools)", and b) "an instance of being diverse (a diversity of opinion)" (366). The University of Michigan's mission statement claims that it has a "long-standing commitment to diversity" and that it "celebrates and promotes diversity in all [of] its forms" (Mission). Based on the definition of diversity provided by the Webster Dictionary, this would mean that the University of Michigan includes diverse people from different cultures and races in a variety of school organizations, and that it also encompasses a wide-range of opinions. So, is the University of Michigan diverse? Is there a different way to define diversity? Based on one definition of diversity, the University of Michigan is in fact a diverse university as it offers over a thousand ways for students of different cultures to be involved in activities together and on campus. There are many ways to define diversity, and depending on how a person defines diversity, the University of Michigan can be considered to be an extremely diverse campus, although it is not exempt from racial tensions on campus, which means that Michigan still has some work to do in providing all students with a safe environment to conduct their studies.

According to the second definition from the dictionary, in order for something to be diverse there needs to be an "instance of being diverse", which means that there should be people of different cultures, backgrounds, opinions, etc. In this case the University of Michigan is diverse due to the number of people who come from all over the world. On the University of Michigan website, it states that there are "students from every state and 114 countries" (Current

Students). Some of these countries include, Turkey, Switzerland, Germany, Afghanistan, Belarus, and Azerbaijan. Different cultures are celebrated in each of these countries, different languages are spoken, and just like in the United States, people of different religions, beliefs, interests, and skin colors live in these countries. These are only six examples of the 114 countries that students come from to attend the University of Michigan. Considering that each country is unique, and people of different beliefs and backgrounds come from each country, the campus in Ann Arbor is diverse by definition. This is an example of how the campus can be diverse in a way that is not solely based upon racial diversity.

Diversity at the University of Michigan is so much more than race. In addition to having students from all different cultures on campus, this college provides nearly endless ways for students to engage in programs at the University. Another way that the University of Michigan supports the dictionary's definition of diversity is by offering a huge variety of organizations for its diverse student body's participation. On *Maize Pages*, a popular website for students to use, when conducting a search on the different organizations and clubs at the University of Michigan, one will find that there are 1,277 different organizations for students. Some of these clubs include the Gay and Lesbian club, the Acoustic Guitar club, the Amazin' Blue A Capella club, the American Geriatrics Society, the American Sign Language club, Angels on Call club, Autism club, the Anthropololgy club, and even the Ann Arbor Ninja Warrior Club. These are just a few of the organizations that illustrate the diversity of students and variety of interests at the University of Michigan. There are even clubs on campus that focus specifically on diversity. Out of the 1,277 organizations on campus, when a search for the keyword of "diversity" is performed, 57 organizations come up in the results. Some of these clubs include: the Arab Student Association, the American Asian Association, the Diversity Student Coalition, the Markley Multicultural Affairs Council, and the Organizational Diversity Initiative (*Maize Pages*).

Not everybody believes that organizations define diversity as solely as a strict focus on diversity as the number of people of a certain skin color. It is true that since the ban of affirmative action in Michigan was re-voted into the Michigan legislature in 2006, the number of minorities represented at the University of Michigan has decreased significantly. According to a 2014 article from mlive, written by Julianne Hang, “black student enrollment at the University of Michigan dropped 30%”, which leads her to write that there will be, “no escape from racism” unless something is done to stop avoiding racial oppression (2). Is a campus that encompasses over 40,000 students who come from all 50 states and over 100 countries racist? According to another 2014 article from mlive, written by Kellie Woodhouse, “The [University of Michigan] has become more competitive and Michigan high schools aren’t producing enough minority students who are prepared for the rigor of a U-M education” (1). As a school that strives to be among the “leaders and the best”, the University of Michigan has become highly selective, meaning that if students do not fit their academic requirements they will not be accepted into the University of Michigan. As this article states, since minority students are not as prepared as they should be for a college education from Michigan, the number of minority students enrolled is decreasing. Mark Bernstein, a University of Michigan regent, was quoted in this article stating, “There are fewer minority students on campus and it’s an increasingly lonely place and that is a tragedy unfolding before our very eyes” (1). Here, Bernstein equates having a lower enrollment of minority students is making the campus “lonely”. In this sense Bernstein is implying that this lack of a mixture of students is not good for the University, because in Bernstein’s terms it means that campus is not diverse. Hence, if it is not racially diverse, campus is not as full as it should be. From this quote it is implied that if there were more minority students enrolled there would be a greater sense of community and accomplishment at the U of M. Does a decreasing number of enrolled minorities mean that the University of Michigan is not diverse? Among 40,000 plus students, is campus truly a lonely place, just because there are not nearly as many minorities

represented on campus as the majority? As the dictionary stated, diversity is not solely the amount of people on campus of a certain color. Because of the Affirmative Action ban, the University of Michigan cannot control how many people of a certain race are accepted or denied, but this being said, it doesn't mean that the University doesn't try to make campus diverse in other ways.

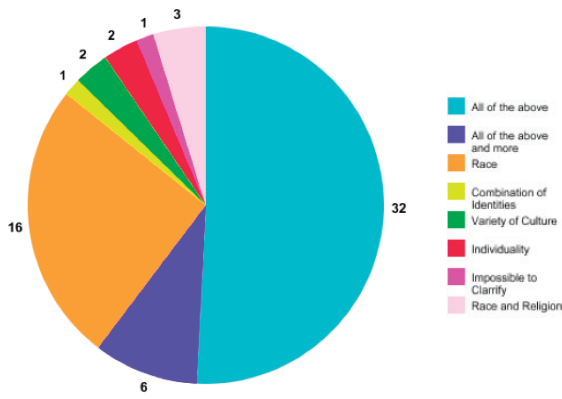
The University of Michigan is one of the most advanced universities in the United States in terms of how handles diversity. In an article titled, "Long-Term Transformations: Excavating Privilege and Diversity in the Academy", author Frances A. Maher states that, "U-M is farthest along the continuum – in the sense that the synergy between the goals of 'diversity' and 'excellence' has distinguished institutional discourses there over the past two decades" (1). The University may not be as racially diverse as some believe it needs to be, but it is impossible to deny Michigan's efforts to promote diversity. Also, as mentioned previously race is just one way diversity can be defined. The University of Michigan chooses to define diversity as a mixture of many different attributes. That being said, Michigan has made many efforts to try and keep campus diverse in different aspects. One of the first efforts to promote campus diversity emphasized hiring more women of color into positions of power in the University. This proves that the University not only recognized that it is important to make sure that all people of different skin colors are included, but also that there should be a mixture of gender in the work area and on campus. From the same article, an agenda that plans for greater diversity and inclusion created by James Duderstadt, the former president of the University of Michigan, is described in detail:

U-M to increase the presence and participation of women faculty and staff at all ranks, ensure that women of color are full beneficiaries of all components of the agenda, restructure faculty tenure and promotion policies, appoint and retain 10 new senior women faculty, adopt policies encouraging flexibility in managing the intersection of work and family responsibilities, and become 'the leader among American universities in promoting and achieving the success of women as faculty, students, and staff'. (5)



Here the University is addressing diversity in terms of not only color, but gender, age, and financial support. Today, the University of Michigan is still making efforts to promote diversity. This article also includes an interview with Duderstadt, where he stated that the University “could not be a great university without being a diverse university” (1). In addition Duderstadt states that, “[diversity] would apply to race, it would apply to gender, it would apply to gay rights” (1). Michigan does offer a diverse campus – in the sense that on campus many different attributes of students strongly enhance the diversity on campus. On the other hand though, Michigan could still promote the inclusion of students of different races. Michigan tries to promote diversity and excels in different ways at doing so, but it could always be better. It is important to acknowledge the difference between complete diversity and diversity within one attribute of a diverse range of attributes.

However, it is also important to acknowledge how students feel about the diversity of campus. To gain a sense of public opinion, I sent a survey out to my peers. The questions were, “How would you define diversity?” The options of: a) race, b) athletics, c) religion, d) clubs, e) all of the above, and f) other were provided. If a person chose to select “other” they could provide their own answer. The second question said, “Do you believe that the University of Michigan offers a diverse campus to students?” For this question a text box was provided for the students to explain why their answers. The results from the small sample of students whom responded (63) are illustrated in the pie chart.



The majority of responses stated that students do believe that Michigan does offer a diverse campus. Of the 63 students, 38 students believe that diversity is defined by race, religion, athletics, and clubs (six of those people believed it was even more than that). To conclude, the students surveyed believe that diversity involves multiple factors, all of which are present at the University of Michigan. One student wrote, “Yes [it is diverse], it is representative of a myriad of cultures, religions, races and opportunities...” and that there are “chances for students to express themselves through cultural clubs and a wide array of organizations including politics, religion, sports, music, and drama clubs.” This is a more broad and inclusive way of defining diversity, but this definition of diversity does not limit diversity to only one factor, and means that the University of Michigan can try to maintain a diverse campus in many different ways.

Unfortunately though, this does not mean that everyone agrees that the definition of diversity refers to a combination of many different parts of campus. Sixteen of the respondents believe that diversity is solely represented in terms of race. A different responder wrote, “No [it is not diverse], there are not enough minorities, such as African Americans and Latinos represented. There is also a lack of cultural awareness on campus.” In this case, the student refers to the amount of diversity by race, acknowledging that he/she has noticed that there are not nearly as many minorities on campus, which means that since there are not a large variety of people of different skin colors on campus, campus is not diverse. This would be considered to be a lack of visible diversity, as while there may not be as many minorities on campus as the White and Asian majority, the huge variety of different cultures and backgrounds of all of the different people on campus is not being acknowledged. As one can see from these results, there are differing opinions regarding diversity on campus. In general, it seems that if one defines diversity as a combination of many different aspects of life, then they will believe that the University of Michigan is diverse. If a person defines diversity by a person’s race though, then the campus of the University of Michigan is not diverse.

In conclusion, there are different ways to define diversity, and whether the University of Michigan is diverse or not really depends on how one *defines* diversity. As for me, I am going to chose to define diversity as “All of the above, and more.” I believe that diversity at the University of Michigan is represented by a variety of different cultures and backgrounds. It is emphasized by the numerous amounts of clubs and organizations on campus. I believe that a combination of athletics, ideas, religion, races, gender, sexual identity, and socioeconomic status makes the University of Michigan diverse. Not everybody agrees with my definition of diversity though, and it is important to note that even though the University of Michigan can be diverse in many aspects, it can also have problems with the number of minorities admitted. Some people believe that since the University of Michigan does not have more minority representation on campus, Michigan in turn is racist. It is important to be able to differentiate between diversity though, what the University can control, and race, which the University does not have control over. Affirmative action is banned at the University of Michigan, thus considering race is not allowed in the admissions process. These are two different issues that can get confused, leading to hostilities on campus. However, I too will not deny that racism is believed to exist on campus, although racism and diversity are different. On campus every year there are multiple protests against the University of Michigan regarding minority enrollment. One of the most profound student movements at the University is the group, Being Black at the University of Michigan. In January of 2014, students came together in a protest in order to help raise awareness of racism on campus (Woodhouse, 2). The students “demanded 10 percent black enrollment, an echo of what the Black Action Movement had asked for 44 years ago and U-M had failed to deliver” (2). This was only one of the seven requests students made on this day directed towards the University. The BSU group gave administrators seven days to complete their seven demands, saying that unless the University took action, students would take matters into their own hands.

The students are pictured on the next page.



These pictures actually emphasize one attribute of diversity on campus, which is the diversity of student voices (which can be related to a diversity of students with different backgrounds). It's important to be able to have a diversity of students with different opinions because without this effort from the students to voice their concerns about diversity on campus, it is possible that the issue of racial tension would not seem as important of a problem. This picture shows how diverse the student body is, but again, these students were protesting the lack of minorities on campus, and the lack of opportunities and tools provided to black students in order to succeed. Unfortunately, today the University has yet to meet many of these demands, such as the 10% enrollment of black students to the University. By my definition of diversity, Michigan offers a diverse campus to students, but this demonstrates that by no means is Michigan exempt from racial problems that have been nationally reoccurring for years. Although the University has tried to overcome many racial barriers, it still is unable to guarantee the same opportunities for everyone, which is a problem that still deserves constant effort and attention on campus to relieve.

Lastly, in order to remain among the leaders and the best, the University of Michigan has to be leaders in all aspects of education, including diversity. While the University of Michigan may already seem to be diverse enough, there is always room for improvement. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." As a university that influences the world, the University of Michigan needs to

maintain its diversity and improve its minority enrollment to continue to be the “leaders and best”. If this can be done, maybe slowly students will begin to acknowledge that the term diversity encompasses a lot of different meanings, and that a lack of minority representation on campus does not mean there is a lack of effort in trying to maintain diversity.

UPDATE: On January 9, 2015 University of Michigan president, Mark Schlissel, revealed to the press that he has a new plan that he hopes will increase the amount of enrolled black students on campus. This is huge news for the University, as in the past when students have brought up diversity issues on campus there has been talk of plans to change the way the campus approaches diversity, although accomplishments are slim. David Jesse, author of the Detroit Free Press article, “Schlissel to unveil plan to make U-M campus more diverse”, writes that in the spring “[Schlissel] will launch a new campus-wide diversity plan to increase enrollment of black students and other under-represented minorities” (Jesse, 1). As a student on Michigan’s campus, it will be really interesting to see the results of President Schlissel’s plan, and if the enrollment of minorities will actually increase, meaning that the plan has been successful. The plan itself is to have “the deans and directors of U-M’s various colleges and centers... develop detailed recruitment and admission plans to increase the diversity on campus,” as President Schlissel reported. (Jesse, 1). Currently on campus, enrollment is one of the biggest issues, and since it is one of the biggest it’s also one of the hardest issues to tackle as there are so many different factors involved. I believe that it’s important that Mr. Schlissel is heading right into one of the biggest diversity issues on campus, which is the fact that in terms of minority enrollment, there are not many minorities enrolled compared to other races. I think this will show great leaps in the fight against campus racism if more minorities enroll at the University of Michigan for Fall 2015 semester.







The background of the cover is an abstract image of ocean waves, overlaid with several large, semi-transparent color blocks: a yellow block at the top left, a red block in the middle, a blue block on the right, and a green block at the bottom left. A solid yellow horizontal bar is positioned above the text, and a solid blue horizontal bar is positioned below it.

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