Reflections on CORE

By Laura Wagoner

College is a unique opportunity to expose yourself to new ideas and expand your horizons and I feel that that is exactly what my CORE class has done for me. This course offers many opportunities for reflection through the use of texts that not only have literary merit but also open the reader’s eyes to new concepts. I feel that my abilities to analyze texts and write have improved through my work in this course, but I have learned so much more. Unlike most reading and writing courses, CORE forces its students to open their eyes to new viewpoints and to really analyze how they feel about important issues like creation, coming of age, and citizenship.

To show how I have grown over the past semester, I choose to include my first, third and fourth essays. The first paper presents a personal reflection on my experiences as a 4-H member and how those experiences helped to shape me. I choose the third essay because it presented me with an opportunity to show my ability to analyze the text *In the Time of the Butterflies* through the lens provided by Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” The final paper in this portfolio covers the topic of citizenship and discusses the motives for Paul Farmer’s dedication to his work and the idea that the lessons presented in the Sermon on the Mount are still applicable to our modern society and global citizenship.

I really enjoyed writing my first essay because it was an opportunity for me to truly reflect on what my experiences as a 4-H member meant to me and how much I have grown because of them. I knew that 4-H had been a major part of my life for a long time and that it had shaped me, but it wasn’t until I actually committed my thoughts and feelings to paper that I
realized how different my life would be if I had not been so involved. Beginning college so far away from home was an experience that made me analyze my life prior to college and where I am headed after graduation. I feel this paper gives a fairly clear view of a very important aspect of my coming of age and is helpful for the reader in understand my perspective in later papers included in this portfolio.

I found the third paper to be the easiest to write because this type of analysis is something that I have had the most experience doing. The ideas for the paper were also more focused by the prompt so I found it was easier to develop my ideas with in these bounds. I also found Plato’s Allegory of the Cave to be a wonderful tool with which to analyze other texts so I enjoyed writing this paper the most and am pleased with the overall result.

The fourth paper covers the topic of making a difference in the world, which is very near to my heart. I was really inspired by the quote that I began this paper with. Despite my passion for the subject matter, I think this was actually my least favorite paper to write and am still not satisfied with the present draft.

In my portfolio, I choose to include my informal to the film Crash. I feel that out of all the texts in the course his film had the biggest impact on me. This very blunt view of racism and prejudice really opened my eyes. I was not so naïve as to think that racism was no longer an issue in our society, but the film really made me think about the way I react toward people who are different from me. Because this film caused me to question my own values and actions, I felt it merited inclusion in my portfolio.

Though my portfolio gives example of different types of writing, as I began editing and preparing my portfolio there is a common theme of reflection and seeing an injustice and calling for action. I think this first paper sets the common reflective tone for all of the writing that is
included in this portfolio. I have always tried to find the deeper meaning in the text presented in
writing courses, and the texts chosen in this course made it easy to direct the focus of a paper
into a very reflective and analytical tone. In general, I tried to not only analyze the texts but also
apply my own values and view with support from the tests. I have been blessed enough to have
found my passion in life and this passion seems to come through in all of my essays. I am here
studying to be pre-med and am striving to help as many people as I can with this degree and I
think this comes through in my essays.

I really enjoyed my peer group and they gave me valuable feedback that I took to heart
on all of my papers. Though all of us arrived at Valparaiso University from different
backgrounds and with different goals for our lives, I think we all learned a great deal from one
another. I have typically disliked having my peers review my essays, but this time I felt very
comfortable with my group and actually looked forward to their responses to my essays and
enjoyed learning more about each of them by reading their essays. I owe them many thanks for
helping me to focus my thoughts and improve my papers.

I feel that this first semester of CORE has been a great opportunity for me to improve my
writing and critical thinking skills. College is a time when students examine their lives, values,
and priorities and make decisions that will define who they will become. CORE has helped me to
think about my own values and realize that even if someone else's views differ from my own I
can learn from what they have to say. Socrates states that "the unexamined life is not worth
living"; this course assures that none of us will be left with unexamined lives.