What a Year of CORE Has Brought Me

By Rachel Williams

If an incoming freshman were to come up to me and ask how I felt about CORE, I would have to tell them the truth - it's hard. More than that though, it makes you think. Thinking, in my opinion, is not done enough by my generation. We have machines that can do all of our thinking. For example, Microsoft Word has spell-check and a thesaurus that can make you sound much smarter than the Good Lord made you. Naturally, when a class like CORE comes along and requires you to read real-life books, not online versions, students can become quite frightened. I can honestly say that I was. However, after I decided to sit back and go with flow I found that the thinking might not be such a bad idea. It was fun to analyze popular movies and look for meanings in the simplest places. Even the texts, which some I enjoyed more than others, provided me with a great chance to develop my investigation skills. This hit most personally with our study of the Bible. I truly enjoy reading it and learning more about my faith, but I just find it to be such a complicated and not easily-understood text. Our devotions to Corinthians, Jonah, and Luke have really helped me get a better grasp of the information presented in the Bible. Now when I read any of the Bible in my spare time, I am able to better visualize the events and connect them with a larger picture. If all of this wasn't enough, CORE then asked me to take what I had learned and write about it. My trusted technology came quite in handy for this part, but I still had to rely on my own judgments in the majority of my compositions. In doing so, I feel like CORE helped me immensely strengthen my writing techniques and abilities. For example, before CORE, I had rarely let anyone read or discuss any of my papers. I still maintain
that my first peer review was somewhat close to being on trial for murder; but now, after surviving multiple peer reviews, I am much more aware what my strength and weakness are.

When it came to choosing which of these well-worked compositions I would include in my portfolio, I looked to my final drafts. The two I had to deliberate over were as different as night and day. My first was a narrative essay, which I found to be easier to write. In turn, I feel like I produced a much better second draft of it than my second essay. This second work was a textual analysis of pieces dealing with the topic of “love.” For whatever reason, I just could not seem to convey my messages clearly in this paper, nor support my ideas with properly-explained passages from the literature. These sentiments were echoed by my peer review group, as well. All in all, I felt that it was the weaker of the two papers, which is why my narrative essay found its way into my final presentation.

With papers one and two out of the way, focus shifted to the third paper. This piece was a research paper and a worker profile paper blended together. Having written numerous research papers in the past, I knew approaching this paper that it was going to be quite a task. I began choosing my topic by examining who I knew that I could interview. This helped me weed out choices, like competitive eater and animal handler, until I landed at “lawyer.” I knew a few attorneys in my hometown, so talking with them over spring break worked out perfectly. Also, I am studying to become a lawyer, so this topic seemed to fit rather well. I though it was an interesting topic, as well as one that I could write extensive pages on. Once I had produced the first draft of this paper, my peer review group commented on the research basis of my paper. They felt that I needed to combine more information from my interviews into my research. After doing this, I felt like I had produced a paper that was a nice mixture of my old style of writing, with the new element of my interviews.
My fourth paper is another mesh of styles like the worker profile paper, except in this recipe the ingredients are from my first and second essays. It has a topic similar to my first composition, but also uses some textual analysis. In my opinion, it provides a nice bookend because the personal narrative characteristics, but also shows a wider range of my abilities with the inclusion of the textual analysis. These two aspects seemed to split my peer review group. Some people felt my work needed more embellishment of my own story, while others felt I had incorporated, without forcing, my story nicely into the paper. Although it was required, I would have chosen this paper for my portfolio anyway because I feel that it accurately represents where I stand as a writer today.

I would like to say that I have become a better writer because of CORE; however, I think I have just become more mature in my writing process. I am no longer terrified to have other people critique my writings. I like to take on more challenges in my papers and push my limits. I know that if it is not great the first time, there are always second and third drafts. I still have weaknesses and make errors when I am writing, but the art of revising and editing can make these eyesores less noticeable.

Not only has CORE changed my style of writing, it has also altered some of my views. “Dead Man Walking,” for example showed me a different side of capital punishment. Before viewing the film I was certain that I fully supported the death penalty, in any situation. Now, I realize that each case has to be examined individually; and that there will never be a clearly defined answer. The same sentiment can be said for illegal immigration, as seen in Enrique’s Journey. Sonia Nazario, in her book and campus visit, really opened my eyes to the torture that immigrants face just for the chance of a better life. The fact that I live this life made me appreciate it all the more. Also, A River Runs Through It, although not as politically charged of a
piece as the first two, certainly changed other ideas of mine, specifically in my relationship with my own brother. We have only recently begun to tolerate each other. After reading this story, I felt such a strong connection to Norman and his never-ending struggle to understand his brother. The passage that really seemed to drive this point home for me was when he stated that complete love does not come from complete understanding.

With this semester and year coming to a close, it only feels right that I should acknowledge the people who helped me during my year of CORE. Both of my professors brought me out of my writing shell and helped me to explore other routes. They also got me to become more comfortable sharing my views in class. (I am still not stellar in this area, but I have slowly become more extroverted.) My peer review group lent a hand, as well, to my writing transformation. They not only read all my papers, but also provided me with a cohort of people who I could bounce ideas off of. To all of these people, I extend my greatest appreciation.

Looking back now, the year flew; although, at the time I could swear a snail put it to shame. To the incoming freshmen, I would like to say that CORE is hard, but worth it. Do not be afraid of all of the paper assignments; look at them as a chance to become even more acquainted with your computer and all its amenities. Sit back and try to enjoy the ride like I did; it was a pretty great trip.