Writing Across the Curriculum Assessment Report
Submitted by Dan Melzer, University Reading and Writing Coordinator
June 2010

Executive Summary

The following assessment report details the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program’s “value-added” to teachers and students since its inception in 2003. The assessment includes quantitative data and information on the breadth of the WAC program (the overview section), quantitative and qualitative information about the WAC program’s value-added based on surveys of faculty and students (the survey summary section), and qualitative evidence of WAC’s value-added based on pre/post WAC Seminar faculty writing assignments and pre/post student writing from University Writing Center tutees (the case studies section). The assessment of the WAC program reveals that over the last seven years WAC has added value to teaching and learning at Sacramento State in a variety of ways:

- Significant improvements in the teaching of reading and writing that faculty have made based on their experiences with WAC as evidenced by their transformed assignments.
- A breadth of faculty development activities and number of faculty contacts (over 2,000 faculty contacts since 2003).
- Significant improvements in writing when students visit the University Writing Center as evidenced by a pre/post comparison of student drafts and the English 1A and English 20 grades of students who regularly attend Writing Center tutoring sessions.
- The building of a nationally recognized WAC program, as evidenced by multiple conference presentations, national publications, invited consultant workshops from across the country, and WAC website visitors from around the world.

Part I: Overview of the Value-Added of the WAC Program

Value added to Faculty, 2003-Present

WAC Program Activities:

*Faculty retreat*

Full-day faculty development retreat prior to each fall semester since 2004.

*Faculty seminar*

Six two-hour sessions focused on integrating reading and writing into a course.

*Faculty reading group*

Once-a-month hour-long meetings to discuss a shared faculty development book on reading and writing.
Faculty consultations

Individual consultations on teaching reading and writing.

Department consultations

Consultations with departments on assessment, course design, programmatic sequencing, etc.

Sacramento State WAC Conference

Biannual regional conference on reading and writing across the curriculum since 2004.

Campus-wide workshops

Hour-long workshops on topics such as responding to student writing, designing reading assignments, creating effective writing assignments, etc.

Departmental workshops

Reading and writing workshops tailored to the disciplinary needs of specific departments.

Thesis writing workshops

Hour-long workshops for graduate thesis writers.

University Writing Center classroom workshops

Workshop for students in courses across disciplines on topics such as revising and editing, reading strategies, avoiding plagiarism, etc.

Faculty Senate Reading and Writing Subcommittee

Submitted Comprehensive Writing Report that changed the GWAR to a placement exam, created the 109X small group tutorial, and changed the focus of ENGL20 to Writing in the Disciplines; submitted the report that led to the creation of the Class Size Task Force; and created the Sacramento State Student Writing Handbook and the online undergraduate writing journal Writing the University.

WAC Publications:

WAC newsletter

Newsletter with faculty development advice and WAC and Comprehensive Writing Program information published once each semester.

Writing the University journal

Online undergraduate journal of student writing from across the curriculum at www.csus.edu/wac/journal.

Sacramento State Student Writing Handbook

200 page reading and writing handbook required in ENGL20 and ENGL109W featuring information from CSUS faculty, edited by the WAC Coordinator.
Quantitative Data on the Breadth of the WAC Program

WAC Retreats
Total # of faculty attending: 155

Campus Workshops and Seminars
Total # of faculty workshops and seminars: 69
Total # of faculty attending: 1096

Regional and National Workshops and Invited Talks
Total # of faculty workshops and invited talks: 15
Total # of faculty attending: 410

Sacramento State WAC Conferences
Total # of faculty attending: 340

Total number of Sacramento State faculty contacts: 2010
Total number of faculty on WAC email distribution list: 170
WAC website hits: 9,341
University Writing Center Website hits: 10,545

Student contacts:
Classroom Presentations: 405
Thesis workshops: 250
Writing Center tutoring sessions: 6,900 since fall 2008

Total number of student contacts: 7,555

WAC Workshop Evaluations
4=Extremely Helpful
3 = Helpful
2 = Somewhat helpful
1 = Not helpful
N=272
Overall average: 3.4
National conference presentations about the WAC program:


Scholarly publications including WAC program materials:


*Exploring College Writing: Reading, Writing, and Researching across the Curriculum*. First-year composition textbook under contract with Equinox for a spring 2011 publication date. (Based on the *Sacramento State Student Writing Guide*).

Summary of Surveys of Faculty and Students Regarding the Value-Added of the WAC Program

Results of a survey of the WAC distribution list (n=50, 29% of total number of faculty on the distribution list)

1. Please indicate any Writing Across the Curriculum program components you have participated in within the last five years:

   □ [32] Attended the WAC summer retreat in late August
   □ [31] Attended a campus-wide or departmental WAC workshop
   □ [23] Attended or presented at the Biannual Writing Across the Curriculum Conference at Sacramento State
   □ [6] Arranged a one-on-one consultation
Survey Comments:

“I find the WAC an invaluable resource because the majority of professors are never trained to teach. Because we are required to engage in teaching and learning, teaching students to write and also providing helpful assignments and feedback is crucial. Without the WAC, there is not another resource on campus that explicitly supports our own professional development with regards to writing, developing meaningful written assignments, creating an effective communication structure with our students, and teaching us how to provide constructive feedback to get the best work out of our students. I appreciate this resource and find it essential to insure the success of my students and myself.”

“This is a fantastic program. I am impressed by the many resources available to me. The program director is always available to answer questions for me. The workshops seem to be extremely relevant to my teaching needs.”

“It was good to meet instructors from other departments and compare notes on our common experiences regarding challenges in approaching writing assignments. Each gathering Dan M. has designed has been a wonderful learning experience and we as staff felt nourished by the good teaching examples he provided.”

“Participation in the WAC workshops have really helped me to maintain the writing components in large classes without being overwhelmed by workload.”

“I have found the WAC programs and support invaluable. I am a better instructor as a result of participating in the August retreats and other programs. I know as as result, my students have benefited!”

“I have used the theoretical frameworks discussed in WAC workshops and newsletters to design writing assignments. Not only has this helped me to design questions, the information has been useful in developing a wide range of writing options.”

“I have learned how to “think out of the box” when creating writing assignments. There is more than the typical research paper!

“I think more about how I can help students develop their write-to-learn skills.”

“I have incorporated writing assignments that were drafted in online discussion/assignments. Students received feedback and were able to revise components of the final writing assignment. Students synthesized the discussions, revised their discussion feedback, and then submitted their final written paper.”

“The workshops help me construct a more effective means of managing the paper load.”

“I also enjoyed the Rubric Design workshop. Because of this workshop, I have cut down the amount of time I have spent grading papers, while still providing students with a sufficient amount of response.”
“By incorporating components of my writing assignments in my weekly online discussions, I was able to offer feedback to drafts more frequently. Thus, students were submitting better papers, which required less grading time.”

“I have included the use of rubrics for feedback to students on early drafts of essays, which I had not done before reading the WAC newsletter and which both my students and I have found quite helpful.”

Results of University Writing Center surveys of regularly scheduled tutees from fall and spring 2009 and spring 2010 (n=125, 54% of total number of students receiving the survey).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My tutor has helped me to understand my writing assignments.</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My tutor has helped me to develop and revise my papers.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of coming to the Writing Center, I have more strategies to use in my writing processes.</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend the Writing Center to other students.</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey comments:

“You definitely helped make my first-year experience a great and successful one.”

“My writing has improved greatly coming to the Writing Center.”

“I felt the Writing Center was extremely helpful in helping me explore my own thoughts and developing my own writing strategies.”

“I love the Writing Center. Everyone is so nice and helpful. I have gained a lot of valuable writing skills from your services.”

“I really enjoyed receiving this service and appreciate all the suggestions and advice. It really helped.”
“I found it very helpful to me and I believe that I have improved my writing skills because of our meetings.”

“The Writing Center is wonderful and helpful.”

“A great resource for my writing progress.”

“My grades have improved and by tutoring one-one-one I gained new writing skills.”

**University Writing Center and Student GPA**

The research shows that peer tutoring is one of the most effective ways to ensure student retention and success (Beal and Noel, 1980; Boylan et al., 2000; Gardner et al., 2001; Swing, 2000). As part of the WAC/Writing Center assessment, I compared the final course grades of ENGL1A and ENGL20 students who regularly attended the Writing Center from fall 2008 to spring 2010 with the overall average GPA for ENGL1A and ENGL20 in fall and spring of 2009. I did not include ENGL1A students who were also registered for ENGL1X. Below are the results of this comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average overall course GPA, Fall and Spring 2009</th>
<th>Average GPA of students regularly attending the University Writing Center, Fall 2008 to Spring 2010 (n = 35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 1A</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 20</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Although Writing Center support is not the only variable that can account for student success, the significance of the differences in GPA between students who did and did not visit the Writing Center for regular tutoring session—in the context of the literature on peer tutoring and student success—provides evidence for the Writing Center’s “value added” to student GPA.

References


Evidence of the Value-Added of the WAC Program from Case Studies of Faculty and Students

Faculty Pre/Post Writing Assignments

Following are writing assignment samples from faculty before attending the Spring 2010 WAC seminar and revisions to the assignments made after attending the seminar. Additions to the assignments are highlighted in yellow.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT BEFORE WAC SEMINAR

Project #2 – Public Transportation Takes Us Where?

Discussions about public transportation underpin many urban geography issues. With the going concerns about the environment, energy independence, and costs of car ownership, the public has also become more interested in public transportation. In 2008, both Los Angeles and San Francisco, CA were in the top 10 most congested cities in the U.S. Sacramento is ranked 24th in the nation. As the population of the greater Sacramento area grows, more people are commuting greater distances. Freeways are congested and people exhibit poor driving skills or outright road rage. Capital City Freeway, Highway 80 and I-80 are among the worst bottlenecks according to a 2008 Inrix Nation Traffic survey.

Although Americans for the most part choose to use their personal cars to commute to work, the economic downturn has led to a decrease of traffic congestion and an increase of public transportation use. Public transportation is often the best way to move large numbers of people into and out of the city. This project will encourage you to investigate the human geography of public transportation:

- First, determine when are the heaviest Sacramento commute times? How commuters into and out of the Sacramento area find out about traffic delays, road closures, or other problems that might slow their travel? What events or factors other than amount of traffic affect commute times?

- Then, use public transportation, (Sacramento Regional Transit, BART, etc.) to move around the city. Sacramento RT offers 93 bus routes and 37.4 miles of light rail. Much of the service is 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (but check each route), is cheap, and can take you to places of interest for an outing, such as the Capitol Mall, California State Indian Museum, the Crocker Art Museum, the Railroad Museum, the Travels Through Time Science Fiction Museum. Route 31, the J Street-River Park Route can be caught near campus. Other information can be accessed at the regional transit homepage <www.sacrt.com/schedulesfares.stm> or by calling 916/321-BUSS (2877). Information on other systems is also available on-line. Remember to take something with which to take notes. As you are planning your trip and traveling, consider the following:

  Have you used public transportation before? How did this experience compare public transportation systems you have used and trips you have taken?

  How easy was it for you to use public transit (information about routes and schedules, access to transit stops, etc)? Did you use transfers to changes lines or routes?

  How do transit routes fit within the urban fabric - which areas are best served and what areas are poorly served, what is the landscape surround the lines like (industrial, residential...?).

  Did you have a sense of security/safety while on public transit? If not, what were you seeing/experiencing?

  How diverse (ethnic, racial, economic, disabled) diverse was the ridership?
What advantages/disadvantages does this public transportation system have over using a private automobile?

From your observations, who is using public transportation? Do you see families, people with children, business people…?

From your observations, what are some of the cultural norms of behavior on public transit?

What problems of public transportation would prevent you from using it regularly to get to school or work? Would you use it on a regular basis, and why or why not?

Provide me with the route name/number, the date(s) you traveled, and your destination.

You may want to adapt the project to fit your circumstances. See me for help

• Your analysis should be approximately 500 to 650 words in length. You do not need to address each of the questions above, but you should provide me with a sense of your observations and perceptions about public transportation in the context of human geography. Your grade will reflect your thorough and critical geographic discussion, analysis, and integration, using appropriate examples, geographic concepts and terminology. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and style are important and will affect your grade (at least 5 pts).

**Due Date:** Your typed project will be due in class on Thursday, May 7. Early projects will be accepted gladly and I will also review written drafts if given to me sufficiently in advance. Late projects will be penalized 10% per class late and no projects will be accepted after 2:00 p.m. May 14.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT AFTER WAC SEMINAR

Project #2 – Public Transportation Takes Us Where? (40+ points)

This project will encourage you to investigate the human geography of urban regions and public transportation and to analyze your findings in approximately 750 words.

Some geographic context for the project:

Discussions about public transportation underpin many urban geography issues. With concerns about the environment, energy independence, and costs of car ownership, the public has become more interested in public transportation. Although Americans for the most part choose to use personal cars for transportation, the economic downturn has led to a decrease of traffic congestion and increased public transit use.

In 2008, both Los Angeles and San Francisco, CA were in the top 10 most congested cities in the U.S. Sacramento is ranked 24th in the nation. As the population of the greater Sacramento area grows, people are commuting greater distances. Freeways are congested and people exhibit poor driving skills or outright road rage. Capital City Freeway, Highway 80 and I-80 are among the city’s worst bottlenecks according to a 2008 Inrix Nation Traffic survey.

All 3 of the following components must be completed for the project:

Step 1: What is your impression of the state of commuting and public transportation in Sacramento? Consider:

- When are the heaviest Sacramento commute times? What events or factors other than amount of traffic affect commutes?
- How do commuters into and out of the Sacramento area find out about traffic delays, road closures, or other problems that might slow their travel?
- How easy is it to figure out how to use public transit?
- Who do you think takes public transit and for what purposes?

Step 2: Use public transportation, (Sacramento Regional Transit, BART, etc., but not the Hornet Shuttle) to move around the (a) city. Sacramento RT offers 93 bus routes and 37.4 miles of light rail. Much of the
service is 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (but check each route), is cheap, and can take you to places of interest for an outing. Information can be accessed at the regional transit homepage <www.sacrt.com/schedulesfares.stm> or by calling 916/321-BUSS (2877). Information on other systems is also available on-line.

You may go with a friend or a classmate and may discuss your thoughts and observations, Remember to take something with which to take notes.

As you are planning your trip and traveling, consider the following:

- How did this experience compare public transportation systems you have used before and other trips you have taken?
- How easy was it for you to use public transit (information about routes and schedules, access to transit stops, using transfers, etc)?
- How do transit routes fit within the urban fabric - which areas are best served and what areas are poorly served, what is the landscape surround the lines like (industrial, commercial, ethnic enclaves, residential...?).
- Did you have a sense of security/safety while on public transit? If not, what were you seeing/experiencing?
- Who did you observe using public transportation? Do you see families, people with children, business people...? How diverse (ethnic, racial, economic, disabled, age-groups) was the ridership?
- What advantages/disadvantages does this public transportation system have over using a private automobile? What problems of public transportation would prevent you from using it regularly to get to school or work? Would you use it on a regular basis, and why or why not?
- From your observations, what are some of the cultural norms of behavior on public transit?

Step 3: Document and analyze your experience and observations in the context of Cultural Geography. You do not need to address each of the questions above, but you should provide me with a sense of your observations and perceptions about public transportation in the context of human geography. Specifically integrate concepts and vocabulary from Geography 2 to date and from Chapters 10 and 11 (Yes–this means you must read ahead in the text.). This is a geographic, spatial analysis, not a field trip summary.

Provide me with the route name/number, the date(s) you traveled, and your destination. You may want to adapt the project to fit your circumstances. See me for help

- Consider this as an opportunity to enjoy the city - Capitol Mall, Old Town, the California State Indian Museum, Crocker Art Museum, the Railroad Museum, Travels Through Time Science Fiction Museum are accessible via public transit. Route 31, the J Street-River Park Route can be caught near campus.

- You may discuss and brainstorm with your fellow students and you may do the observations together, but obviously, each person’s final paper must reflect his or her own independent efforts. You are responsible for independent thinking and for completing all aspects of your own project. Academic dishonesty, cheating, or plagiarism as defined in CSUS Policies and Procedures. You should not need to consult outside sources for information, but if you use such information, you MUST cite the source. This includes web sources.
Your grade will reflect your thorough and critical geographic discussion, analysis, and integration, using appropriate examples, geographic concepts and terminology. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and style are important and can improve your grade by an additional 5 points.

Due Date: Your typed project will be due in class on Wednesday, April 28. Early projects will be accepted gladly and I will also review written drafts if given to me sufficiently in advance. Late projects will be penalized 10% per class late. No projects will be accepted after 2:00 p.m. May 12.

Learning Objectives:

To experience the process of field observation and data collection, considering obviously cultural elements such as food, ethnicity, and language, but also elements of the environment, architecture, urban landscapes, activities, economic activity, etc.

To integrate information on transportation (transport gradients, Central Place, elements of various urban models, etc.) from lecture and the text with real experiences.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT BEFORE WAC SEMINAR

Art 137: Journal Prompts

Drawing Diary……Personal Journal………Doodle Diary

* First encounter or memorable experience with an individual with special needs
* Every human being has challenges and lessons to learn which at times may feel like handicaps. What are some of the challenges you face, lessons are you learning?
* Early childhood memory: where did you go for comfort/ play? what did you fear?
* A visual map of your day.
* Picture your monster, the monkey on your back etc.
* Select quotes and doodle a design around them.
* Responses to class experiences / guest presenters / field trips
* Review field trip and select the most significant observation or experience for you.
* Plant a seed, draw a metaphor for something you want to nurture in your life.
* Draw symbols of individuals who have nurtured you and helped you evolve.
* Create symbols of those who have challenged you and stretched you to grow.
* Draw the toxic people in your life, note lesson learned…Thank them for sharing.”
* Visually release those things in your life you no longer need.
* Visualize cutting the cord to toxic influences.
* Release or forgive anyone who recycles negatively in your mind.
* Share great ideas you have with fellow classmates.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT AFTER WAC SEMINAR

Introduction to Exploring Drawing and Writing in a Personal Doodle* Diary

Materials needed: 8.5 x 11 inch bound notebook with blank pages. ink pen/pencil

Choose two types of colored art materials (colored pencils, sharpie markers, oil pastels, etc.)

Timeline: Weeks 1-3.....Bring your journal to class for the first three weeks to explore journal entries.

(Homework assignment: Life line project note taking begins-guidelines discussed in class.)

Weeks 4-7.....Spend 10 minutes a day recording words and images of your choice

(Minimum of 3 entry pages / week. You may take ideas from assignment prompts as needed)

Week 8........Midterm Reflection: Share progress in class on LIIFELINE note/image taking process.

Week 9-10.....Present LIIFELINE Art Project (guidelines provided in class)

Week 11-14.....Continue to use drawing journal in your preferred way (minimum 3 entry pages / week)

Week 15........Due: One page overview of your experience keeping a “Doodle Diary” due;

Due: Show Journal: Quick flip of your journal entries.

Choose one art entry to share in class and note any benefits of the process for you.

(*Doodle is used in association with drawing because it suggests sketches and experimental marks on paper of a more spontaneous nature and may be less intimidating.)

Purpose of Art combined with Journal Writing:

To practice using art materials while exploring design elements/principles of art introduced in class.

To better understand ourselves and others by developing a habit of reflecting ideas, thoughts and reactions to life in images as well as words.

To examine, explore and process ideas before giving them more permanent form.

To empathize through imagination and conscious thinking what it might be like to walk in the shoes of individuals who have been labeled “exceptional”.

To use images and symbols to enhance or replace words.

To record dream images or explore fantasies to picture and clarify intentions.

To search for what others do well and practice articulating specific comments by designing and delivering these response notes to those you observe (classmates, friends, family, co-workers).
**Process:** Keeping a journal implies that you are writing words in a specific place in an ongoing way. A journal may be a proving ground for papers or projects to be developed, a place to vent unprocessed feeling, or a place to simply externalize the many unrelated freeform stream of consciousness thoughts. It might be a place to record dream imagery in order to decipher meaning. (Discuss with class their ideas/experiences. Note any prior journal and drawing diary experience. Reflect on purpose and usefulness of the process.)

**ART is a key element in the learning process in this course.** The point of the journal is an effort to combine free writing or personal writing in conjunction with images (doodles, drawings etc). It is a place to explore ideas for projects, test different art materials, reflect on daily life experiences. It is a place to record the most important thought or experience of the day. The drawing journey is an opportunity to survey feeling responses to fellow students, guest speakers, DVD presentations and other significant happenings as they pertain.

One might create an image and then finding words to describe it. Symbols can be used to represent things that are not to be read by anyone else. The drawing diary is an attempt to get students to understand and appreciate their own uniqueness. People labeled “exceptional” include those considered gifted as well as those who have been identified by society as having special needs. When we take a closer look, we may all come to appreciate that in every individual there are strengths to reinforced and weakness to address.

**Evaluation:** A simple checklist for both self and group evaluations may help reflect the level of participation and degree of investment in the process. Discuss with your group and rate your level of engagement in the Doodle Diary.

What elements or principles of art did you explore with art materials?

Which different media and techniques did you use in designs?

How many pages did you complete in class ______ at home ______?

How many of the journal prompts did you use to create a pages in your journal ______?

What ideas of your own did you include as a prompts for journal entries? (list and discuss)

Did you integrate words and images/ keep words and images on separate pages?

How did the process benefit you? Were you able to process feelings, ideas etc?

Circle the appropriate number on a scale of 1-10 which best reflects your experience:

Rate the art exploration and image generation in your journal?

1. waste of time 2 tolerable 3 ok 4 somewhat helpful 5 good 6 very good 7 great 8 fantastic 9 significant 10 plan to continue

Rate the blending of art and writing in your journal?
Rate your overall experience of keeping a doodle diary this semester?

* In a one page document share what worked for you in the process and any ideas for how the process could be improved for others.

* Select an entry to share in class which reflects a representative benefit or value for you
WRITING ASSIGNMENT BEFORE WAC SEMINAR

Political Participation Project – Outline

The second piece of the Political Participation Project will be a well thought out and carefully constructed graded outline worth 5% percent of your overall course grade coupled

**Outline: Your outline is due in class on Tuesday, April 27, 2010, or EARLIER** The outline must include a thesis, a breakdown of what each piece of the paper will focus on, and topic sentences for each major subject change. The outline should provide you of an opportunity to create a framework where you can create a synthesis of not only your experience but a direction for your analysis of your experience. Your outline should reflect that you have thought about what you plan to write, and that you plan to write more than just a narration of your Political Participation. You are encouraged to use other books and articles or connect your experience with concepts in ‘We the People’ Chapter 7 where Political Participation is discussed, and Chapter 9 where Interest Groups are discussed. Creating the outline should be a chance to plan the direction of this analysis.

Be sure to include:

- Thesis Statement
- A breakdown of what each part of the paper will focus on. Each part of your paper should focus on one of the topics listed in the description of the paper assignment posted on SacCt.
- A list of your topic sentences. Topic sentences tell readers what your paragraphs will be about; these should make arguments that relate the topics (posted on SacCt) to your own experience. Better outlines will provide crisp topic sentences.
- An explanation of how your experiences will support your topic sentences. You may use bullet points.
- A statement describing the articles or books you plan to read (or have already read) to develop the topics you plan to address in your paper. Better outlines will demonstrate that you have read some articles about your topics and that you are well on your way.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT AFTER WAC SEMINAR

Political Participation Project – Descriptive Outline

The second assignment within the Political Participation Project is a carefully constructed descriptive outline worth 5% percent of your overall course grade.

**Deadline:** Your typed outline is due in class on Tuesday, April 10, 2010.

**Threshold Requirements:** In order to complete this part of the assignment, you need to have completed your 10 hours of political participation.

**Assignment Overview:** This assignment requires you to catalogue your experiences under assigned topics (the topics are listed below). It also requires you answer descriptive questions pertaining to these topics.

**Specific Instructions:**
Below you shall find 9 general topics. Each topic relates to political participation in some way. Under each topic you will find a sub-set of questions. These questions relate the topic to your political participation experience. Generally speaking, the questions ask you to describe or interpret facts about your experience.

This assignment asks you to choose a set of topics from the list below and answer the descriptive (D) questions pertaining to the topic you choose.

You do not need to address every topic in your outline. You do not need to address every descriptive question either. Address topics that interest you. Address topics that you believe are relevant to your experience. Answer questions that enable you to develop a concrete and rich description of your experience. Answer questions in as much significant detail as possible.

**Assignment Structure:**
In your outline:
1) **Identify** the topic in bold.
2) Under the topic, **state** the D question you plan to answer (re-write the question).
3) Underneath the D question, use bullet points to **answer the question**.
   Answer the question in as much descriptive detail as possible. Unearth salient facts.
   Demonstrate that you observed your experience with a keen eye.
4) After stating and answering all salient questions, **proceed** to the next topic and repeat.

**Grading Rubric:**
Excellent outlines:
- will follow the assignment structure above.
- will address several salient topics.
- will contain concrete answers to many D questions.
- will contain detailed answers to many D questions.

Example: Suppose you decide to address Topic 2, “Group Demographics.” Suppose you decide to answer the question about the racial demographic in your group.
A poor answer will say something like, “The group is racially diverse.” This answer is poor because it is vague.

A superior answer will say something like, “Out of 15 active members, there are 4 Caucasians, 7 Asian-Americans, and 4 African-Americans, but 3 of the 7 Asian-Americans participate significantly less than the rest of the active membership.”

This is a superior answer because it is concrete and specific.
Student Pre/Post Writing

The following writing samples are from student drafts before attending a University Writing Center session and after attending a Writing Center session and revising based on feedback from the tutor. Additions to the essays are highlighted in yellow.
ESSAY DRAFT BEFORE ATTENDING A WRITING CENTER SESSION

An Orange Blooded Associate

Every time I head into work at The Home Depot I feel a drive that wouldn’t be fulfilled if I were working at some clothing store or fast food joint. Within the store I feel a sense of community with the other associates. Together we have our own language that few outsiders would be able to understand. The Home Depot discourse community is one that I am proud to call my own. Working in the Paint Department has helped me develop a hard earned place within this community through the use of specialized product knowledge and workplace jargon.

My coworkers and I in the paint department use special paint lingo when talking amongst ourselves. When we have specific tasks to fill, we are expected to get them done effectively and efficiently. Using slang and abbreviations help us to do that. For example, if my Department Head (DH) wants me to restack the orange Home Depot buckets along the back isle of the store, he may say, “Fill up the buckets along the back racetrack.” Through working in Home Depot and the training I have received while there, I am able to understand what he wants me to do, no questions asked. Having a ‘special language’ with my coworkers not only promotes efficiency within the store, but also community. I have developed friendships with my coworkers and am even dating a hardware associate. This sort interweaving between my personal life and my discourse community is explained perfectly by Gary D. Schmidt and William J. Vande Kopple in their book “Discourse Communities”. They describe why I feel connected to people within my discourse community by writing, “If you and a friend have one or more discourse communities in common, the two of you will probably spend a significant amount of time focusing your attention on the same issues and things.”(p. 1). They continue, writing, “The two of you will share many ways to think and communicate about those issues and things, as well as many ways to evaluate your thinking and communicating.”(p.2) Having my friends and boyfriend within the same discourse community has helped me become closer to them because we can all relate to similar issues as well as triumphs.

During a typical work day at the Home Depot, I change contexts of speaking several different times. The specialized lingo that my coworkers and I use doesn’t always translate to upper management or new associates. Although I still talk to ASM’s (Assistant Store Managers) with respect, I don’t expect them to know every product within the paint department. I usually talk in more general terms, unless I know for a fact that the manager will understand whatever is I am talking about.

I adjust my discourse depending on what situation I am in as well as what customer’s I am helping. I may not have to change the lingo I use with coworkers when I am speaking to a painting contractor. However, if I am helping a newly-wed couple trying to paint their first home, I won’t be able to use the lingo that I usually do. Since excellent customer service is one of the Home Depot’s top priorities, it is important that I correctly read the customer and adjust my discourse accordingly. Without doing this, I may look ignorant and silly to a contractor, or I may sound confusing to the general public.

Working at the Home Depot has given me a sense of empowerment that no other job has been able to add up to. Being a female in a mostly male environment has its advantages and disadvantages. Using specific language as well as my expertise helps me to break stereotypes. Since I am a young, blonde, and female many contractors look right past me and talk to one of my male associates. I have seen this happen countless times, so when I do have the chance to help someone
who makes home improvement their living, I like to throw around more Home Depot jargon and specific product knowledge than I normally would. When I asked the only other female associate in the paint department, Laura, if she had experienced any of these stereotypes she replied, “There have definitely been times when I’ve felt intimidated by a customer, but I just tell them what I know and ask someone else for help if I don’t know.” She combines her knowledge of the products within the paint department with one of Home Depot’s core values, customer service, to try and get the customer the information that they are looking for.

I have established my authority with my coworkers and bosses through my use of language. When I first started at the Home Depot, I was talked down to by coworkers and management. By asking hundreds of questions, researching commonly asked questions online, spending hours in the training room and months in the paint pit, I now consider myself a true member of the Home Depot team. Management now comes to me when they need paint or have questions about specific products. I feel that I have proven myself to them by really knowing what I am talking about when I speak to customers. They speak to me with more respect than they did when I was first hired.

The Home Depot is more than just a job to me; it is a place where I am learning skills that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Skills not limited to work ethic, product knowledge and painting techniques, but also how to communicate effectively in different situations with different people.
An Orange Blooded Associate

Every time I head into work at The Home Depot I feel a drive that wouldn’t be fulfilled if I were working at some clothing store or fast food joint. Within the store I feel a sense of community with the other associates. Together we have our own language that few outsiders would be able to understand. The Home Depot discourse community is one that I am proud to call my own. Working in the Paint Department has helped me develop a hard earned place within this community through the use of specialized product knowledge and workplace jargon.

My coworkers and I in the paint department use special paint lingo when talking amongst ourselves. When we have specific tasks to fill, we are expected to get them done effectively and efficiently. Using slang and abbreviations help us to do that. If there is a rush, a large influx of customers in a short amount of time, I usually ask a coworker to assist me by grabbing specific cans of paint from the paint isle. I may say, “Grab 2 medium base gallons of Behr Premium Plus Ultra, and tint them to Brown Teepee.” By trusting that my coworkers and I understand each other, it makes working together much easier and more efficient. When management needs me to complete a task, they expect that it gets done the right way. For example, if my Department Head (DH) wants me to restack the orange Home Depot buckets along the back isle of the store, he may say, “Fill up the buckets along the back racetrack.” Through the training I have received and the time I have spent at the Home Depot, I am able to clearly understand my coworkers and bosses when they use Home Depot lingo. Having a ‘special language’ with my coworkers not only promotes efficiency within the store, but also community. I have developed friendships with my coworkers and am even dating a hardware associate. This sort of interweaving between my personal life and my discourse community is explained perfectly by Gary D. Schmidt and William J. Vande Kopple in their book *Communities of Discourse*. They describe why I feel connected to people within my discourse community by writing, “…if you and a friend have one or more discourse communities in common, the two of you will probably spend a significant amount of time focusing your attention on the same issues and things” (1). They continue, writing, “…the two of you will share many ways to think and communicate about those issues and things, as well as many ways to evaluate your thinking and communicating” (2). Having my friends and boyfriend within the same discourse community has helped me become closer to them because we can all relate to similar issues.

During a typical work day at the Home Depot, I change my context of speaking and use of jargon several different times. The specialized lingo that my coworkers and I use doesn’t always translate to upper management or new associates. Although I still talk to Assistant Store Managers (ASMs) with respect, I don’t expect them to know every product within the paint department. I usually talk in more general terms, unless I know for a fact that the ASM will understand what I am saying. The use of walkie-talkies is an important communication device used by Home Depot associates. For example, if a customer asks me a question pertaining to lumber, I can quickly get a hold of a lumber associate. When speaking to other associates on the walkie-talkie’s, I try to keep my message concise and to the point. It is also important to be professional, because customers are likely to overhear walkie conversations. Another context of communication that I use at the Home Depot is the overhead pager. This method of communication is used by associates who need to reach someone who may or may not have a walkie-talkie. There are certain guidelines that every associate must follow when speaking on the overhead pager. Since everyone in the store can hear
the pager, it very important to be professional and follow specific paging guidelines. An example of an acceptable page would be, “MOD, call 424 please, MOD call 424.” This message is meant for a Manager on Duty (MOD), and it is asking them to call 424, the paint pit. Knowing when to use different contexts can be tricky sometimes, but what I find more challenging is adjusting my discourse depending on who I am talking to.

When helping customers, it is important that I read their needs and adjust my discourse accordingly. How I choose to speak varies from customer to customer as well as what situation I am in. I may not have to change the lingo I use with my coworkers if I am speaking to a painting contractor. However, if I am helping a newly-wed couple trying to paint their first home, I won’t be able to use the lingo that I usually do. Since excellent customer service is one of the Home Depot’s core values, it is important that I correctly adjust my discourse to meet the customer’s needs. Without doing this, I may look ignorant and silly to a contractor, or I may sound confusing to the general public.

Working at the Home Depot has given me a sense of empowerment, partly due to my use of language. Being a female in a mostly male environment has its trials and challenges, but is also very rewarding. Using specific language as well as my expertise helps me to break stereotypes. Since I am young, blonde, and female many contractors look right past me and talk to one of my male associates. I have seen this happen countless times, so when I do have the chance to help someone like a contractor, I like to throw around more Home Depot jargon and specific product knowledge. When I asked the only other female associate in the paint department, Laura Leidy, if she had experienced any of these stereotypes she replied, “There have definitely been times when I’ve felt intimidated by a customer, but I just tell them what I know and ask someone else for help if I don’t know.” She combines her knowledge of the products within the paint department with one of Home Depot’s core values, customer service, to try and get the customer the information that they are looking for.

Through the use of language, I have established my authority with my coworkers and bosses. When I first started at the Home Depot, I was talked down to by coworkers and management. By asking hundreds of questions, researching commonly asked questions online, spending hours in the training room and months in the paint pit, I now consider myself a true member of the Home Depot team. The Home Depot phrase, “orange blooded” has now been integrated into my life. Management no longer looks past me, but actually seeks me when they need paint or have questions about specific products. I feel that I have proven myself to them by really knowing what I am talking about when I speak to customers. Management now speaks to me with more respect than they did when I was first hired.

The Home Depot is more than just a job to me; it is a place where I am learning skills that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Skills not limited to work ethic, product knowledge and painting techniques, but also how to communicate effectively with people from different discourse communities. Through the conversations that I have had within my discourse community, I can now communicate better with people outside my community. I have built close relationships with the people in my discourse community through the use of language. We talk to each other differently than we would with someone outside our discourse community. Home Depot has opened new doors for me to communicate with people from all walks of life. My next customer may be a foreigner who can hardly speak English, or a painting contractor using jargon I’ve never heard of, but I am now confident that I can overcome any challenge that may come my way.

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University and Society: Draft

University plays the role of a mentor to the society. According to John Henry Newman, the author of “The Idea of a University,” a university gives us skills to apply in professional life, which creates a society of the intellectuals. The universities mentioned in the Mission Statements aim towards teaching skills and knowledge which the students find to be very useful on a globular level. College professors teach by keeping in mind that each and every student has the potential to make a difference in the world and that would glorify the nation. The purpose of university is to teach its students the skills of how to criticize, actively apply knowledge and skills in an everyday life, and take actions within the community to make a better society.

University gives us many skills that we can use in our everyday lives, such as the skill to think and criticize. As Newman declares, “it is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them,” (Newman, 54). All citizens of America have to serve on jury duty. The jury needs to have the skills to criticize the arguments made by the lawyers and think carefully before announcing the verdict. In philosophy classes, students learn how to determine the difference between a valid and invalid argument. These are important lessons that students must not forget after passing the course.

The University of Minnesota is a research university. The purpose of University of Minnesota is search for the truth and preserve knowledge which would benefit the state, the nation, and the world, (Mission Statements, 57). The Iranians spread the Hindu-Arabic numeral system, which is used today as a universal numeric system. The entire world has benefited from such a discovery. Astronomers use it to learn the details of the space and even travel to the moon. Research universities are very important in that sense. Preservation of knowledge is essential because critics can criticize to find further discoveries. If we see all discoveries as facts found by the great scholars then the modern world would have not developed. For example, if the geocentric model by the Roman Catholic Church was seen as fact to this day then we would have never discovered the truth. The truth being that the sun is in the center of the solar system, not the Earth. Everyone has something new to teach. If people open themselves to knowledge then they can learn something new every day. Even a child can teach a valuable lesson to a professor.

Learning liberally about other races and cultures can rid the ridiculous stereotypes. Therefore, the societies would respect everyone in the world and their cultures. This would promise peace and unity. Appreciation of various cultures promotes peace, morality, humility, tolerance, and social justice in an unsympathetic world. Students cannot learn in a hostile environment. When learning environment is more tolerant and respectful then people desire to learn and carry on discussions because they feel they will not be attacked or judged with prejudice.

Morehouse College teaches skills that are applicable and useful for everyday activities in both the professional and personal life. Interpersonal relationship skills can help us maintain healthy relations with our families and the people we work with. Black history is a very broad subject in itself and a lot can be learned from it. Through the knowledge of Black history, students will never take the sacrifices of African American heroes for granted. The college also preserves black history and culture which the society is not able to during the Black history awareness month.

The benefit of living in the modern times is that education is no longer for the Caucasian elites; anyone can be educated. An individual needs to possess the desire for learning. Today, many students want to complete their credits as quickly as possible so they can settle their professional life. Berea College is determined to give the Appalachian students a high quality education because they have limited recourses. Berea college also wants to reach the ethics of Christianity such as, “the power of love over hate, human
dignity and equality, and peace with justice.” (Mission Statements, 58). These humane principles serve the purpose of spreading world peace starting from the Appalachian community.

Evergreen State College teaches students how to apply what they know, both at college and throughout their lives. This is an essential skill for all students throughout the country. Many students complain about having to take general education courses. They believe they will not need the knowledge acquired from general education courses in the real world. If they are taught how to apply this knowledge in their lives and in the future years of college then they will not complain. The benefit of taking general education courses is that many students find their major that they can be committed to for the rest of their lives and practice a career that will not make them miserable.

The Evergreen State College seems to be challenging because it believes in students becoming involved in “active participation in learning, rather than passive reception of information,” (Mission Statements, 60). Passive reception of information is a robotic manner of gaining knowledge. This executes the message to students that the teachers and textbooks possess all the knowledge and students, the receivers, are completely reliable on teachers and books. Universities should promote the luxury of engaging in discussions. Discussions teach us the skills of public speaking, conducting a valid point or an argument which can be supported with evidence and examples, and the ability to respect each other opinions. Additionally, Newman reports, “…he knows when to speak and when to be silent…to be serious with effect,” (Newman, 54). Newman is claiming that through the university’s classes, an intelligent person learns to choose his words carefully so they will not backfire. These skills are crucial in the professional world, which can only be taught through discussions, not lectures.

Colleges should not be a higher form or the next level of high school. Instead it should actively provide us with the skills to apply in the social life so student and graduates can engage with the community. Many people do not actively become involved with the community because they do not see any purpose. There is a purpose and the point being that a community is consisted of individuals. Making a small difference would affect a small number of individuals which would have a lasting impact on someone’s life.

California State University of Monterey Bay serves to teach multilingual and multicultural society of California, (Mission Statements, 60). This should be very beneficial to the Mexican community, which is statistically, a majority in California. They are the low-income working class and undereducated; they need a lot of encouragement. Fortunately, the California State University of Monterey Bay provides them with the resources and encouragement they need. Many Mexican adults struggle in fast food restaurants to make ends meet. They want their children to have the opportunities to better their future, which is provided only in the higher education system. In the old days, education was considered a freedom as declared by Fredrick Douglas. This still holds true today in America. Many Americans and immigrants look toward education to make the American Dream come true.

Every country is cursed with social problems, even America. Although, America is one of the advanced nations in the world, it is still not perfect. The American citizens will have to make it perfect. When a person starts by making a difference in his or her own community then people will become inspired to make a difference in the world. An individual has to initiate a step forward by becoming an example for the rest of the community. Universities will teach law students the legal systems of America so they can take appropriate actions to give justice to the unfortunate. There are many social problems in America which needs solutions. It is up to the future social workers or politicians to make the American society the best it can be.

Many people believe the purpose of a university is to get a better job in which they can make a good living. However, the purpose of a university is to challenge its students to criticize the discoveries made by the great scholars. Students and alumni must actively apply knowledge and skills taught by in the classrooms in professional and social life. They must work together to take actions to make a better society beginning from their local communities. Skills and knowledge has the power to make a difference on a national level and as well as on global level.
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Mission Statements. “The University of Minnesota; Morehouse College; Berea College; The Evergreen State College; California State University, Monterey Bay; and Thomas Aquinas College.” Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz 56-64.

A university plays the role of a mentor for the society. According to John Henry Newman, a Catholic priest in the 1800s wrote an essay called, “The Idea of a University.” The essay explains the value of learning by explaining how it becomes essential in professional and personal life. Newman claims that a university gives students the skills to apply in professional life, which creates a society of intellectuals. Many of the universities mentioned in the “Mission Statements” aim towards teaching skills and knowledge which the students find to be useful outside of classrooms and work place. However, college professors teach by passing on the information through lectures instead of discussions and the students like this type of a teaching method because they do not have to work very hard. They believe they will not need the knowledge acquired in general education classes in the “real world.” American universities’ mission is to teach by keeping in mind that each and every student has the potential to make a difference in the society which would impact various communities and it should be the mission of every student.

An individual needs to possess the desire for learning. Today, many students want to complete their credits as quickly as possible so they can settle their professional life. Evergreen State College teaches students how to apply what they know, both at college and throughout their lives. However, many students complain about having to take general education courses. They believe they will not need the knowledge acquired from general education courses in the real world. Newman argues, “If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is in the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world,” (Newman 53). Newman is arguing that the university must teach its students how to apply the knowledge in life outside of school. The purpose of a university is to train its students for the sake of creating an improved society for the benefits of the nation. The democratic United States relies on intellectual individuals to take intelligent actions. If students are taught how to apply this knowledge in their lives and in the future years of college then they will not complain. For example, Interpersonal relationship skills can help us maintain healthy relations with our families and the people we work with. Knowledge must be used beyond class work and homework.

Colleges should not be a higher form or the next level of high school. Instead it should actively provide the skills to apply in the social life so students and graduates can engage with the community. Evergreen State College challenges its students because the goal is to get students to become involved in “active participation in learning, rather than passive reception of information,” (“Mission Statements” 60). An active participation of learning is engaging in discussions with fellow classmates and professors while passive reception of information is listening to the lecture and taking notes to study for the exams. Passive reception of information is a robotic manner of gaining knowledge. This method executes the message to students that the teachers and textbooks possess all the knowledge and students, the receivers, are completely reliable on teachers and books. Instead, universities should promote the luxury of engaging in discussions. Discussions teach the skills of public speaking, conducting a valid point or an argument which can be supported with evidence and examples, and the ability to respect each other opinions. Additionally, Newman reports, “...he knows when to speak and when to be silent...to be serious with effect,” (Newman 54). Newman is claiming that through the university’s classes, a student becomes wise by learning to choose his words carefully so they will not backfire. Engaging in a dialogue can help students to weigh every word before they speak. These skills are crucial in the professional world, which can only be taught through discussions, not lectures. Discussions give students experience for how to interact with other minds because individuals usually think differently.

A university gives us many skills that we can apply in our everyday lives, such as the skills to think and criticize. As Newman declares, “it is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own
opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them,” (Newman 54). Newman is saying that education is critical in making tough decisions because an education creates an intelligent society that is capable of differentiating between right and wrong. However, many people believe criticizing isn’t important because the easy thing to do is to believe everything they hear and read from the mass media and peers. Majority of the citizens of America are required to serve on jury duty by the law. The jury needs to have the intelligence to analytically criticize the arguments made by the lawyers. They must think carefully before announcing the verdict because someone’s life depends on the decision. In a critical thinking philosophy class, students learn how to determine the difference between a valid and an invalid argument. These lessons are essential for students which they must not forget after passing the course. Practicing such skills and lessons throughout lifetime helps the individuals to always remember the precious knowledge taught in school.

Many people do not actively become involved with the community because they do not see a way they can make an impact but there is a purpose in participating and engaging with the community. They believe they will not be able to make a difference. Many countries are cursed with social problems, even America. Although, America is one of the advanced nations in the world, it is still not perfect. The American citizens can make it perfect starting by making a difference in their own communities. Universities will teach law students the legal systems of America so they can take appropriate actions to give justice to the unfortunate. America has many social problems which needs solutions. The students, who acquire the skills taught in the higher education system, can initiate a step forward by becoming an example for the rest of the community. The future social workers or politicians possess the abilities to work towards making the American society the best it can be. Ultimately, education has the ability to create a better society.

The benefit of living in the modern times is that education is no longer for the Caucasian elites; anyone can be educated. Sadly, many young people from the minority ethnic groups do not attend a four-year college. According to the mission statement by CSU, Monterey Bay, some diverse minorities of California are “the working class and historically undereducated and low income populations,” (“Mission Statements” 60). In order, to improve the lives of the people who fall in this category needs resources and encouragement. As a result, they would be able to achieve higher education. Berea College is determined to give the Appalachian students a high quality education because they have limited recourses. California State University of Monterey Bay serves to teach multilingual and multicultural society of California (“Mission Statements” 60). This university should be very beneficial to the minorities of California. Fortunately, CSU, Monterey Bay provides the multicultural Americans with the resources and encouragement they need. Many Americans and immigrants from all over the world must look toward education for more and better opportunities.

Learning liberally about other races and cultures can rid the ridiculous stereotypes. Knowledge holds the power to transform students into good human beings who are not judgmental. For example, when students learn about Islam in specific class then they develop the understanding that Islam does not give birth to terrorism. The University of Minnesota starts from the roots because the university strives to make its students respectful human beings. The university knows that if it produces respectful men and women then they would make an effort towards creating a respectful community. Therefore, the societies would respect the many cultures of the world. Appreciation of various cultures would promote peace and unity. Berea college, located in the Appalachian region, teaches the ethics of Christianity such as, “the power of love over hate, human dignity and equality, and peace with justice;” (“Mission Statements” 58). This mission is quite straight forward. The idea is to create a society of peaceful, loving individuals. These humane principles serve the purpose of spreading world peace starting from the Appalachian community.

Skills and knowledge have the power to make a difference on a national level. Many people believe the purpose of a university is to get a better job in which they can make a good living. However, the purpose of a university is to challenge its students to criticize the discoveries made by the great scholars. Students and alumnus must actively apply knowledge and skills taught in the classrooms in professional and social life. They must work together to take actions to make a better society beginning from their local communities
and, they should expand their ideas toward building a better state and a nation by becoming involved and getting rid of stereotypes.

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To better understand the events that caused terror to America on September 11 2001, it is important to analyze the claims made in regards to who is responsible for the attacks and how the particular attacks occurred. In the article, “We Do Not Believe You,” Oliver Janich questions the original theory of the 9/11 attacks on America by proposing other theories about the collapse of the buildings (The World Trade Towers and Pentagon). One of these theories describes the placement and detonation of bombs within the buildings. This idea is not proven wrong, it is correct to question a theory but the process of questioning must not be reasoned through illogical claims. “The official theory claims that Islamic terrorists, led by Osama bin Laden,” were responsible for the attacks. Janich specifies in “We Do Not Believe You” that the majority of people disbelieve this original theory without evidence of how this generalization was created. Oliver Janich brings up interesting points about the logistics of the attacks; however, it is unreasonable to believe his fallacious claims.

**Hasty generalization is a common logical problem in thinking and this article shows a great example of this type of fallacious argument. People often make claims that are over generalized. **These claims are all inclusive and nonspecific like ___ says in the article or illustrates“ a couple of bad teachers mean a bad school,” or/and (to connect) “a handful of members of a group are used to judge the entire group.” This generalization does not make a logical reason for believing the idea put forward because it misrepresents the situation answer the broad statements. This article claims that the majority of people do not believe the official theory of the 2001 September 11th attacks on the United States when in fact no studies have been shown that form a conclusion of people’s beliefs in the logistics of the attacks. The author makes an assumption since 400 scientists disbelieve the official theory, everybody disbelieves. This again is illogical, as studies have not been shown to support the authors’ claim.

##Another fallacy made by Oliver is over-reliance on authorities. He mentions a number of experts (400 scientists) one in specific name is Jesse Ventura, a Vietnam War veteran who was part of the Under Water Demolition Team where he obtained impressive experience with explosives. With such experience, Ventura was “stunned that he believed the official story about the terror-attacks of 9/11,” (author,page #) because of the evidence he saw of explosions going off before the buildings collapsed. Many Americans, as stated in the article, shared Ventura’s shame. People believe what they hear because it is easier to allow someone else with the expertise to make conclusions about a particular situation, rather than looking into the situation by themselves. If they were to research first what is needed to study the particular situation, it would take time and effort that they are probably not willing to commit. This lack of will is detrimental for those troubled people as they may fall for the trap of fallacies.

If people believe everything they hear then who says they will not believe something like a pseudoscience. Pseudoscience simply means fake science, a science that is not credible under the definition of scientific discovery. This definition includes the testing of hypotheses, the designing of experiments and forming theories based on the results of those experiments. Pseudoscience plays on the fact that there are people not knowledgeable of a particular topic making it easier to persuade the individuals to believe in the idea. Pseudoscience uses pretend scientific language to discuss the experiments, which gives it a reputation of being plausible. However the experiments are poorly designed and the results are unclear with no significant value.

Michael Shermer and Thomas Kida are excellent sources to understand the problems with human thinking that will guide you through the problems with the claim this article is putting forth. Add shermer and kida quotes explaining the way thinking goes wrong.

“We are often willing to form extraordinary beliefs on the basis of flimsy evidence. (Kida)” “Sometimes, we spend considerable time and effort thinking about topic before forming a belief (Kida).” “These beliefs that we hold can have major impact on the decisions we make (Kida).”

Carl Sagan “extraordinary claims deserve extraordinary evidence.
“We Do Not Believe You” or Do We?

To better understand the events that caused terror to America on September 11, 2001, it is important to analyze the claims made about who is responsible for the attacks and how the particular attacks occurred. In the article, “We Do Not Believe You,” Oliver Janich questions the original theory of the 9/11 attacks on America by proposing other theories about the collapse of the buildings (The World Trade Towers and Pentagon). “The official theory suggests that Islamic terrorists, led by Osama bin Laden,” were responsible for the attacks. One of the alternative theories, of which Janich is a proponent, describes the placement and detonation of bombs within the buildings. It is correct for Janich to question the official theory, but the questioning must not be reasoned through illogical claims. Janich claims in “We Do Not Believe You” that the majority of people disbelieve this original theory but he has no evidence of how his generalization was created. Janich brings up interesting points about the logistics of the attacks; however, it is unreasonable to believe his fallacious claims because he uses generalizations, improper experts, and pseudoscience to support his theory.

Hasty generalizations are common problems in logical thinking. The “We Do Not Believe You” article is a great example that showcases this type of faulty argument. People often make claims that are over generalized. These claims are all inclusive and nonspecific like Michael Shermer illustrates “a couple of bad teachers mean a bad school,” or “a handful of members of a group are used to judge the entire group.” (57) These claims do not make logical reasons for believing the idea put forward because they are misrepresentative of the situation. They study a small percentage of the total population of people, which then make broad and often fallible statements in regards to the results. The article “We Do Not Believe You” claims that the majority of people do not believe the official theory of the 2001 September 11 attacks on the United States when, in fact, no studies have been shown that form a conclusion of people’s beliefs about the logistics of the attacks. The author makes an assumption that because 400 scientists disbelieve the official theory, therefore everybody disbelieves the theory. This again is illogical, as studies have not been shown to support Janich’s hasty generalization, and that small sample group is not necessarily demonstrative of the population as a whole.

Janich relies heavily on authorities when it comes to his beliefs. He mentions a number of experts (400 scientists and others). One in specific, named Jesse Ventura, is a Vietnam War veteran who was part of the Under Water Demolition Team where he obtained impressive experience with explosives. With such experience, Ventura was “stunned that he [Ventura] believed the official story about the terror-attacks of 9/11,” (Janich, 2) because of the evidence he saw of explosions going off before the buildings collapsed. Many Americans, as stated in the article, shared Ventura’s shame based on seeing the videos depicting the explosions, and taking Ventura’s expertise into consideration they also questioned the original theory. This is an example of some people following the path of least resistance, believing what is before them because that is easier to allow someone else with the expertise to make conclusions about a particular situation. The time and effort it would take to understand and study the particular situation would likely keep a layperson from researching it. This is a weakness for these individuals. Thomas Kida says, “We are often willing to form extraordinary beliefs on the basis of flimsy evidence.” (12) Laypersons are unable to point out fallacies in the supposed credible claims, as they lack knowledge, missing the process of interpretation that is involved when analyzing a claim. Kida would argue that, “we spend considerable time and effort thinking about a topic before forming a belief.” (13) This would be ideal for all of us, but in reality, it is not the case. It would take time to sort through the evidence and make educated beliefs, time that people often do not invest. Carl Sagan says, “Extraordinary claims deserve extraordinary evidence,” which establishes a need for people to understand the evidence before believing an idea. “These beliefs that we hold can have major impact on the decisions we make (Kida 14).” Decision-making is a part of everyday life and escaping it makes a more
treacherous journey. People who fall prey to the fallacious meat of the world allow separation from society by over-reliance on authorities due to suffering from ignorance and vulnerability.

Oliver Janich’s claim is a pseudoscience. Pseudoscience simply means fake science, a science that is not credible under the definition of scientific discovery. This definition includes the testing of hypotheses, the designing of experiments and forming theories based on the results of those experiments. Pseudoscience plays on the fact that there are people who are not considerably knowledgeable of a particular topic, making it easier to persuade these individuals to believe the idea. Pseudoscience uses pretend scientific language to discuss their “experiments,” which gives it a reputation of being plausible. However the experiments are poorly designed and the results are unclear with no significant value. Janich gives support for his theory by showing evidence that his claim disproves the official theory. One argument Janich makes is that the fire initiated by the airplane could not have been hot enough to melt the steel support structure of the buildings. Janich never once states the scientific evidence that supports his claim. He mentions Richard Gage, an architect, who also “denies that fire caused the three skyscrapers to collapse.”(Janich, 2) His source brings a degree of skepticism to the table. In the article Janich says “According to Gage, the probability of fire destroying all the columns at the same time is zero.” (Janich, 3) Gage the architect has expertise in his practice but does he understand how hot the temperatures need to be for the fire to melt steel and how to determine the temperature of the fire from the crash of the plane. These types of questions would need to be answered by an expert in the steel industry as well as an expert on heat, not by an architect. Janich attempted to discuss science but he is discredited because of his pseudoscientific approach to discovering the logistics of the collapsed buildings.

September 11th 2001 was a horrid day for many and the suffering that arose that day has many questioning what happened to bring about the attack and how that attack occurred. It is thought to be Islamic terrorists, led by Osama bin Laden, but as Janich discussed in his article “We Do Not Believe You” he shows opposition to this official theory. When determining the correct theories of the attacks it is important to understand fallacies. Janich used generalizations, improper experts, such as Gage, and pseudoscience to support his claims. Had he provided almost exactly the opposite, one might have been more persuaded to believe his theory. The lack of specific details, proper experts, such as those knowledgeable in steel and heat, and real, controlled experiments is what weakened Janich’s theory, which makes it unreasonable to believe.