Reflective Essay FILA-450

Bridgewater College

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Introduction, **Integration and Experiential Learning**

With graduation drawing near, I have done a lot of reflecting on my time at Bridgewater these last few weeks. I've learned an incredible amount these last few years and matured in ways I didn't realize I could. I began to grow into my own and figure out what it means to be the person I want to be in life. The journey was far from perfect, though. In fact, there were many tough moments. From COVID throwing everything out of order, to my own personal struggles, there was a time where I genuinely wasn't sure if or how I was going to finish college. However, through it all and with the help of others, I've grown and furthered my education in ways I never thought I would. I've joked a few times to different people over the last year about how ready I am to graduate. That being said, it's also become a bittersweet feeling. I've grown to love learning and to love Bridgewater College for helping become the person I am today. There was a time where I was just going through the motions and wandering about aimlessly. During my sophomore year, I decided to take a semester off from school. What I was doing wasn't working and I needed help. Through working with the amazing people on campus and doing other things outside of school, I was able to turn it around. It was a long journey full of mistakes and lessons learned, but it's the lessons I had to learn the hard way that helped me grow. My time at Bridgewater signifies more than just the furthering of my education, but also the growth of myself as a person. I am forever grateful for the time I have spent here and for the things I have learned academically and in my individual growth.

My education throughout the last four years has given me the tools to succeed in my career by providing me with a multitude of skills. One of the most important skills a programmer can possess is the ability to effectively problem solve. As a Computer Science major, I am always finding new ways to solve tough problems. Outside of school, I have written several

programs and contributed to a few projects. One of my favorite projects is a program I made to allow keyboard inputs to simulate a mouse ([Artifact: KeyboardMouse.py](#)). Programming this project was one of the first times that I felt all of my skills coming together to create something that was entirely me. At the same time, collaborating with others is one of the ways I've grown the most as of late. To date, the largest project I was a part of involved a team of five other students where we were tasked with building a website ([Artifact: Ernie's Eats](#)). The website was designed to serve as a local restaurant review and blog site for the town of Bridgewater. By adding both business and standard user accounts, businesses could create posts that could be seen by users that followed them. Users could then interact with the posts and leave reviews on business' pages. Working in collaboration with a team of like minded individuals taught me how to work effectively with others. Experiences like these played a significant role in my development over the last few years at Bridgewater. Additionally, in depth code reviews and studying how others think about programming has offered me insight into ways I can improve my own understanding of the subject. These skills will translate directly into my career as a software engineer. Furthermore, I've started to create websites for people I know to build my portfolio and make some money in the process. Applying myself this way allows me to have projects to show to employers while also providing me a way to practice my programming. Another benefit is that I have begun to learn how to manage customers and charge for my work based on my time spent. Expanding my talents has allowed me to learn from a wider breadth of areas and improve my skills at a faster pace. All of the time spent learning these skills has provided me with the tools to succeed professionally: how to manage deadlines with my work and how to meet customer needs, just to name a few.

Engaging Diverse Perspectives

During my time at Bridgewater College, there were classes that challenged my view on the world and helped me to develop the perspective that I have today. Through these courses, I was able to strengthen skills and techniques that I would carry throughout the rest of my career. The first of these two courses that I will discuss was one that I took during my freshman year at Bridgewater, Effective Writing (ENG 110). Despite being a 100 level course, this class immediately stuck out to me as different. I knew from the first class that I would be able to learn a great amount from Professor Yurcaba and her way of teaching. What made this class stand out was what we were reading and writing about. From the ground up, this course was designed by Professor Yurcaba to teach English through the lens of Ukrainian history and culture. More specifically, detailing the Chernobyl nuclear reactor incident and how it affected the lives of the people of Ukraine then, now, and in the future. I had heard about Chernobyl prior to this class, but didn't truly understand or know much of it. Reading books like *Midnight in Chernobyl* and *Wormwood Forest* taught me a lot about Ukraine and its incredible culture. Through her Ukrainian heritage, Professor Yurcaba provided yet another source of information and first hand experience with the culture. This class gave me a view into the lives and cultures of those who suffered from this horrific tragedy, how hard they fought to recover since, and how despite all that has happened, their culture lives on. This class taught me how to conduct proper research and showed how important culture is to the Ukrainian people. Even after the reactor meltdown, many of them refused to leave their homes. Through thorough examination and class discussions, I learned how important true, genuine leadership is in times of crisis. We discussed how the decision to downplay the severity of the accident by those in power caused even more

damage. The leadership's attempt to save face ultimately backfired and the citizens paid the price. We analyzed how the poor response of the Soviet Union affected countries hundreds of miles away due to radioactive fallout. Even countries on the other side of the world felt the impacts as some relied on trade with those experiencing the fallout. This further exemplified the importance of proper leadership to me.

In Spring of 2024, I had the privilege of taking a class with Dr. Carol Scheppard. I had signed up for this class hoping to get my general education requirement for religion. While the course sounded fairly interesting, I had no idea what to expect. With that being said, I was blown away by how much I enjoyed Medieval Women's Spirituality (REL-316W). I don't think I have ever had more thoughtful and engaging conversations in a class than this one. While I consider myself to be a religious person, this class was at a new depth for me. I struggled for a bit with the analysis, but by actively engaging in discussions with my classmates and working through the meanings of the motifs with Dr. Scheppard, I began to thrive in conversation. This was simultaneously one of the most challenging but rewarding classes that I have ever taken. One of the challenging aspects was that the class had just twelve people. This encouraged everyone to participate consistently and also allowed us to have in-depth discussions, which we did in every class. We would discuss what we read and break down the meanings. In much of the literature we read and discussed, the meanings were quite ambiguous. Occasionally they would have a fairly defined theme, but oftentimes we would interpret them differently. It was incredibly engaging to discuss what I thought the meaning from an excerpt was and why and hear a classmate have an entirely different perspective on it. We all have such varied backgrounds and stories that our analysis of these malleable themes can take on a very personal interpretation. It helped me to broaden my understanding of how different yet similar we all are. At times, nobody

else would understand an excerpt where I would, so I would speak up and explain how I saw it. Other times, it was the other way around and someone else would be showing us their point of view. Experiences like this helped me appreciate how other people can see things. By keeping an open mind, I open myself to possibilities that I alone can't come up with. This allows me to continue to grow and seek advice where I can. By using what I learned from both myself and others, I was able to construct a strong argument for my final paper ([Artifact: Religion Final Paper](#)). This paper was the culmination of everything I had learned in class that semester. The constructive discussions and thought provoking questions we asked each other helped me to construct a strong thesis. The analysis gave me knowledge of the mystics and how they lived and practiced religion which allowed me to flesh out my paper. Putting together everything I had learned allowed me to write a full paper on a topic I knew absolutely nothing about three months prior. The experiences I had in this class taught me perspective-taking and allowed me to step out of my comfort zone more than I ever had before. I truly believe that this is a class that will stick with me. It also taught me to keep an open mind because the unexpected can happen. You can find that you enjoy something you never thought you would. I believe this open mindedness will make me a great team member in the future.

Public Discourse

For this section I will be breaking it up into two different pieces. The first being general public discourse and the discussions involved with having differing opinions. The second section I would like to discuss would be the problem-solving discourse that involves working together to come to a solution on an issue. Public discourse is an interesting topic for me because it is one that just a few years ago I would have hated. Now, however, I find myself comfortable having deep and challenging discussions with others. Regardless of what career or profession you follow

in life, being able to have discussions with others, especially those who disagree with you, is a very important aspect of life. As I get ready for my career, I will be working with people both in the office and as part of a team. Programmers typically work in a team comprised of several people who have to efficiently work together to accomplish their task on time. There will be a difference in opinions and it is important to be able to have the discussions necessary to work through them and come to terms on an agreement. My time at Bridgewater College has given me the ability to have these discussions in a professional manner.

In May of 2024, I took Political Psychology, taught by Dr. Gentry, that immediately challenged me from the first day. Not only was this class not related to my major, but it wasn't even needed for a general education requirement. Needless to say, I had no experience in the field of political psychology. I needed credits for graduation and saw this class as a way to challenge myself.

On the very first day she had us doing research on certain political topics and presenting them to the class, discussing what our take is. At this time, I had begun to get over my fear of public speaking and welcomed the opportunity to do something like this. However, I was still quite nervous as my group and I were meant to provide a solid argument for what went wrong with the NASA Challenger disaster in 1986, in just fifteen minutes worth of class time. As I presented with my group, I found myself actively engaging with the class about what went wrong and what we believe should have been done to fix it. Dr. Gentry has an interesting approach that I really appreciate. Her class is a combination of politics and psychology where we learned about both and how they can massively affect one another. By understanding how to frame behaviors into a political, psychological, or a combined lens, it allows us to better understand why people do what they do. Everything that I learned from Dr. Gentry's class was

synthesized into my final paper ([Artifact: Climate Change](#)). I conducted significant research about climate change and the perspectives people hold on it. I examined and analyzed the arguments and thoughts of both sides through the lens of political psychology. This class taught me how to take two entirely different fields and apply them in conjunction with one another. Understanding how to draw connections from one field to the other and finding a relationship between the two opened up an entirely new way to think about things not confined solely to politics and psychology. By using the skills I built in this class, I formed an extensive argument as to why climate change is in fact happening and what we can do about it. Dr. Gentry didn't just teach me how to improve a skill I already knew how to use, she showed me how to perfect it. She taught me the importance of using your resources to find connections between seemingly unrelated topics. As a result, I confidently and thoroughly constructed my paper using research as supporting evidence to back up my claims. I developed counterarguments and discussed the potential weaknesses of my original argument. The culmination of this class goes much further than a paper on climate change. It is a skill that taught me the importance of a strong argument and the value of thorough research. Dr. Gentry's class taught me to understand how people could think that climate change isn't real by viewing the issue through the political and psychological lenses it provided to me. This class helped me to understand the nuance required to take an argument from decent to powerful. The lessons I learned from Dr. Gentry will take me far as I begin to venture into my professional career. Being able to draw connections between separate topics will be a skill that sets me apart from others in the future.

   The second section of this involves one of my major classes, Software Engineering. This class, taught by Dr. McGregor, required us to be in teams of six to work on a semester-long programming project. Not only did this simulate what it would be like to work as programmers

in the field, but it gave us a chance to practice our programming and social skills. Every Wednesday, we would meet as a team to discuss what we had worked on throughout the previous week and to discuss plans going forward. This would be the time to bring up any issues in the way. We would also delegate new tasks to be worked on. There were times where we would have to discuss with one another and compromise on who got to work on what. Not everyone always got to work on their preferred task. At times, a person who had more expertise in a certain area would have to take on a task they could do if nobody else on the team could manage it. For example, if person A was very talented and could do anything, but really wanted to work on our website theme and colors we would have to have a discussion as to what was best for the team. Person B lacking the same proficiency as person A, caused us to delegate easier tasks to person B to ensure tasks are completed. This led to lengthy discussions about who was doing what task to avoid a situation where someone is unable to do their task properly. We also came to agreements that just because someone is less experienced doesn't mean they shouldn't attempt harder tasks. This ensures that everyone gets the opportunity to work on what the team needs, but also some of what they want. I believe this weekly discussion and semester long project was one of the most valuable things I did during my time at Bridgewater. Not only was it for my specific career path, but it offered me the chance to strengthen my communication skills in a realistic environment.

Global Citizenship and Intercultural Competencies

Throughout my time at Bridgewater I have grown to understand the importance of being part of a community. Whether it be at school, my home town, a club, or the world, I have learned an incredible amount about the importance of culture and the differences in societies. During my time at Bridgewater, I've been exposed to different cultures and ways of thinking from around

the world. This helped me to learn about perspective taking and garnering a more holistic view of the world. In this section I will discuss two different courses, Global Political Economy (PSCI-440W) and Intermediate Spanish (SPAN-201), both of which had a profound impact on my development in this area and how they did so.

Within my Global Political Economy class, I was able to learn about different societies through the study of the global political economy. Examining the way different cultures behave can explain many of the decisions they make in regards to their government and economic policies. As I went through this course, I noticed how I was learning about other cultures through their policies and governments and not just their people. Similar to many of my other courses at Bridgewater, this was another example of how I was prompted to think in ways I hadn't previously. I was fascinated at how the political decisions of one country could greatly affect the political decisions or economic status of another. One country that showcased this well was the United States. Our country is so influential on the world, we sometimes forget that our actions have consequences well beyond our own borders. Thought processes like this can be drawn in parallel to our own lives. We make decisions every single day and there are many times where we make a decision that greatly impacts another without us considering that first. The reflection I've done of this course has helped reinforce the importance of understanding the consequences of my own actions, as well as the actions of others.

Writing the final paper for this class was one of the most interesting research papers I've ever written (Artifact: Global Political Economy). Through my analysis and interpretation of the responses of various countries to the COVID-19 Pandemic, I was able to understand a lot about the global political economy. I learned how different cultures led to different governments making different decisions in response to the virus. Additionally, I was able to connect the

responses of countries to their economic impact domestically as well as globally. This class was one of the most insightful ways I have ever learned about other societies.

In contrast to the previous course, my Spanish class helped me learn about culture through a more direct way. Hands-on learning is one of my favorite ways to grasp a concept as it gives me the opportunity to apply what I am learning to something tangible. Learning the language through speaking with classmates and reading is practical and provides a level of comfort because we are all at a similar level. Literature created by Spanish speaking authors and poets is one of the many ways we learn to speak and read the language. It offers us a more natural approach by consuming content that is genuine and not just created for a textbook. One of the most striking cultural practices we learned about was from the cholitas. Cholitas are indigenous Bolivian women who dress in a very particular way as a form of cultural pride and female empowerment. Their stories are inspiring and you can tell how much their culture means to them. Through watching them, it instills a deeper pride within me for my own culture and by extension an appreciation for others'.

Prior to taking this course, my Spanish was at a decent level, however, I was very out of practice. Confidence is key when speaking a different language and this class has given me just that. Not only am I better with my Spanish than ever before, but I am also more confident. I'm at a level where I feel comfortable speaking and reading outside of class. Having the ability to speak two languages will be an incredible help for me not only professionally but also personally. My dad's side of the family mainly speaks Spanish and I've always wanted to be able to reach a level where I can speak with them in Spanish. Dr. Ramirez has created one of the most engaging learning environments I have ever been a part of and has given me the skills and confidence to succeed outside of the classroom.

Ethical Reasoning

The study of ethics is one of the most applicable subjects I learned about during my time at Bridgewater. Through my study in the course Philosophical Ethics (PHIL-318E), I was able to learn so much about ethics and how they can be applied to virtually every situation in life. Dr. Katherine Brelje taught me so much in this course that I will be able to carry forward with me. Learning and discussing the different ethical frameworks and moral considerations led to some interesting discussions. Working with others, I helped create a final project that we presented to the class. We decided to create a presentation about the ever increasing presence of artificial intelligence and its role in today's world both academically and in the workplace. Engaging the class in thoughtful discussions, we asked questions about their views on AI as we presented. We opened up an honest and interesting conversation utilizing the ethical and moral frameworks we learned about in class. Artificial intelligence is evolving at a pace far beyond that of legislation. As a result, it becomes an ethical and moral consideration in which the individual has to decide on their own terms what is and isn't okay. The conversations we had during this presentation really gave us a chance to apply our studies on something real and tangible that we all have experience with. Experiences like these have helped me form my opinions and values regarding social and moral topics, like artificial intelligence.

For my final paper in this class, I decided to write about John Rawls' "Veil of Ignorance" and how I believe it can be used in ethical and moral contexts (Artifact: Veil of Ignorance). My argument in this paper was one in favor of the "Veil of Ignorance", but not that it should be used as the only ethical framework. My argument, instead, was how it can be used as a supplemental tool to help us make fair and just decisions. When faced with difficult decisions, if we ask ourselves what we would do if we had no knowledge of who we were in the world, what would

our decision be? We are rarely free from our inherent biases, so by studying ethics we can better understand how to make decisions that are ethically sound and free of bias. Concepts like this can be incredibly important in life especially as we meet and interact with new people all the time. In fact, I have already applied this technique when thinking about graphic design. During my time in Ron Alabanza's Graphic Design class, I learned an incredible amount about design and how to make design accessible. This relates to my paper with Rawl's "Veil of Ignorance" because of the fact that when designing a website I believe one should make it as accessible as possible to everyone. We are capable of being unfair to others due to ignorance or simply via a lack of consideration. If I were blind, color blind, or deaf, I would want the websites I visit to be able to accommodate me so that I may enjoy them too. By drawing this connection and applying an ethical framework such as the "Veil of Ignorance" to situations like this, it allows me to see the bigger picture when designing programs or websites. Even without consciously thinking in terms of ethics, I've learned to try to consider others when making things of that nature. This is just one of the many ways that my study in ethics has aided me in my educational career and how I will be able to apply it going forward into my professional career.

Through this essay, I have demonstrated my ability to analyze, think critically, and apply the many techniques I've learned in meaningful ways. I believe the qualities I've expressed in this essay and throughout my portfolio, reflect someone with both the potential and the drive to continually grow. These traits, combined with my education, position me for future success, whether academically or professionally. My time at Bridgewater helped me rediscover my love for learning, and I've grown so much since I first arrived. That mindset now shapes how I approach challenges, guiding me on the journey I've begun, both academically and personally.