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## Experience (2011)

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## Experience

*By Anthony Dary*

Now that I'm on the other side of another semester and my first academic year at Valparaiso University, I can look back at my thoughts from the beginning and realize how different they are from what I think now. I'll admit that in August, I was a bit apprehensive at being required (not allowed) to take a 5 credit humanities course—twice. And to be honest, I felt the same way with my CORE filled work schedule for the first few months. Only when I was well into CORE-115, things started to connect. It wasn't that I didn't appreciate the value of discussion, the experience in argument to be gained from writing, and the importance of being open to new ideas and philosophies. It was that I hadn't done it for long enough for any reflection, progress, and revelations to be meaningful. Now that I've been reading carefully selected texts and participating in discussion for eight months, I'm starting to see the beauty of the course and how it reflects the nature of the human experience. First and second semester are generally separated by final exams, winter break, and often professors, but for CORE, it was really a continuation. How often our discussions involved going back to related CORE 110 texts, texts in entirely different units! I've realized that like life, having to come to terms with Origins, Education, Love, Citizenship, Vocation, and Death doesn't actually ever end; it's a continuous process that links the topics together in unexpected ways.

It's appropriate that I begin to compile my final portfolio for second semester the day after I received my graded portfolio from first semester. Here I am, sitting and reflecting on my experience again, when my first reflection paper (and the many others) comes back to me as a means of further reflection. As I paged through my old introductory essay, I actually found myself critiquing my final graded work and disagreeing the way I went about writing it. Perhaps I wasn't as substantial then as I am now, and perhaps this is due to the fact that I arguably hadn't come to complete terms with CORE yet. Either way, I think this is an excellent example of my improvement in thinking and reflecting.

It was after the events of MLK Day that things began to connect. We read *Outcasts United* as the bridge text between the Education and Love units the semester prior. But when the book got a reprise of sorts when Luma Mufleh came to speak to the university, we looked at her story in the context of citizenship and vocation. As I'm of the belief that these crossovers are what CORE is all about, I've chosen the write-up from this day to be my fifth-hour informal in the portfolio. I commend my school for making MLK Day matter and for planning the unit

involving two texts by Dr. King to coincide with the day. Certainly, the events and texts we read made me think about what it means to be a citizen of a government and society.

I was sold to the prompt for Paper 1, “Antigone: The Disqualified Hero,” when it explicitly asked me to “practice [my] arguing skills.” After all the discussion about unjust laws and nonviolent resistance, to construct a strong argument that Antigone was not a hero but a troublemaker was quite the challenge. But yet, it was almost fun in a way, just because the impression I got from the prompt was “bet you can’t do this!” and my instinct was to prove it wrong. The great lengths of time I spent combing through the book and looking for shreds of ideas that would help my case felt oddly like my time as an attorney in my high school law class mock trials. Both were incredibly valuable experiences for improving my arguing skills. I’ve heard so often that the best way to practice arguing is to defend something you don’t believe. I’m still at odds on whether or not I actually believe my argument or if I invented it just for the sake of arguing. Regardless, that I was told this paper was persuasive more than once was definitely a boost to my arguing confidence.

As a Catholic, I was unfamiliar with the fact that the Lutheran church stresses the idea of vocation, and wasn’t quite sure what the difference between a vocation and a career is. This very discussion came up today in another class, again showing the relevance of CORE. I take a vocation to mean a life path you feel as if you are meant to do. A vocation can be a profitable career, or it can be something outside of what one does to earn a living. I’ve found that there is a sort of connotation to a vocation in that it typically isn’t a high paying activity, but this doesn’t have to be true. However, it was for Billy Elliot, as he took on the bohemian style of living as a ballet dancer. One of my favorite scenes in the film, one with a moving piece by Tchaikovsky and a transporter bridge, is the subject of the film essay in this portfolio. I like how this paper turned out because it involves just the right amount of ‘reading between the lines’ to make good conclusions.

Apparently there’s consensus among CORE students that Paper 2, the Worker Profile, is the most enjoyable formal paper to write. And while I wouldn’t exactly say an eight page research paper is fun, I would say that because we as students were given such freedom in choosing a topic, most enjoyed writing the paper because their topic interested them. For me, and I would imagine for most, my topic was related to my major, civil engineering, which made the topic incredibly relevant to me. When I was first assigned the paper, I knew I would have to find an engineer to interview as a subject, but as it turns out, I don’t actually know many engineers. Luckily, I had the contact information of someone my financial advisor knows who was, over a year ago, willing to talk to me about the field and about schools. Unfortunately for me, he changed jobs and I was left with an e-mail address for nobody in particular. With some persistence, I was able to find the most recent e-mail address and arranged to meet him. Mr. Hillebrenner was an incredibly helpful subject and will be valuable for networking in the future.

For career development, Paper 2 was by far the most useful, as I was able to explore the field of civil engineering in more depth than I knew was possible and have an experience with contacting, interviewing, and thanking, although on the more HR end of things.

I was looking forward to reading *The Things They Carried* since I found a copy for class over the summer. A friend of mine spoke very highly of the writing style and storytelling in this book, and what better way to understand a text than to read it in a discussion based class? One of the many things that makes Tim O'Brien's novel deep and complex are the parallels to the Bible—having a savior figure with the initials JC, main female characters named Martha and Mary. This struck me as particularly interesting, so I chose to write about how the message of the short passage of Martha and Mary in the gospel of Luke is backed up by their equivalents in the novel. Choosing the prompt to signing the honor code took no more than seven hours of thinking and writing. I feel that “Between Truth and Service” is a well written paper, so considering how quickly I finished it, this further adds to my confidence in being able to generate a thesis and argue it. I also found great joy in writing the sentence “Mary Anne went from knowing nothing of war to nothing but war” in this paper, as “Nothing of War to Nothing But War” was the name of the paper I wrote last semester about Ishmael Beah and Plato. This was one of my favorite times when the interconnectedness of everything became more apparent to me.

Of course, my writing is not without flaws. I've been aware for quite some time that I'm difficult to follow sometimes, and that many times when I feel as if I left enough information for something to explain itself, my readers are left wondering what they should be concluding. While I may be improving in together an argument, I'll find myself missing fallacies or forcing conclusions. It is for this reason that I value the input and opinions of my peer reviewers, Megan \_\_\_\_\_ and Emily \_\_\_\_\_, and of course my professor \_\_\_\_\_. For as many times as I quote and cite successfully, I quote and cite in ways that don't make sense to anyone but me. My word choices and organization may not work for others, and I thank my reviewers for telling me so.

As my schedule becomes more filled with science, engineering and math, there will be times when I'll actually miss CORE. This experience has been more than just time off from the left brain classes. The CORE curriculum has served to broaden my knowledge and experience and has given me a starting place in the academic community that is Valparaiso University. But it wouldn't be a true class called “The Human Experience” if it ended after the final exam. I have a feeling this is going to be one of those classes where the texts and discussions and concepts follow me around. The topics we've read and discussed are truly universal with real place in the world, so I'm sure there will be plenty of times in my years to come where I'll end up thinking back to this 5-credit class I took as a freshman and having something to contribute. CORE, like life, is a continuous experience.