A teal vintage typewriter is positioned on a light-colored wooden desk. To the right of the typewriter is a yellow notepad with lined paper. The background is a wooden surface with vertical planks. The text "BEST OF STUDENT ESSAYS" is centered in a bold, teal, sans-serif font.

# BEST OF STUDENT ESSAYS

VOLUNTEER STATE COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE

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2019-2020



**Volunteer State  
Community College**

**Best of  
Student Essays  
for  
2019-2020**



## **Acknowledgements for the 2019-2020 Academic Year**

**Deans of Humanities:** Dr. Tonya Daniels & Dr. Melva Black

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**Best Essays Selection Committee:** Cindy Chanin, Laura Black, Lucas Flatt, Jaime Sanchez, Jessica Cocita, and Kristine Fox.

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## Introduction

*Volunteer State Community College Best of Student Essays* highlights some of the best writing created by students at Volunteer State. Each year, instructors at Volunteer State nominate students who have demonstrated excellence in writing and invite them to submit an essay to our selection committee; that committee of Vol State faculty then works collaboratively to choose superior student work for publication. *Best Essays*, then, represents the exemplary writing of student authors, the support of their instructors, the efforts made by nominating faculty, and hours of hard work the selection committee does in reading and choosing the best of the best submissions.

The purpose of this publication is twofold: first, to showcase exemplary student writing by Vol State students, and second, to provide our faculty with helpful tools for teaching writing and critical thinking skills to our students.

The student essays published here exhibit the elements essential to high-quality, college-level writing. They are original, thoughtful, well-developed, well-organized, and carefully edited documents. The authors' voices are strong, the prose is engaging, and the pieces are written with a clear sense of audience and purpose. The work in this volume includes expository and personal essays, short research-based essays, analytical essays, and longer, more advanced researched arguments. The student submissions are separated into three categories, and one student in each category is awarded a prize for his or her work. Prize winners are chosen based on creativity, originality, critical thought, organization, and an awareness of the fundamentals of good writing.

Section 1 focuses on expository writing such as personal responses to selected topics, critical analysis, and essays, which do not typically include formal research. The essays generally rely upon the rhetorical modes of narration, description, illustration, and analysis.

Section 2 focuses on short research essays written for English Composition 1. This category gives first semester composition students the chance to show off their beginning collegiate research skills without having to compete with more advanced writers. Good research essays employ rhetorical modes such as comparison and contrast and/or analysis of cause and effect as a means of critical engagement. They include research from a limited number of sources.

Section 3 focuses on research essays written by students taking English Composition 2 (English 1020) and other courses in which research-based writing is required. The critical discussions are well-developed, and the research for some of these essays may be substantial.

The student essays appearing in this publication were submitted between the summer 2019 and summer 2020 terms. We think they demonstrate both the excellence and diversity of student writing at Volunteer State. We would like to thank all the professors who nominated student essays and encouraged students to submit. We'd also like to extend our sincerest congratulations to the students whose work appears here. It is our goal to continue to develop this project, and to publish the best student writing at Volunteer State in a way that is meaningful to both students and faculty alike.

Editor Emeritus Leslie LaChance, Committee Chair  
On behalf of the *Best Essays* Committee



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# Section 1: Expository Writing

**CATEGORY PRIZE WINNER**

*In Jennifer Tharp's "My 'Ah ha' Moment," readers encounter a comical, yet life changing, event that occurred between the author and their grandmother. Tharp balances humor and sincerity while narrating a situation that would easily make others cringe. Through this narrative essay, the author details the discovery of their true calling.*

---

Jennifer Tharp

Dr. Shapiro

ENGL 1010-021

12 September 2019

My "Ah ha" Moment

It was a gorgeous spring day. The sky was a perfect shade of baby blue, and the afternoon sun was gleaming down and spreading just the right amount of warmth in the air. My husband and I were remodeling our kitchen, so I was in Russellville to finalize color selections. The color choices had come together so perfectly, and the weather could not have been any better. My grandmother lives about five miles from the cabinet shop, so I decided to stop by for a visit.

Going to my grandma's house is always such a treat. Her house is ever so warm and welcoming, just like her. She constantly has fresh baked goodies on her kitchen counter and always greets you at the door with open arms and the most beautiful smile. However, on this day, she did not greet me at the door. There was no warm welcome or a "I am so happy that you stopped by." I had to knock on the door a couple of times before she eventually came out of her bedroom to answer. Before she ever opened the door, I could tell that something was not right. She didn't have the warm welcoming beautiful smile on her face; instead she had the look of complete exhaustion.

"Hey Mamaw. Is everything okay? You don't look very well," I said to her.

I was not prepared for what came next. Tears started to well up in her eyes, and a defeated look came over her face. “I have been up all night. My stomach hurts, and I can’t stop using the restroom. I feel so tired, I just don’t know what to do.”

I immediately called my mom, “Mamaw isn’t feeling well. I think she needs to see a doctor.” My mom agreed, and we made the decision to get her to a doctor as soon as possible. I gathered some of her things, and we headed to the hospital.

We were on the way to the hospital when the first accident happened. There was a sound and then these words “I think I just shit my pants; it feels like it is going everywhere. I am so sorry. I hope it does not get on your seat.”

Trying to remain calm and figure out where I was going to stop, I said, “Are you okay? I will stop at the next store, and we will get you changed. Don’t worry about the seat; it can be cleaned.” There are only a few places to stop in between Russellville and Springfield. Luckily, we had not passed the Dollar Store yet, and we were able to stop and get her cleaned up. Somehow, I managed to remove her soiled clothing, wipe her backside and legs, then clean up the mess we had made in the restroom all without feeling nauseous. We got back in the car and headed for the hospital.

When we pulled up to the emergency room doors, and we were greeted by my mother. She had a tired, worried look on her face that she tried to cover with one of those brave-face smiles. As she opened the door, she said in the calmest voice, “Come on, let’s get you inside.” She helped my grandma inside while I parked the car. I walked into the crowded waiting room and realized very quickly that we were going to be there for a while. We tried to make jokes to pass time, but the time felt like it was moving in slow motion.

The lobby began to clear out, and there was a sigh of relief when we finally heard, “Louise Reynolds.” My mom grabbed a wheelchair and said, “Hop on in.” Mamaw tried to smile, but she just didn’t have much left in her.

The nurse showed us to her room where we waited another few hours. When no one came in, I decided to go to the nurses' station. “We have been here for hours and no one has been in the room to check on her,” I said with frustration.

“I am so sorry; we just changed shifts. I will give your new nurse her chart,” the nurse behind the desk explained.

About five minutes later, our nurse and our nurse practitioner came in the room. The nurse practitioner was very soft spoken and gentle. “We are going to take good care of you, Mrs. Reynolds,” she assured my grandmother. They ran a few tests and x-rays. When the results came back, we found out that she had an infection in her colon and rectum, along with a prolapsed rectum. The NP proceeded to tell all of us that Mamaw was going to be admitted to the hospital for a few days. Panic immediately set in. All I could think was that she was going to be bed ridden, and she would lose her strength. I looked at my mom while they were explaining the next steps to my grandma, trying to hold back the tears, and said, “I do not think this is the best idea. What if she gets too weak from being here? What if she never recovers?” As the words came out of my mouth, the tears started streaming down my face.

“She is in good hands; the nurse practitioner knows what she is doing. Mamaw will be fine,” my mom assured me. I hugged my mom, dried the tears, and put on a brave face for my Mamaw.

“Do you need anything while we wait?” I asked, and for just a moment, I saw her bright beautiful smile, “No, honey, I am fine. Thank you.”

Once we settled into my grandma's new room, we waited for the nurses and doctors to make their rounds. Our new nurse had just come into the room when my grandma said that she needed to use the restroom. She made it safely and successfully to the toilet. On the way back was another story. The nurse put the stand that was holding the IV bag in the wrong spot, which caused her to trip over it and rip the IV right out of my grandma's arm. The sight of blood normally would make me feel queasy, but this time it was different. This time a sudden urge came over me to help. I just wanted to make it better, but I didn't know what to do. This left me feeling helpless. It was around 12:30 a.m. by the time they got Mamaw a new IV. We were all exhausted.

"Why don't you all go home and get some rest," Mamaw said in an almost raspy voice. "I am going to go to sleep. It won't do you any good to sit here and watch me."

We decided to say goodnight and head home. That was one of the worst night sleeps ever. I just wanted to go back to before she was sick and hear her make some silly joke or talk about how she was going to find her a young hot stud. Instead, my mom and I headed for the hospital to find that Mamaw had taken a turn for the worse. We were only in the room for half an hour before she got sick. She motioned to her mouth, gesturing that she was about to upchuck. I grabbed the "puke" bucket and held it as she vomited what must have been stomach acid. It was bright green and smelled terrible. After she finished, I washed out the bucket and cleaned her mouth.

"I am so sorry, honey," she said.

"Don't be sorry. I am here to help you with anything that you need."

Over the next few weeks, we did the same thing day in and day out. She would vomit, and I would hold the bucket. She would have a bowel movement (whether she meant to or not),

and I would clean her and help change her bedding. I kept her comfy by adjusting her pillows and got her food or drinks when she needed them. One evening, our nurse came in during one of the vomit sessions and turned to leave the room. I had already cleaned everything up when she returned.

“I am so sorry. I do not do puke; it is the one thing that my stomach can’t tolerate,” the nurse explained.

It was then, in that moment, that I knew that I have what it takes to be a nurse. It was as if a light bulb switched on when I realized all the things I had done over the past few weeks. I had always thought about a career in nursing, but I never thought that I had the stomach for some of the things that I would encounter. However, all the things that I never thought that I could “stomach,” I had already been exposed to over and over and made it through it all like a champ.

A few days later, my grandma was released to a rehab facility where they helped her regain her strength. On Easter Sunday, I went to visit her. When I arrived at her room, I was greeted with that beautiful warm smile, “Hello, there. Happy Easter,” she said.

“Happy Easter to you, too. I have something to tell you. I have decided to become a nurse.”

“I know you can do it, honey; you will make a very good nurse,” she said in an encouraging tone.

The experience that I had over those few horrible weeks is what ultimately put me on the path to my BSN. There cannot be a rainbow without rain. With all the bad that happened, the end result was positive. I am currently on my way to a BSN, my grandma is back at home almost as good as new, and all feels right in the world again.

*A charming foray into a childhood memory, Michael A Clower's "A Childhood Present: From Childhood to Present" uses strong sensory details and descriptions to recount his experience discovering a Christmas present. His reflection on the memory leads Clower to acknowledge the difference between a gift and a present and how this particular gift unexpectedly affected his academic and social life for years to come.*

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Michael A. Clower

Professor Linda Rebenstorf

English 1010-501

9 September 2019

### A Childhood Present: From Childhood to Present

"I don't think we should be doing this," came a hushed whisper followed by a pregnant pause. I froze. Turning around, I stared down my brother James' hasty eyes ... Well, I stared him down as much as someone a foot shorter can; I guess I stared him up? Either way, my eight-year-old face was doing all it could to express: "Stop being a coward, and do something stupid with me!" It worked. His nervous pause returned to a begrudging creep after an exasperated sigh that seized his entire upper body.

It was early November in Lafayette, Tennessee, a small town about an hour north of Nashville. On this day, there was a cool, crisp quality to the afternoon air; it was the type that never seems to end when you are eight. The windows of our small home were all opened, and the curtains consequently danced a slow methodic two-step that ever so often turned into an all-out Jazzy swing. My four-year-old sister Brandi was keeping to herself on the back-porch. Kind of. She was attending to the newborn kittens and was apparently unmoved by the attacks of the mother of the litter. Inside the home, my mother was preparing for her nightly two-hour



commute to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. She excelled as a charge nurse, but at the time of this story, she was struggling to get her hair curlers out of her hair. Then there was my father; he had finished dinner five minutes prior and was in the garage engaging in his nightly meditative ritual: tinkering with one of his car projects. This was also the reason for the hushed tones and brotherly stare-downs. James and I were on a clandestine mission with only the door leading to the garage separating us from grave consequences.

Across from the door to the garage was the door to Gaga's room. My grandmother, "Gaga," had passed away long before. Even before then, she had only stayed in the room briefly, but in our household vernacular, we still called it "Gaga's room." In all practicality, it was really a guest bedroom and storage room. The obligatory place that things that either lost their homes or never had proper homes, in our home, were relegated. My siblings and I were warned a month ago not to go in there, and we all knew what that meant ... well, we all thought we did: Christmas presents. James knew that there was a huge flat-screen TV behind that door. I knew that the Xbox 360 that had periodically been teased to me as a potential "Santa present" was surely waiting. Brandi, however, was the most certain: more kittens were behind the door for sure. Outside of the door, James and I did not hear any meowing. "Does that prove I am right, or prove the kittens are dead," I naively pondered.

James stretched his long thin fingers to the trim above the door, standing on the forefront of his right foot with his outstretched left arm maximizing his range. His index finger slid cautiously from one end to the other unsettling the dust until something fell from the top. We quickly glanced at each other before simultaneously diving to prevent the falling key from

making a noise. The bellowing crash that followed did not come from the key, but from our pretzel-like bodies clamoring for control of the key. “Shh,” he whispered loudly, with no sense of the irony. He had control of the key. We maintained our tangled position to listen for anyone coming to investigate the crash. No one came. After a few moments, we sorted ourselves out, and he carefully inserted the key into the door. As the knob turned, it creaked in a way only a door not meant to be opened can.

Inside, the room looked very similar to the way it did when I had last seen it. Gaga’s long unused bedroom furniture was as homely and mid-century as it had ever been. There were neatly arranged flower patterns on the cloths and ornate doilies accenting every flat surface. In addition to her things, there were boxes piled to the ceiling in several formerly open spaces. One such box stood out as unusual though ... It was a tall cardboard box dubiously covered with a quilt. James and I exchanged a mischievous grin. About two feet wide on each side and three feet tall, I could tell James’ wish for his very own big-screen TV was not going to be granted within this box. Now to find out if it held kittens or an Xbox.

We closed the door behind us, this time pulling up on the handle to mitigate the squeak as much as possible. Tiptoeing towards the box, we carefully measured our gaits to prevent the floor from creaking. It did anyway. The tiptoeing continued, on principle, until we reached the box. We each squatted down, and without communicating, grabbed one end of the quilt covering the box, and unveiled the contents within. Before I knew it, a shriek had escaped my lips in unison with my brother letting out a disappointed cry. We each covered the other’s mouth, but it was too late; the damage was done. I heard the garage door swing open followed by one, two,

three heavy steps towards the guest bedroom. My eyes were fixed on the shadows of two feet stopped in front of the door to Gaga's room, presumably searching for the key that was in James' hand still. An instant later, the door flew open, illuminating the room and my wry, guilty smile.

As he stood in the doorway, I could not see his face clearly, only a silhouette. The garage door was still open behind him, and the bright afternoon sun was at such an angle that it was directly behind his body. Before he said a word, I considered what I had seen in the box. The slick black exterior of the gaming console that I had so yearned for over the past year. I remembered how disappointed I had been the previous Christmas and over my birthday to hope for, and not receive, the toy of a lifetime: the Xbox 360 Elite. I had bragged to many of my friends in anticipation. "I'll get it this Christmas for sure," I had boasted for now two years straight. Several of my friends in school had an Xbox that I had played when I went over to their houses. Our game of choice was a shooter called "Gears of War," but the best part of having my own Xbox would be having the ability to play with them remotely, every night of the week. And as a bonus, none of my friends had the Xbox "Elite". A prestigious special edition that I could not wait to boast about. However, I noticed one issue: in the box there was no, "Gears of War". In its place was "Shrek: The Video Game". "A thoughtful gift, Mom and Dad," I thought, but not what I wanted. What use was my beautiful new Xbox if I did not have a game to play with my friends? All these thoughts raced through my mind, seemingly in an instant, as I peered up at my father. I noticed that his gaze was fixated on me alone, and to my surprise, that was because James had vanished!

"Son, what did I tell you about going into this room?"

“Not to,” I answered coyly, my eyes now glued down to my intersected hands.

“So why are you in here?”

“I wanted to see if what James said was true,” I responded plainly.

“What did James say?” It was at this moment that I noticed James’ cartoonishly stick his head out ever-so-slightly from behind one of the towers of boxes. His expression conveyed the adage “snitches get stitches” in a way only a brother’s glare can.

“Uhh ... he said there was a box of kittens in here for Brandi, and I... wanted to save them, Daddy.” The eight-year-old charm had been engaged.

He sighed, running his hand through his hair. “Oh buddy, your brother says some stupid stuff. Don’t listen to him ... I see you also opened that box ... Did you like what you saw?” I could see a proud smile crawl across his face in anticipation.

“Oh my goodness, did I ever! I can’t wait for Christmas! Can I play it now? I already found it!”

He chuckled before walking over, grabbing my hand and kneeling to my level. “You can’t play it yet. Let’s pretend for your mom that you haven’t seen it yet, and definitely don’t tell your brother or sister what you found in here, okay? We don’t want to make them jealous that they don’t know what they’re getting, okay?”

“Alright, Dad. You got it! But maybe I can play it once or twice before Christmas?”

I could hear my mom shouting from the kitchen for everyone to join her at the table. “Come on, buddy,” he said. “Let’s go get some dinner.” As we walked out of Gaga’s room, he

turned back and chuckled, “You too, James. Come on, doofus.” We all laughed on our way to the kitchen table.

That Christmas I received my first interactive, socially driven medium of technology: my Xbox 360 Elite. This preceded my first phone, computer, or even cable TV, so for me, it was the beginning of using media to communicate with the outside world. The peer pressure that came with having the console but not having the game my friends had led me to lobby to my parents through a thoroughly researched paper on video game violence as it relates to violence in the real world. That research led me to an appreciation for reading, writing, and psychology that I still carry to this day. It led me to this college course and to this paper. This medium also led to me forming and maintaining many developmental relationships that through a tumultuous childhood were invaluable. Those friendships served as building blocks for an awkward youth that helped me step out into the world with an otherwise unfound level of confidence and swagger. The memory of that console, and of stumbling in on it the way I did, is one of my most cherished to this day, because as innocuous as it seemed at the time, it has taught me the monumental difference between a gift and a present. A gift is simply something given or received; I cannot recall the sum of gifts I have encountered in my life, but a present is a gift that changes me and consequently I keep with me for the rest of my life. In other words: a gift is fleeting; a present is ever present.

*Narrative writing can be one of the most intimate views into a writer's mind, and Jade Parr spares no one's feelings in her essay, "Daddy Issues." An exploration of personal emotions meets descriptive narrative elements, which walk readers through a description of self-growth and self-love. For assignments that encourage an examination of inner workings, this essay is an excellent example.*

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Jade Parr

Jennifer McMillion

English 1010

12 September 2019

### Daddy Issues

I woke up to a crash that shook the walls of my home the way a wave crashes against a pier and shakes its sturdy floor. The crash was followed by the sound of glass raining on the tile floor beneath it. Immediately, I knew it was the giant gold-framed mirror that hung perfectly in the middle of an unnecessary amount of school photos of my sister and me. The reflection of light coming from my nightlight danced from the shards of glass like a lightshow in the hallway next to my bedroom. Everything was as still as the air moments before a tornado strikes and annihilates entire cities. Erupting out of the silence was the sound of my mom's wailing cry. That night, I learned that it did not take a tornado or a natural disaster to annihilate your world. All it took was 15 seconds. All it took was my dad.

When I was five years old, I believed that my dad was a superhero without a cape, and my mother was the antagonist who tried to rid the world of fun by any means necessary. My mother was never fond of the idea of her 5-year-old daughters watching violence such as UFC fights at 10:00 pm. I can remember my dad exclaiming, "Nancy, what is the big deal? We are having fun. Just go clean or whatever you do." At the time, my sister and I thought this was funny and just an effort to protect the great time we were having. My dad was the funniest person who ever existed to my sister and me. He was always laughing and making every

situation funny and never too serious. My mom, on the other hand, cried a lot. Every night in fact. In the perspective of a 5-year-old, the man who carried you around on his back while feeding you soda and candy is going to be more inviting than the mom who is always nervous, serious, and sad. It was not until I started noticing the cans that he would always drink out of, which I was never allowed to touch, that my dad lost his cape. These cans would turn my hero into the villain who was enraged by the slightest comment that he did not want to hear. At any moment, he could turn the clear sky into an ominous dark abyss. However, I do not remember ever being afraid of my dad until the night of the mirror. I woke up to my mom on the floor and my dad standing over her. She moved as if the house was on fire, and we only had seconds to escape. My mom swooped my sister and me under her arms with two suitcases in her hand. She turned to my dad and said, “You will never see us again,” and we walked into the darkness.

I was eight years old when my faith was restored in the thought of having a father. Or so I thought. After being without a father figure for a few years, my mother thought it would be a good idea to reintroduce the concept. My sister was extremely reluctant and refused to get in the car on the way to our new house. I, however, have always been the optimistic type and decided to only view positives from this. My mind never ventured to conjure up a “what if he’s bad” thought. It is funny how different minds can use different techniques to move forward or to stay in the past. In this family, my sister and I had taken on my mom and dad’s previous roles. My sister had become the sad, reclusive, and serious person that my mom had been while I had become the funny, never too serious, and careless one. The way my sister decided to deal with the loss of a dad was to hate every male figure in her life as well as shut out personal relationships of all forms. The way I had decided to cope was to pour everything I was into men. Trusting them fully and being blinded by the portrait of who I wanted them to be. My mom also

tried this approach. My new stepdad started out being this fantastic, fun-loving, caring person that we loved to be around. Quickly, we discovered that he would spit venom from his tongue and burn you with his words. He, in comparison to my dad, was an entirely different animal. He loved to throw things and ruin walls with his fists. The smaller you felt, the bigger he grew. Bipolar is the term my mother used to excuse his behavior. This dysfunction carried on for about six years until it had to be brought to a stop. It seems that the same night my dad became the villain repeated itself and again: another hero had died.

I was 14 years old when I realized that men viewed me as something they could destroy. I had unknowingly relinquished my worth. The process of losing yourself is astonishingly subtle. It started with allowing myself to believe that boys were men. I was under the impression that men leaving was normal, and that there had to be ways that I could make them stay. I could change them for the good, and I could finally have a hero. When you are raised in a world with negative words being considered casual conversation and insults being more prominent than words of kindness, this is your normal. The “men” I allowed to be a part of my life embodied every character flaw that my previous role model dads had. I would allow them to speak to me in a way that every word chipped away at who I was. I was what they said I was, and I had no idea of what I was really worth. What I thought I deserved is what I received. I think that the absence of a male protector, leader, or role model certainly can make for issues in judgement and character later down the road. I know, however, that the presence of an abusive, flawed, morally corrupt male figure will indefinitely lead to an internal war at finding your worth.

I was 18 years old when I healed. I remember sitting in church one Sunday morning. The preacher was speaking on marriage, which I had no interest in nor did I think it had any relevance to me. He was going on and on about how your life partner should be supportive and



kind and loyal. His words filled the room like a loud air conditioner did. The spoken words were noticeable at first and then they left the room, turning into nothing more than background noise. I was in a daydream state, and my mind drifted off until it felt as if the ground shook and the earth went silent. Again. The preacher seemed to be looking at only me, and he said husbands should love their wives as Christ loved you, so much that he gave his life. Selflessness was the title of the message and the word that changed my views of myself. I realized that I had been living in a shadow cast over me by people who were incapable of selflessness. I had placed a restraint on what I deserved because I did not think I was worth someone who would give their life for me. When I was 18, I reclaimed my value and removed the thought that it was found in a man. Since that day, the only person in control of my life and emotions has been me. And I thank God for the failures of men in my life, because they taught me to be my own hero.

Section 2:  
English 1010  
Researched Argument

### **CATEGORY PRIZE WINNER**

*Antiquated legislation collides with modern sensibilities in the prize-winning essay of Researched Essays. Amanda Harland's "Constitutionally Underfunded: The Fourteenth Agenda" tackles the outdated notion that property taxes should determine the funding for public schools in a given area with a well-structured argument and research to support her thesis.*

---

Amanda Harland

Dr. Mickey Hall

ENGL-1010-013

April 19, 2020

#### Constitutionally Underfunded: The Fourteenth Agenda

In 1954, the Supreme Court declared that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.” This followed the landmark ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, and established that “feelings of inferiority” created by racial separation in public schools would no longer be considered constitutionally justifiable. The Court went on to assert that, “Education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.” Since that ruling, the Supreme Court has continually ruled in favor of the decentralized system of public school funding. Inadequate funding for urban minority schools contributes to the problem of rising racial segregation in America’s public schools.

Most modern industrialized nations, such as global leader Finland, have a centralized system for funding public education. These schools are paid for by the federal government in an equal method, regardless of demographic, giving all schools essentially the same framework. The United States, however, uses a decentralized system. Authors Sadker and Zittleman found that public schools are funded more locally, through state and local taxes, with only an average of eight to ten percent of funding from federal government grants. Local governments also retain control of schools through state and local Department or Board of Education representatives.

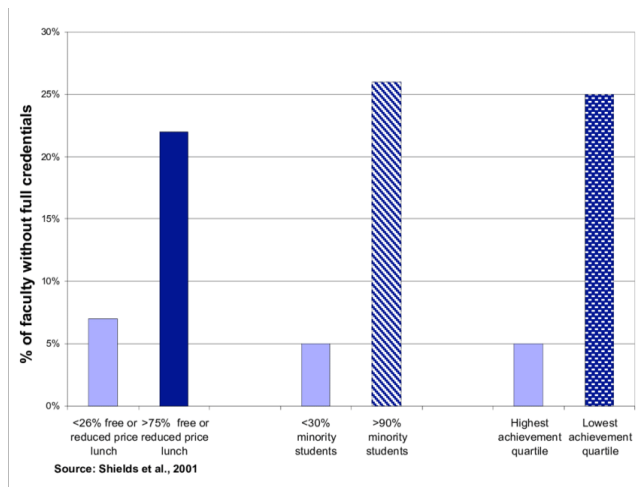
Those numbers equate to fifty states, 14,000 local governments, federal involvement in funding distribution, and marginal oversight for over 100,000 schools.

The decentralized system harkens back to colonial America, when the Constitution failed to designate a federal role in education, leaving the responsibility in the hands of the states themselves. Given the agrarian colonial society, towns and districts assessed a property tax as a means of equally measuring wealth and funding the local schools. In today's America, only approximately two percent of the population "work the land," but property tax remains the largest source of school revenue. Property taxes are now levied on residential and commercial real estate value. In *Teachers, Schools, and Societies*, the authors Sadker and Zittleman argue, "Whether a school district will find itself rich in resources or scrambling to make ends meet depends largely on the community being taxed." Urban schools, with already lower property values, must also compete with the use of limited resources allocated for public safety, public health, and transportation, creating municipal overburden. This further illustrates the disparity in funding between affluent suburban schools and impoverished urban schools.

In *Urban Sprawl and the Constitution: Educational Inequality as an Impetus to Low Density Living*, author Wayne Batchis claims, "A 2002 study by the United States General Accounting Office examining differences between inner city and suburban schools found that urban schools were typically older, with higher student enrollments, far fewer resources, less technological support, fewer books, and less experienced and lower-quality teachers" (2). Batchis goes on to describe education as a commodity with local districts competing to attract wealthy taxpayers to support their school system. This counterproductive structural inequality turns taxes into fees paid for by the middle class for the right to attend highly sought-after schools that only a select few can afford. Most middle class, white families flee urban school

districts for better-served suburban schools, creating a cycle of decreased tax value in urban districts, causing more white middle class families to leave urban districts. Even though studies have shown that more parents prefer racially diverse school settings for their children, American schools are increasingly segregated (Batchis 14-15).

Most studies also continue to illustrate how students in urban minority schools are not given the same opportunities as their peers in affluent white neighborhoods. In 2001, California's



most segregated minority students were shown to be five times more likely to have uncertified teachers (Darling-Hammond 218). Similar findings have been procured through litigation in Massachusetts, South Carolina, New York, and Texas, among a myriad of other states. Teachers who were found lacking

**Fig. 1** Distribution of Unqualified Teachers in California, 2001 (Darling-Hammond, 218)

in training and/or licensure were found disproportionately teaching in urban minority schools. A national study of scientific and mathematical academic opportunities confirmed the trend. Low-income, minority students have less access to the best-qualified math and science teachers. Students in minority schools had less than a fifty-percent chance of being taught by a teacher with a degree or license in the content material (Darling-Hammond 218). Multiple studies have already shown the importance of teacher preparation and certification for student achievement and academic gains. Those gains can be as much as five times when paired with a well-qualified teacher in the content area, especially in mathematics and science. When 900 school districts in Texas were analyzed, teacher expertise, as measured by performance on certification exams, along with experience and advanced degrees, was found to be the single most important factor in

increased student learning. Even holding a socioeconomic status constant, minority student achievement would have been comparable to those of their white peers, had they been given qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond 219).

Unequal access to qualified teachers is just one of the many challenges facing underfunded urban minority schools. In an excerpt from his nationally renowned *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, author Jonathan Kozol delves deeper into the effects of funding policies on the everyday lives of the students attending Fremont High School in South Central Los Angeles. Class sizes ranged between 30 and 40 students, far beyond the national standard of 18 – being the magic number for academic achievement. Kozol referenced court documents detailing “15 fewer bathrooms than the law requires,” few in working order, unlocked, lacking in basic hygiene necessities and maintenance, and with no working ventilation. The school was overrun with vermin. Students were forced to take and retake menial vocational classes, not aligned with their future plans, due to the school lacking staff for AP classes or even alternative elective classes. The students rarely had a regular teacher, mostly relying on unqualified substitutes, and the library was often closed, due to being utilized for testing. “Why is it,” one student asked, “That students who do not need what we need get so much more? And we who need so much more get so much less?” (Kozol 723). The answer to that question is with the support of the Supreme Court.

In 1973, with *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, the Supreme Court decided that the systemic inequality of funding does not violate the United States Constitution. Given the opportunity to level the playing field, the Court decided to instead rule to uphold the system, which equates zip code to academic and future achievement. What began as a class action lawsuit argued that the system, which relied on property taxes, discriminated against

impoverished citizens and was in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. Per pupil expenditures were so disparate, the poorer districts were receiving half the funding of the wealthier districts, with poorer districts having three times the population. Meanwhile, the poorer districts had the highest property tax rates. While the district court ruled in favor of the families, the Supreme Court balked at the notion. The Supreme Court rejected the idea that “Education is fundamental for the purposes of the Equal Protection Clause,” meaning it is not a constitutional right, thus setting the precedence for further litigation (Batchis 5).

Linda Darling-Hammond, a leader in educational reform observes:

During the years following *Brown v. Board of Education* when desegregation and early efforts at school finance reform launched, and when the Great Society’s War on Poverty increased investments in urban and poor rural schools, substantial gains were made in equalizing both educational inputs and out- comes. Gaps in school spending, access to qualified teachers, and access to higher education were smaller in the mid- to late 1970s than they had been before and, in many states, than they have been since. These trends may be related to the growth in childhood poverty rates since 1980 as well as the fact that most targeted federal programs supporting investments in urban and poor rural schools were reduced or eliminated in the 1980s. Gaps in achievement began to widen again after the mid-1980s and have, in many areas, continued to grow in the decades since. (Darling-Hammond 225)

The decentralized system of public school funding is creating an environment that precludes students in urban minority schools from equitable educational opportunities. On

national assessments, minority students continue to lag behind their peers, past gains having already been lost, or even reversed. Tax cuts have cut into in per pupil expenditures, though student needs have continued to increase. Impoverished urban schools continue to be penalized for falling short of milestones set by better-funded schools. Lack of education is linked to poverty and crime because the economy is no longer built to support an uneducated workforce. More than half the adult prisoners are functionally illiterate. Almost half of juvenile delinquents have undiagnosed learning disabilities. The gap in educational achievement caused by inequitable funding affects everyone, not only our most vulnerable students (Darling-Hammond, 226). Closing the achievement gap, by closing the funding gap, is the only way to ever achieve true reform and assure equal educational opportunities for all students.

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*Ballet has a long-standing history as a sport that encourages self-harm in the goal of perfection, and one will find it difficult to argue with Olivia Holland's "Eating Disorders in Ballet." A thoroughly researched essay, Holland offers several pieces of evidence that support her argument that ballet would be better served by emphasizing the individuality of a dancer rather than a dancer's weight on a scale.*

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Olivia Holland

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English 1010

31 October 2019

### Eating Disorders in Ballet

Ballet is known for its pristine lines, solid technique, and effortless grace. It paints a picture of perfection in the light as feather way dancers glide across the stage. While ballet in and of itself is a wonderful thing, it also paves way for destructive patterns in the dancer's life. There needs to be a shift in the mindset of dancers and companies to rethink their priorities and focus on health, rather than weight. Eating disorders, especially anorexia, are a prominent issue in ballet companies around the world due to the perfectionism engrained in dancers, the unattainable body standards enforced, and the emphasis on the dancer's physique affecting their ability to portray a story effectively.

Anorexia is a disease that takes hold of the mind before the physical effects are visible in the body. It stems from a deep desire to take control of something in one's life or from the need to appear a certain way and reach a certain weight. As stated in a report from the journal *Psychological Medicine*, anorexia is a "persistent severe food restriction" often accompanied by "excessive exercise, self-induced vomiting, [and] laxative abuse" and shockingly states that anorexia's "mortality rate is the highest of any mental disorder" (Schmidt et al.). This means anorexia's death rate is higher than that of depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. Mayo Clinic elaborated on the detrimental effects of this disorder by highlighting

symptoms common in anorexics such as, “abnormally low body weight, an intense fear of gaining weight, and a distorted perception of weight” (“Anorexia”). One of the most disconcerting elements of anorexia is its victims rarely acknowledge the severity of the problem and perceive themselves as overweight even when they are so malnourished that their life is on the line.

Ballet companies are marked by their pursuit of perfection, and many ballerinas start at the early age of three. It takes years and years of tireless work to be competitive in the industry and actually attain the dream of getting into a company and reaching prima ballerina status: highest achieving soloist. Ballet is also a constantly evolving art as choreographers are exploring new ways to move and create, teachers are developing more intricate techniques and combinations, and dancers are continually raising the bar in flexibility, strength, and their ability to perform tricks that defy logic. Simply put: there is never a time in a dancer’s life when they have “made it.” There is always someone skinnier, stronger, more creative, more daring, more graceful, more flexible, or more desirable for the spot in a company or a role in a dance. This means it is a tireless pursuit of perfection and a cutthroat environment where something as simple as a five-pound difference could mean being overlooked for the girl next in line.

Many companies have methods and practices they set in place to ensure their dancers are performing in top shape, or what their distorted version is considered to be, at all time. A famous choreographer named George Balanchine is a heavy influencer in the stick-thin body type often associated with ballet dancers. He exclusively used tall, thin, white dancers to create a willowy, light, and airy effect in all his work. Balanchine is now a signature type of choreography. Unfortunately, because of the significance of his influence on dance, not only is his style of choreography widespread, but his standard of appearance is also still heavily enforced. This is

implemented through weigh-ins or dancers being sat down and given a specific amount of weight they need to lose by a set date less the result would be being cut. Susan Bordo gave insight into the brutal consequences of weight gain in ballet companies when she reported that ballerina Anastasia Volochkova lost her job at the Bolshoi, because “at 5’7” and 110 lbs., she was too tall and too heavy for her partners to lift” (Oliver 38). Furthermore, Luke Jenkins stated in an article that weight was so important in the company he attended that every month the heaviest girl and skinniest guy would get 125 dollars taken out of their paycheck (qtd. in Symon). This heavy emphasis on the number on the scale becomes the defining factor in a ballet dancer’s career. It is no wonder so many resort to starving themselves in hopes of being recognized in their field.

Many professional dancers have gone public about their eating disorders and the battle to overcome it, like Misty Copeland and Katherine Morgan. These two dancers acknowledged the destruction it played into their lives and are now big influencers for the younger generation in promoting health first and not letting an obsession over weight steal the love of dance itself. However, some dancers lived with anorexia so long that it beat them. The danger of the dance world is that many dancers could not care less about the long-term effects of starving themselves if it means the glory and pride of feeling confident in their body and being recognized as an outstanding performer. Dawn Smith Theodore, a psychotherapist specializing in eating disorders and a former professional ballerina, sums up her struggle with anorexia in a way that clearly paints the picture of how detrimental this disease can be:

Five pounds turned into five more, just to make sure I would be thin enough to offset any future weight gain. I spent hours planning my caloric intake for the next day. Eventually, I developed the eating disorder anorexia nervosa, where I did not see myself as thin no matter how much weight I lost. My health suffered; I had a

low heart rate, no menstrual cycle, and problematic stomach issues. I was chasing the rainbow of perfection, an illusion. (“Eating Disorders”)

Once a dancer’s mindset equates beauty and talent with the least amount of fat possible, there is never an end goal. They have conditioned their minds to hate fat and do anything they can to rid themselves of it. Achieving the goal of seeing one’s ribs and appearing malnourished is considered their crowning glory of being in control and capable.

If the ideal ballerina body was celebrated for being the healthiest, strongest version of oneself rather than the thinnest, lightest version, ballet could pack a powerful punch along with the grace and beauty it already carries. While it is important to be slim for visual effect and for the logistics of lifts and turns, there needs to be a shift from an enforced weight and appearance for every dancer to an individualized approach of what is slim and healthy. There should not be as much emphasis on being a set weight and a specific image when the beauty is in the diversity of individuals. When people can come together with their unique strengths, gifts, assets, and attributes, the reach of a performance is magnified tenfold. Each dancer has specific strengths that are unique to them and a huge part of what makes an audience drawn to them. There is something that sets them apart. Maybe their sky-high leaps, their graceful turns, or the joy that exudes from their every performance. These things are only possible by strong, muscular thighs, long, slim arms, or a beaming smile: physical traits that reflect the dancer’s individuality. The ballet world should be highlighting the level of performance, the ability to turn, the stamina to train for ten-hour days, the control to balance on the tip of a pointe shoe, and the flexibility to leap 180 degrees in the air - not the number on the scale.

Dance is a genuinely beautiful thing. It is a way people express themselves and

challenge themselves. Dance pushes the boundaries of what should be physically possible and rewrites the rules. Ballet is the highest level of intensity and technicality, beauty and grace, with an air of untouchability. If dancers can get out of the mindset that achieving this standard of athleticism and art is equal to the length of their legs or the width of their ribcage, anorexia would not have nearly as much of a foothold. Ballet would still be a challenge with standards that only the best of the best could meet, but instead of trying to be an image of perfection unattainable by most, the focus would shift to fueling and training themselves to be their own very best. Anorexia can take its final bow, and ballerinas can get back to simply working hard for the love of dance.

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*If the Covid-19 Pandemic has taught our society anything, it is that simple joys are not to be overlooked. Caitlin Horner makes a sound argument for the benefits of being close to nature in “The Correlation between Nature Relatedness and Subjective Well-Being.” Using evidence from recent studies, Horner aligns ancient beliefs with what science is continually proving with the aim of improving all lives.*

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Caitlin Horner

Professor Brown

English 1010-38

20 November 2019

### The Correlation between Nature Relatedness and Subjective Well-Being

Modern societies all over the world are pulling people farther from nature and into overdeveloped cities with minimal green space. People seek opportunities for monetary gain and perceived success in a concrete jungle, consequently losing touch with nature. Many are too busy or do not have the resources to venture far from the noise and chaos of city living in order to reap the restorative benefits of nature immersion. A heightened sense of nature relatedness may be key to achieving long-lasting psychological benefits. Nature relatedness can be described as an overall feeling of connection or oneness with nature and all that it encompasses. The higher one's nature relatedness is the higher one's subjective well-being is likely to be, while the inverse is also true.

In order to understand the connection between nature relatedness and subjective well-being, one must first understand the correlates. As Elizabeth K. Nisbet explains in “Happiness is in our Nature: Exploring Nature Relatedness as a Contributor to Subjective Well-Being,” “Nature relatedness refers to the affective, cognitive, and experiential relationship individuals have with the natural world or a subjective sense of connectedness with nature. [It] encompasses one's appreciation for and understanding of our interconnectedness with all living things” (304). For people that score high on the nature relatedness scale, hiking, rock climbing, and kayaking are not just fun athletic activities that provide a dose of serotonin and adrenaline; they are



immersive experiences and opportunities to feel one with nature in a modern society that has become increasingly segregated from the natural world. Many nature activities also allow the individual to experience flow, as explained by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “[t]he concept describes a particular kind of experience that is so engrossing and enjoyable that it becomes autotelic, that is, worth doing for its own sake” (148-149). These kinds of experiences can lead to an increase in subjective well-being or how one perceives their own level of happiness. In “Subjective Well-Being: The Science of Happiness and a Proposal for a National Index,” Ed Diener explains that “[p]eople experience abundant [subjective well-being] when they feel many pleasant and few unpleasant emotions, when they are engaged in interesting activities, when they experience many pleasures and few pains, and when they are satisfied with their lives” (34). People with a high level of nature relatedness are more likely to experience an increase in subjective well-being after taking a hike, watching a sunset, or viewing a nature documentary. These simple activities often cost nothing to the individual but produce high rewards in multiple aspects.

Exposure to nature is good for the psyche: mind, body, and spirit. Spending time outdoors not only improves physical health by providing exercise, vitamin D, and oxygen, but it also helps to reduce stress and restore cognitive functions. There are several theories that support this idea; the two main ones being Ulrich’s stress reduction theory and Kaplan’s attention restoration theory. As explained in the article, “Is Nature a Basic Human Psychological Need? A Critical Examination of the Extant Literature,” “[Nature] landscapes, according to [stress reduction theory], help moderate and diminish states of arousal and negative thoughts within minutes, through psychophysiological pathways” (qtd. in Baxter and Pelletier 22). The peace, quiet, and beauty of nature may help people decompress and relieve mental and emotional tension while providing an escape from the worries of a demanding life. This concept has been

understood for many years, across many cultures, before ever being explained by science.

Frederick Law Olmstead, designer of the Biltmore Estate gardens, Central Park, and the grounds at Harvard University, proposed that “[natural scenery] employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system” (qtd. in Kaplan 174). Baxter and Pelletier further illustrate this point in a unique way:

The idea is that being away from nature for prolonged periods of time will lead to fatigue in a person’s cognitive capacities and emotional regulations that will ultimately be restored when a person has had a substantive immersive experience in a natural environment.... Put another way, we can consider a human being to be a ‘battery’ with respect to cognitive, psychological, and emotional energy, and the natural environment to be the ‘charging station.’ (24)

The four “components of restorative environments,” according to the attention restoration theory, are being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility (Kaplan 174). Nature fulfills all four requirements amply making it one of the best restorative environments, or charging stations, for cognitive functions, namely directed attention.

Why do many people feel an instinctual connection to nature? For some it seems obvious, innate even, while others do not immediately make the connection. This could be explained by nature, nurture, or both. Nisbet notes that “the ‘biophilia hypothesis’... [contends] that because humans began living in cities, separated from the natural world, relatively late in our evolutionary history, it is unlikely we have erased all the learning about nature’s value embedded in our biology” (304). The biophilia hypothesis proposes that a connection to nature and affinity for all living things is embedded deep within human evolutionary biology. Baxter and Pelletier

suggest that “human beings... have a preference for savannah-like landscapes... [including] low-action water, low-density tree coverage, and a natural prominence overlooking an open landscape, as such places include all the necessary elements for human survival” (22). People’s fondness of wide-open spaces and landscape views, such as a sunset over the ocean, may have originated in an evolutionary need to survive and assess one’s surroundings more readily. As Stefan Klein states in “Enjoyment,” “Nature invented positive feelings to seduce us into useful behavior” (203). While one’s innate sense of connection to all living things may have biological roots, it can also be further instilled at a young age by raising children in and around natural settings, thus nurturing an emotional attachment to nature in general or particular environments such as the beach or the mountains. This may develop a nostalgic sense of place attachment and foster a greater desire to protect such environments.

Ecopsychology is a branch of psychology that assesses the relationship between environmental wellness and human psychological well-being. Nisbet explains that “[o]ur interconnectedness with the earth and sense of inclusion in nature is often referred to as our ecological identity.... An ecological identity encompasses the self... and the planet’s ecosystems, so that damage to the planet is seen as damage to the self” (304). In a world where most people spend more time in front of a screen than they do in natural settings, it is no wonder environmental concerns are being met with blank stares and apathy. This could spell disaster not only for the environment but for the psychological well-being of future generations if they fail to identify with nature. Nisbet states that “[a] corollary of ecopsychology theory is that a disconnection from nature may be leading not only to an unhealthy environment, but to unhealthy and unhappy humans as well” (305). Studies have not only linked nature relatedness to an increase in subjective well-being but have also shown that a lack of access to nature can have

many negative mental and physical consequences. Baxter and Pelletier point out that “children raised in urban environments have higher prevalence rates of somatic complaints ... social withdrawal, delinquency, aggression... mood and emotional problems and disorders ... Asperger disorder, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder” (26-27). In a study of adults and their relative proximity to natural areas, Verheij Maas found that “having 10% more green space than average [close] to one’s home led to lowered prevalence rates of coronary heart disease, neck and back complaints... depression, anxiety disorders, upper respiratory tract infections, asthma, migraines... and diabetes” (Baxter and Pelletier 27). Clearly there is a link between access to natural environments and mental and physical pathology.

Humans have come a long way in a relatively short period of time but at what cost? The industrialization and expansion of urban areas along with the exploitation of natural habitats for finite resources is leading not only to environmental but self-destruction. The good news is that it is not too late. If the biophilia hypothesis is correct, then all humans have an innate connection to nature whether they are aware of it or not. The more people get out into nature and experience that connection and the restorative benefits it has to offer, the more likely they are to come back for more and the higher their nature relatedness and subjective well-being are likely to be. Nature provides everything humans need to survive and thrive, not just food and resources but peace and contentment. While happiness is clearly a multifaceted mystery, nature relatedness seems to be one of the fundamental puzzle pieces. Humankind’s intrinsic search for happiness may just lead back to where it all started: nature.

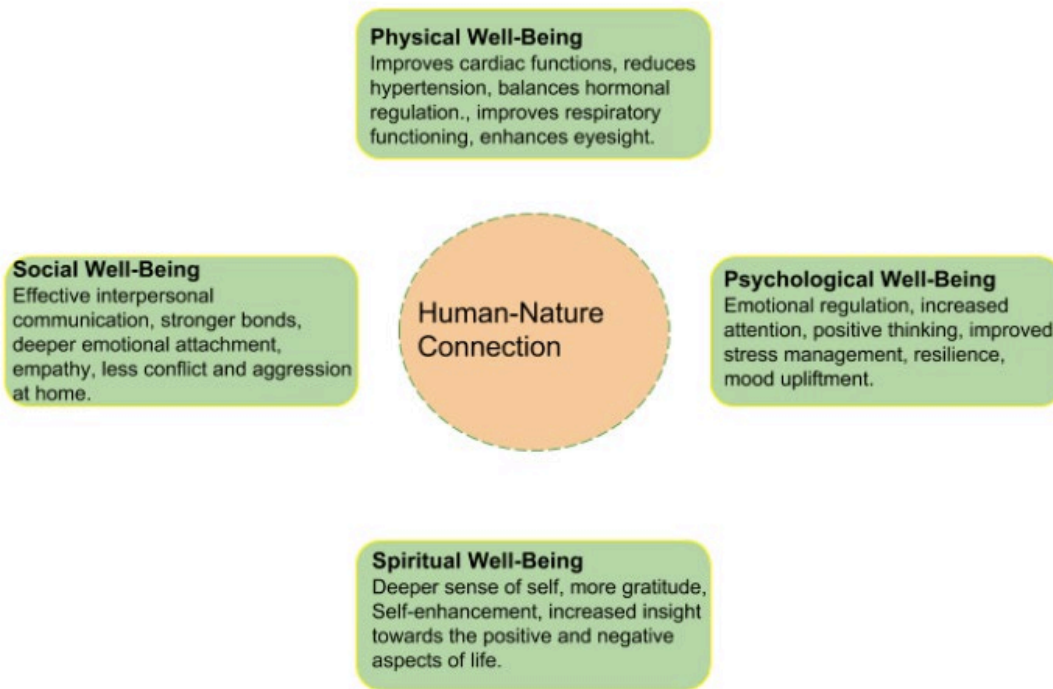


Fig 1. The benefits of nature relatedness. (Chowhury).

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Section III  
Advanced Researched  
Argument

## ***CATEGORY PRIZE WINNER***

*An often-overlooked cornerstone of American education and culture, historically black colleges or universities are the focus of Ari Avant's "Education the Black Student." Avant's essay walks readers through a logical argument of how HBCUs are underfunded and why it is crucial to correct this problem now for the sake of Black students and education in America.*

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Ari Avant

Professor Eades

ENGL-1020- U10

14 May 2020

### Educating the Black Student

Oprah Winfrey, Toni Morrison, Taraji P. Henson, and Katherine Johnson: what do all these people have in common? The answer is they all attended a historically black college or university, or HBCU. HBCUs have a rich legacy of producing greatness. However, these institutions of higher education are struggling to survive due to the lack of funding they receive. HBCUs do not receive as much state or local funding as other institutions do. On average, predominately white institutions (PWIs) receive more state funding than HBCUs do, generating schools (HBCUs) that are ill equipped to fully serve their student population. Due this lack of funding, HBCUs have problems fixing issues that arise on their campuses, and they are not able to adequately support the talent that is displayed on their campuses; as a result, these issues with funding sequentially cause black students to rethink their decisions about attending HBCUs. Because HBCUs are currently unsuited to fully serve their students, more and more black students are making the decision to attend PWIs. Moreover, black students are choosing to attend PWIs, believing they can receive "better educations" from these institutions. However, these institutions do not have the resources to support this level of diversity within their schools,



meaning that black students are not receiving “better educations” from PWIs. Furthermore, black students are being failed by these schools, because PWIs cannot provide the resources these students need to thrive during their educational careers. HBCUs are not funded well enough to support the academic talent that black students bring onto their campuses.

HBCUs have a long and rich history within American society. These institutions are defined as schools that were founded in the United States and its territories before 1964. Their primary purpose was to educate and serve black students. However, their doors have always been open to students of any race. Before the Civil War ended, several HBCUs had already been established, but after the Supreme Court’s ruling in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, the emergence of HBCUs ascended. In this ruling, the Supreme Court's decision was “separate but equal.” This meant that blacks and whites were legally allowed to have separate facilities as long as they were equal, but most historians would agree that “colored” facilities were never “equal to their white counterpart in actuality” (History.com Editors). This demonstrates that the “separate but equal” clause was never really a source for equal treatment of blacks and whites. Historically, severe financial burdens, such as school closings, have only affected private HBCUs; this is attributed to the fact that they are not funded by taxpayers' money. Instead, they rely on loans and money from other sources.

While historically this has been the case, recently public HBCUs have seen a rise in financial difficulties. According to Thomas Sav, author of “Separate and Unequal: State Financing of Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” “their public [sector] counterparts are being forced into the same financial difficulties” (Sav 1). He furthers this by stating that all HBCUs have faced financial hardships since their openings, and that, generally speaking, HBCUs have more financial problems than PWIs. Sav claims that the way public HBCUs

receive money varies from state to state. Sav also talks about how some HBCUs rely on their funding from tuition while others depend on state governments to fund their schools, “Revenue not produced from student tuition comes primarily from state appropriations and grants” (Sav 1). He also discusses the fact that not all states equally fund their public HBCUs, so in states where this is not the case, the Federal Government usually picks up this slack. Sav explains, “Generally, where states have failed in relative terms to financially support HBCUs, the federal government has compensated” (Sav 2). On average, HBCUs receive more money from the federal government than PWIs do because they rely on this money more than PWIs do. The real gap in funding is not apparent until one examines the amount of money that is being distributed within the local government. Sav states, “A state-by-state comparison shows that within many states PWCUs [PWIs] receive a larger percentage of revenue support in comparison to HBCUs” (Sav 3). Therefore, HBCUs have to rely on funds from other places such as students' tuition money, federal money, loans, and grants in order to survive.

Since HBCUs do not receive as much funding as their white counterparts, their students have to weather the outcome of these consequences. For example, Tennessee State University students lost power in three of their dorms after the power system was hit by a lightning strike. Alexandria Adams, a news reporter for Channel 4 says that “Tennessee State University continues to experience electrical problems on its campus. The issue has been an ongoing issue for the last four days” (Adams). It was revealed that this was not the first-time students had lost power in their dorms. Students have stated that they were made to take showers in the dark and throw away spoiled food. Issues such as these do not only plague this university but are seen at multiple HBCUs. Because HBCUs do not receive adequate funding, they are not able to easily repair issues when they arise. Another effect of inadequate funding is seen in the classroom. The

talent that is displayed at many HBCUs is not able to be supported. Ivory A. Toldson, author of “The Funding Gap between Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Traditionally White Institutions Needs to be Addressed (Editor’s Commentary),” states that “the true promise of HBCU innovation will never be fully realized without sincere investments from the federal, state, and local governments, as well as private foundations” (Toldson 4). This proves that HBCUs are not able to appropriately support the talent that is displayed within their schools. As a result of the sparse funds that HBCUs receive, many black students decide to fulfil their educations elsewhere.

With the issue of funding that many HBCUs face, it is no surprise that many black students are choosing to attend other schools for their education. Some people even go so far as to argue that HBCUs promote a culture of racism and exclusion, which leads those people to argue that not only should they not receive adequate funding, but that these schools do not serve a purpose in American society anymore. In the article titled “‘Yet with A Steady Beat’: Advocating Historically Black Colleges and Universities as Black Women in the Age of Trump’s America,” the collection of authors, Kayla C. Elliott, Brittany-Rae Gregory, and Crystal A.deGregory, discuss just how important HBCUs are for students. The authors state the following, “HBCUs have served as affirming spaces for growth and learning, and they continue to do so at this very moment ... these institutions provide refuge from the hail of white supremacy that has rained on and reigned over people of color ...” (Elliott). This shows that HBCUs do still serve a purpose, which is to educate and serve the black student. Therefore, these schools deserve to receive proper funding. One way these schools could generate a source of revenue is through sports. HBCUs are currently not a part of major football leagues such as the SEC. Instead, they have their own leagues, such as the S.W.A.C. and M.E.A.C. The SEC makes

its money from athletes, and most of the athletes that play for schools that are within the SEC are black. This means that these leagues are profiting from black athletes' success. In her article "What the Right Doesn't Understand about Black Colleges," author Jemele Hill discusses how she pushes for black student athletes to attend HBCUs. Hill states that football and basketball coaches "make millions ... because of the lucrative television and merchandise deals that marquee black talent has helped them secure" (Hill). As stated before, Hill is highlighting how major college football leagues such as the SEC depend on black athletes to make money. Not only are these athletes helping the leagues make money, but they are also making money for the various schools they play for. For instance, a school such as the University of Alabama makes millions from the football program. If more black athletes made the decision to attend HBCUs, then this same talent would be brought to these institutions, and HBCUs would have the means to be able to dig themselves out of financial woes. These schools could thrive.

HBCUs specialize in fostering support for black students. This is the premise for which they were founded. Their mission is to serve the black community and to supply them with both the academic and physical resources they need in order to thrive. Even if HBCUs do not always have the monetary means to take care of the school buildings themselves, they will always make sure to take care of the students. This was apparent in a recent article, published by Christine Kreyling, on Fisk University. The university had been donated a piece that was a part of the Stieglitz Collection during the Civil Rights era. When the artist's wife, Georgia O'Keeffe presented the piece to the school in 1949, she stated:

This part of the Stieglitz Collection goes to Fisk University with the hope that it may show that there are many ways of seeing and thinking, and possibly,

through showing that there are many ways, to give someone confidence in his own way, which may be different, whatever its direction. (Kreyling)

Because she donated the piece to Fisk University, an HBCU, anyone white or black, could view the artwork, which was her goal in donating the piece. Essentially, this collection was a part of history, and Fisk understood this. At the time of the donation, the school was financially stable and could afford to house the piece on their campus, but as time went on, the university struggled with trying to keep the piece on the campus due to all of the costs that housing the piece incurred. Fisk settled upon an agreement with the Crystal Bridges Museum, but eventually this too became hard for the university to pay. Fisk went through a long, drawn out legal battle to keep the piece at the university. Even though they were somewhat struggling to keep this piece displayed, Fisk realized that it was not just about the money that it was receiving from the piece, but rather the value students had in the piece. At one point, a spokesperson for the university is even noted as stating that “it's equally important to ensure that the students appreciate their culture — their writing, arts, and history” (Kreyling). Fisk University went to great lengths to make sure that this piece was kept on the campus to honor the history of the collection and to educate students on the matter. Fisk put the students above the money, even though they grappled trying to house the piece, because they knew that the students found meaning in it. This is something that is not seen at PWIs.

The fact that Fisk went to these great lengths to keep this collection displayed for its students shows just how much this university cares, a characteristic that is common at HBCUs across the country. However, for black students that choose to attend PWIs, this level of concern for them may not always be met. Athlete or not, most black students opt out of attending HBCUs. The number of students that currently attend HBCUs has significantly dropped to about

9% (National Center for Education Statistics). This low number is due to the fact that black students, and their parents, have fabricated false notions about HBCUs. When it comes to education, they believe that the more money will equal a better college education. Not taking into consideration that a student's education encompasses everything, from the classroom work, to the faculty, and even student body support on campus. Therefore, the overall education is not better for black students who chose to attend PWIs. In his article titled "Today's Blacks Students Underrate HBCUs," Walter M. Kimbrough explains some of the complaints he has heard over the years from black students who choose not to attend HBCUs:

When I speak on college campuses and meet black students, I hear story after story of their feeling alienated, unaware of basic resources on the campus that could help them prepare for careers or graduate and professional school.

(Kimbrough)

Black students who attend schools other than HBCUs often feel left out or are treated like they are just another number, within the student population, no different than the next person.

Kimbrough goes further to say that the schools are not doing anything to provide black students with the resources they need to be successful in these environments. He explains, "They [students] want to have black faculty and administrators as mentors and a curriculum that reflects their experiences. They are looking for spaces on campus that reflect their culture that is free of racial micro- and macro-aggressions" (Kimbrough). Kimbrough is showing that black students are often unaware of the resources that they can receive to further their education. Even though PWIs have better financial resources than HBCUs, these schools are not equipped to provide black students with a proper education. The lack of access to these resources prove that PWIs do not do enough to ensure that black students feel included on their campuses, and their diverse

perspectives are not reflected in the faculty who are teaching at these institutions. These are two examples of how PWIs do not provide enough support for black students on their campuses. While black students choose to attend these schools because they believe they have better financial resources, they are not able to receive the same guidance and support of these resources at PWIs, because PWIs are not equipped to assist and support black students.

It has been shown that right now in America, neither HBCUs nor PWIs are fully equipped to educate black students. However, HBCUs have a key advantage over PWIs. These institutions have experience in dealing with students from low income or underrepresented backgrounds. HBCUs also have a long record of accomplishment of producing greatness within the black community. In order for institutions of higher education to fully prepare the black student for success in America today, HBCUs need to be better funded and equipped for their students. It is noted that “Seventy-five percent of African Americans with a doctoral degree[s]...received undergraduate schooling at an HBCU. Eighty percent of African American federal judges attended HBCUs as well” (Gale). With a track record like this, it is obvious that HBCUs play a big role in educating many black students, and, more than ever, this is crucial. By 2045, “white” will be the minority in America (Frey). This means that HBCUs need to start receiving the funds they need to educate and prepare their students now. If something is not done about the funding gap that exists for HBCUs then America will have a problem because the new majority of people will not have received the education that they need to be successful and compete with others. This means that America will fall behind other nations in the education of its students.

One solution to this problem is that more funds should be distributed to HBCUs’ fundraising department. These funds could come from any entity, such as the federal and local

government or even private entities. The way to ensure that this solution is effective is to make sure that actual dollar amounts are distributed to fundraising departments at HBCUs. Associate Professor of Higher Education University of Pennsylvania, and author of “Comprehensive Funding Approaches for Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” Marybeth Gasman goes into detail about a plan such as the one list above. She lays out a four-pronged approach for this plan writing the following, “Commit actual dollars toward increasing staff and grants management technology” (Gasman 4). In this first step to her plan, Gasman believes that the government should commit dollar amounts towards fundraising departments at HBCUs. If the government committed a set dollar amount towards these departments, they would be able to hire more staff and purchase better equipment. As a result, this would allow these departments to better recruit students and alumni to give back to the school. This would also allow them to be able to reach more businesses and receive funding through these organizations as well. Gasman’s second step is to “Provide basic training in grant writing for faculty and staff at HBCUs” (Gasman 4). She believes that the White House would be able to offer this assistance to these schools through HBCU advocacy groups by holding workshops on grant writing assistance. If these workshops were offered through these groups, more HBCUs may decide to become member institutions of organizations such as the Thurgood Marshall College or United Negro College Fund. In turn, this will lead to another source of income for these schools. Gasman’s third step in securing funds for HBCUs is to “Educate HBCU administrators about the benefits of securing federal grants ...” (Gasman 4). This step in Gasman’s four-pronged approach could potentially be secured in the first two examples. For example, if HBCU fundraising departments had the staff and proper technology they need, they could attend some of the workshops held by the various advocacy groups listed above. Once professionally trained in this area, they could



then come back to campus and hold these same types of workshops for administrators. This would mean that fewer people would have to travel away from campus to attend the workshops held by advocacy organizations, but more people would be able to get exposure to writing grants if workshops were then held on campus for administration. Gasman's final step is to "Encourage equal partnerships between majority institutions and HBCUs" (Gasman 4). Not only would this allow for more funds to be allocated to HBCUs, but this could in turn encourage less division between these two types of institutions. This is the plan that has been laid out to bring in more wealth to HBCUs.

A similar approach has already been institutionalized at two HBCUs. Claflin University in South Carolina and the University of North Carolina A&T both used their money towards expanding their fundraising departments. Claflin University was struggling, "prior to a grant from the Kresge Foundation to support its fundraising operation ... but now it thrives, attracting major donors" (Gasman 4). Claflin University holds a spot on the Forbes list for best HBCUs. Another example is the University of North Carolina A&T. This school also used money they received to focus on building up fundraising departments. However, this school focused their fundraising growth on every HBCU in the state. The funds that the school raised from this project "helped the HBCUs in North Carolina enhance their fundraising operations and subsequently raise more private funds" (Gasman 4). The key difference between this approach and the one mentioned above is that these schools used money that they were given by the government and committed a percentage of this money towards their fundraising departments instead of being given a set dollar amount by the government to secure their fundraising departments. They had to use the funds that they received to strengthen their fundraising departments, which means that they had to cut back in another area. Unfortunately, this cannot

be done by every HBCU. That is why it is crucial for the federal, local, and state governments to better fund these institutions with the money that they need. If these schools were well funded, they would have the means to be able to pull themselves out of financial hardships, just like the schools mentioned above.

In conclusion, HBCUs have always been an important part of black and American society. Without these institutions of higher education, America would not have people in society such as Toni Morrison, Taraji P. Henson, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Katherine Johnson. All of these people graduated from HBCUs, and all of these people have left some type of lasting impact on American society. However, without the proper monies being allocated to HBCUs, black students wishing to attend HBCUs may not receive the same quality education that these people received. Today this is ever so important seeing that in less than 25 years the demographics of America will shift, and the minorities will become the majority. If something is not done about this now then there will be a gap in the quality education of students. PWIs receive the proper funds toward their academics, but they are not concerned with trying to ensure that all of the needs of their diverse student body are fulfilled. Sadly, the conversation of black students in higher education is seldom mentioned, but if America is serious about getting an advantage over other countries in education, this is a conversation that needs to be addressed soon. Now more than ever, it is crucial for America to have schools that can educate and equip the black student.

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*Living in the Digital Age, it is quite difficult to go throughout an entire day without encountering artificial intelligence. Makenna Owens details the benefits and shortcomings of welcoming artificial intelligence into our lives so freely in the essay, "Our Economy in a Digital Age." With thorough research and compelling examples, Owens offers readers a glimpse into the not so distant future of humans working alongside AI in our society.*

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### Our Economy in a Digital Age

Artificial Intelligence plays a major role in our lives without most of us realizing it. It is utilized by financial institutions and other industries through mobile applications, implemented into the streaming services we use, and is even integrated into our healthcare system. Many years of development have taken place in order for artificial intelligence to be at the level it is today, with its roots dating back to the 1950's. Rockwell Anyoha describes in "The History of Artificial Intelligence" how the intentions of scientists who began exploring this branch of computer science were centered around problem solving through computers, the interpretation of spoken language, and high throughput data processing. However, the extent of its use in different aspects of our society would expand exponentially throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the use of artificial intelligence has become more prevalent, so have the adverse effects on our economy. It has altered the need for specific occupations, unintentionally implemented a risk for bias, and unemployed thousands through automation.

Advancements in artificial intelligence are constantly occurring with no inclination of halting anytime soon. In a growth forecast for artificial intelligence dating from 2019-2025, Shanhong Liu, a telecommunications research expert, predicts that "[AI will be instilled] in

every industry vertical and is likely to be one of the next technological shifts we see in our society” (Liu). Just as we have seen with computers and smartphones, AI has revolutionized the technology industry. To combat the unintended consequences of advancements in AI and the adverse effects it has had on our economy, industry leaders, as well as United States government officials, must explore actions that can be taken in order to ensure our economy can withstand the changes it faces.

Though not the original intention of AI, the goal to have systems that exhibit intelligence similar to humans has increased. It can be seen in the virtual assistants being produced by companies like Google, Amazon, and Apple. The advancements in artificial intelligence that have occurred have in many ways allowed the capabilities of artificial intelligence to surpass the capabilities of humans. Sunil Kumar, a writer for *Towards Data Science*, illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of artificial intelligence capabilities and finds that AI has the ability to endure risky situations without human risk being a factor, limit human emotion compromising a task, increase efficiency and productivity, and promotes precision by eliminating the amount of errors possible (Kumar). However, in an article for *Forbes* magazine, Bernard Marr shows that there are also distinct ways that artificial intelligence cannot compete with the capabilities of humans. He argues that tasks that require creative thinking, human connection, strategic thinking, and imagination are better performed by humans (Marr). As programmers continue to increase the similarities and functions performed by humans and computers, the overlap in human and computer capabilities furthers the role that AI plays in our economy by impacting the job market negatively.

The strengths and weaknesses in terms of the capabilities of artificial intelligence has affected certain job markets detrimentally. The growing number of tasks that computer programs

are able to perform has altered the demand for specific occupations in America's workforce. An example of two jobs that are nearly obsolete due to technological advancements are travel agents and file clerks. New online platforms allow people to be their own travel agent and digital filing systems have replaced the need for file clerks in most offices. The fear of losing their job security has left many Americans wondering if their job is at risk for being replaced by a program or machine. A research paper written by Carl Frey and Michael Osborne published by the Oxford Institute and titled "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerization?" takes an in-depth look on how to actually identify what occupations are at the greatest risk (Frey and Osborne). It identified a specific process to estimate the probability of a specific job and inspired the creation of the website "Will Robots Take My Job?". This website implemented the methodology discussed in the article published by the Oxford Institute to create a computer program that can generate the percentage of probable risk that individual job fields face. This website concludes that the fields at highest risk for becoming obsolete are telemarketers, bookkeepers, accountants, receptionists, and couriers. These are some of the higher risk fields that face becoming completely obsolete; however, there is no job or occupation that hasn't been affected in some way by technological advancements.

Automation and artificial intelligence have impacted the employment of thousands of Americans. Through its capabilities and ability to cut costs, it has contributed to unemployment in the United States. Oren Etzioni, an executive officer of the Allen Institute for Artificial intelligence and Amitai Etzioni, a professor of international affairs finds this in their analysis of AI's future implications:

There is strong evidence that the cyber revolution, beginning with the large-scale use of computers and now accelerated by the introduction of stronger AI, is



destroying many jobs: first blue-collar jobs (robots on the assembly line), then white-collar ones (banks reducing their back office staff), and now professional ones (legal research). The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that jobs in the service sector, which currently employs two-thirds of all workers, were being "obliterated by technology." From 2000 to 2010, 1.1 million secretarial jobs disappeared, as did 500,000 jobs for accounting and auditing clerks. (Etzioni and Etzioni)

The adverse effects of artificial intelligence on employment are substantial and have caused thousands of Americans to lose their jobs or switch their job fields entirely. The impact AI has on the state of unemployment in America increases as we further advance the technologies used in America's workforce. Unemployment due to automation is not limited to any one class of worker but instead has infiltrated many industries. Blue-collar jobs like factory work, white-collar jobs such as clerical work, and even jobs that require skills that are more professional are in danger of being automated. According to *Harvard Business Review*, automation affects both high-skill and low-skill workers. However, more low-skill workers are adversely impacted by this because of longer unemployment rates between jobs for low-skilled workers (Bessen and Kossuth). Unemployment is an adverse effect of the increasing implementation of artificial intelligence systems in the workplace and has already impacted thousands of working Americans negatively.

Artificial intelligence not only affects the economy through the job market, but it also impacts the people who keep an economy thriving. The algorithms developers use in artificial intelligence can unintentionally implement bias in decision-making processes used by the government and industries. This bias stems from the imperfections in the algorithms created by humans who may themselves possess unintentional bias. James Manyika and researchers for The

*Harvard Business Review* wrote an article that illustrates ways in which AI bias has occurred, “Amazon stopped using a hiring algorithm after finding it favored applicants based on words like “executed” or “captured” that were more commonly found on men’s resumes” (Manyika et al). This meant that men were being approved for hire at a much higher rate than women. Another example of algorithm bias can be seen in predictive policing. Police predicting uses large amounts of data in order to create an algorithm that can predict where future crime might occur. These algorithms have been shown to exhibit major bias. The Royal Statistical Society found that PredPol, a predictive policing algorithm for drug crimes, used in Oakland, California, found that “...black people would be targeted by predictive policing at roughly twice the rate of whites. Individuals classified as a race other than white or black would receive targeted policing at a rate 1.5 times that of whites.” These results were found despite the fact that drug use was nearly equal among all races in that community (Lum and Isaac). Predictive policing could lead to minorities being racially profiled due to the biases in the algorithms. The misuse of AI algorithms may alter one’s chance to contribute to the economy by hurting their chances of getting hired or by unfairly altering their ability to have an active role in America’s economy or in the workforce. The unintended biases in the algorithms implemented into our society by employers and governments can lead to people being misrepresented or not given a fair chance to participate in the economy.

Artificial intelligence’s capabilities are not the only reason many employers are switching to computer programs, algorithms, and machines to do the business’s required work. Financial benefits largely factor into the decision to automate certain processes. RNA Automation, a company that specializes in integrating automation into companies, explains that the cost of installing, maintaining, and implementing machinery or software into a business is often

significantly cheaper than manual labor and training. This is the reason many industries justify switching to automation. However, though the decrease in labor cost may cause cheaper goods to be made, it also affects the wages of those in the workforce. Sylvain Leduc and Zheng Liu, researchers of automation and its economic impact, state in their working research:

If a job opening is not filled with a worker, a firm can choose to automate that position and use a robot instead of a worker to produce output. The threat of automation strengthens the firm's bargaining power against job seekers in wage negotiations, suppressing wages in economic expansions. (Liu and Leduc)

The option to automate a job rather than hire manual labor can be used as way of persuading job applicants to accept lower wages. Even in times of economic growth, a company can choose to keep the wages of its employees stifled rather than increase those wages during economic expansions. Despite the benefits of lowered labor costs and cheaper goods, AI also negatively impacts our economy through stagnant wages.

Though there are many jobs that have been deemed unnecessary due to artificial intelligence, it has also created new jobs and shed light on the importance of certain jobs. Data analysts and administrators, IT managers, social media specialists, as well as software and web developers are all occupations that have stemmed from the growth in technology that has occurred throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has also revealed the importance of certain jobs that computers are incapable of doing. Occupations like social workers, writers, public relation managers, therapists, and many medical professions are at a lower risk because of their need for creativity and human connection. As we move further into a Digital Age, it is critical to recognize occupations that are protected from automation in order to form solutions to ensure the job security and welfare of America's workforce as it goes through changes.

Understanding the jobs that are in demand in the digital age and recognizing what jobs are not at risk of being susceptible to automation allows Americans to have job security and is a vital part of easing the effects AI has on the economy.

Despite the harmful effects artificial intelligence has on working Americans and the economy, many feel that the benefits that come from living in a digital age outweigh the potential risks to the economy. New technologies are constantly being created in order to improve the quality of life of Americans, and this trend in advancements will continue with no likeliness of stopping. This integration of programs and algorithms in our everyday life has created the need for strategic solutions. Due to the complexity of AI and the range of its effects on the economy, such as its impact on individuals in a society and its ability to alter the job market, there is not a simple solution to combat the negative effects. Instead, humankind will need to access the skills we value and prepare for a major shift in the job market. Necati Demir, an expert software developer, utilizes a quote in his research from Mark Schaefer, who is head of production planning at Mercedes, to explain the implications of such a switch:

New technologies do bring monumental shifts in the way we do things, but the invention of the plow did not eliminate the need for farm workers, nor did the invention of the computer eliminate the need for mathematicians. As with all technological revolutions, the advent of AI will be utilized to help humankind reach a new paradigm, not to replace it entirely. (Demir)

Though this technological shift is inevitable, steps can be taken to ensure the job security of Americans and to ease the negative effects on the economy.

The responsibility of easing the integration of artificial intelligence into our society falls upon industry leaders and government officials. Industry leaders must do their part in relieving

the economy by creating more jobs for humans than they eliminate with the technologies they introduce into our workforce. This implementation has also established a vital need to expose young Americans to these types of technical fields, as well as encouraging them to seek fields with less risk of being deemed unessential due to advancements. Government officials are also responsible for aiding Americans during the Digital Age by encouraging technological skills in schools and preparing our educational system for the future. By providing the financial means necessary to schools, government officials will allow America's educational system to better prepare young adults to work efficiently in the workforce and compliment the technological systems in place. Without this necessary intervention from industry leaders and government officials, it is likely we will have a generation unprepared to compete with artificial intelligence.

The role artificial intelligence plays in our society has been evolving since its creation and has impacted the American economy negatively. The effects of artificial intelligence on America's economy has caused a shift in the job market, integrated bias into the everyday lives of Americans, and has resulted in the unemployment of many workers. Artificial intelligence has altered the need for certain occupations and emphasized the value of others. It has also unintentionally impacted the individual in a society through bias algorithms implemented in the AI programs used by businesses and the government. The adverse effects of artificial intelligence have created the need for America to make changes in order adapt to the Digital Age. America can combat the negative effects by encouraging young Americans to explore technical or social fields, encouraging the creation of new jobs to oppose the loss of certain job fields eliminated by automation, and by government aid to America's education system.

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*In a well written, balanced argument, Heaven Howard presents an insider's perspective to the issues facing the immigration and naturalization processes in the United States in "The Driving Causes behind Illegal Immigration." Ethos, pathos, and logos are equally represented in this essay, which forms a compelling argument and solution to the illegal immigration crisis.*

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### The Driving Causes behind Illegal Immigration

To Americans, the United States is home, and many take for granted the incredible opportunities offered. Just by being born in America, people are free to work, learn, receive medical attention, think, speak their minds, and welcome many other privileges considered rights that people in many countries all around the world do not have. To Americans, these privileges are normal. To immigrants searching for a better life, the United States is the land of all the opportunities they may not have in their own countries. To immigrants, America really is the land of the free and the home of the brave. How terrible that some of those people will not get to call America their home; at least, they will not be able to call it home legally. According to "Immigration: Will Congress Act in 2017" by Christina Lyons, "The number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has stabilized at about 11.3 million since peaking at 12.2 million in 2007." Although the number has decreased, there is still an overflow of illegal immigrants, and they will keep coming. The number of undocumented immigrants has been an issue for the United States for years; however, once the government recognizes the causes of the issue, a solution can be identified. The difficult processes of legally entering the United States and becoming a citizen, along with the taxpayer benefits the U.S. provides, are the main

contributions to the overflow of illegal immigrants in America, and in order to solve the issue, both the visa process and the naturalization process need to be cheaper and simpler.

Illegal immigration has been a hot topic of controversy in the last couple of years. Because it has been so thoroughly discussed, Americans have started to desensitize and misconstrue the issue. Nowadays, when illegal immigration is brought up, people imagine foreigners trying to steal their jobs and hurt their way of living when, in reality, many of those immigrants are trying to escape from traumatizing situations and provide for themselves and their families. Some of these people entering the U.S. are fleeing from tyrants, dictators, gangs, and other threats most Americans have the pleasure of never knowing; others are reuniting with family members or just trying to make a living. My grandfather worked for three years cutting sugar cane in Cuba to escape the dictatorship and restricted way of living. My grandmother moved with her mother from the Dominican Republic to reunite with her family and escape from a nasty divorce. They had to have a U.S. citizen “claim” them in order to move here. Like my grandparents, many immigrants are not trying to disrupt American lives. Rather, they are trying to obtain the “American Dream” that was advertised to them. However, illegal immigration continues to occur because the processes of entering legally and becoming a citizen are too expensive. Because of those complications, these families and refugees come into the country illegally or overstay their visit, and they are greeted with public benefits and little to no consequences. Once they establish a life here, undocumented immigrants often do not bother getting green cards or becoming citizens, because, in their eyes, it is a waste of money when they are doing just fine without being legal.

One of the main causes of illegal immigration is the difficulty and cost of obtaining a visa or green card. First, in order to get a visa or green card, immigrants must pay an obscene amount

of money. According to "Marriage Green Card and Citizenship Application Fees to Increase under New Proposal", the total cost of a marriage green card, a green card given to the immigrant spouse of a U.S. citizen, is around \$1,760.00; the green card application form itself is \$1,140. In 2019, despite the already costly process, the Trump Administration proposed a plan to increase the prices even more. The article says, "For marriage-based green cards filed within the United States, application fees would increase by 56%, from \$1,760 to \$2,750" ("Marriage Green Card"). It is safe to assume that most of the people immigrating to the U.S. from second or third world countries do not have that kind of money, and it would take them years to come up with it. If the prices increased, illegal immigration would only increase with it. Secondly, the process can take months and many documents to complete, and even then, their application can be denied. In the article "Why Don't Immigrants Apply for Citizenship?", the author writes, "People from countries with high levels of immigration to the United States - Mexico, China, India, and the Philippines - generally have the longest waiting times for immigrant visas. For example, both married and unmarried adult children of U.S. citizens from Mexico and Filipino siblings of U.S. citizens must wait more than 20 years for a visa to become available". When immigrants are trying to make a better life for themselves and their family or escape harmful situations, twenty years of waiting is not an option. Therefore, some forego the process and find other, illegal ways, like being smuggled, to enter the country. If immigrants do happen to endure the long, expensive process of obtaining a visa, some of them do not renew the visas and just stay illegally after it expires. Susan Collins, a U.S. Senator, says, "There are about 12 million individuals here illegally and between four million and 5.5 million of those came here legally but their visas have since expired" (qtd. in "Almost Half of Illegal Immigrants"). Because the process of entering the United States is too costly and lengthy, immigrants find other ways to enter. However, if the

process were simpler, more people would cooperate; therefore, the number of undocumented immigrants in the country would decrease.

Another main cause of illegal immigration is the arduous naturalization process. Becoming a citizen is even more grueling than obtaining a visa, so many opt not to. In order to apply to become a citizen, one needs to have had his or her green card for at least five years, but if they do not have a green card, then undocumented immigrants are faced with even more obstacles. The article “Why Don’t Immigrants Apply for Citizenship?” explains:

Unauthorized immigrants who entered the United States without being legally admitted and inspected are generally not eligible to obtain green cards while still inside the country. Even if there is a visa available, they are barred from “adjusting status” and getting a green card without leaving the country because of how they entered the United States.

For undocumented immigrants in the United States, getting a green card is no easy feat. If they do happen to obtain a green card, illegal immigrants still must pay for the naturalization process, which can take months to complete. In 2019, the cost of applying for citizenship in America was \$725.00, according to “Marriage Green Card and Citizenship Application Fees to Increase under New Proposal.” That cost was after having to pay over \$1,000 to even enter the United States. With little to no consequences of being illegal, many see the citizenship process as a waste of time and money. If the process were less strenuous, more illegal immigrants would become American citizens.

The third contribution to illegal immigration is the benefits that undocumented immigrants can receive in the United States. After they enter, either legally via visa or illegally and continue to live as undocumented immigrants, they are given federal benefits. In some

instances, illegal immigrants seeking asylum have even stayed with family members in the U.S. to wait for their asylum court date. In “Global Migration,” Glazer writes, “The Trump administration contends that [the] policy [of allowing illegal immigrants stay with American family members until their court date] just led to more undocumented immigrants disappearing into the United States and never showing up for their court dates.” All the undocumented immigrants, including the ones escaping their court date, are supported by the United States. If they need to go to the hospital, they are given medical treatments. While that is good, it is money that they are spending that they do not have. If they need jobs, illegal immigrants are also given jobs. Employers all around the country provide jobs to undocumented immigrants, because the immigrants are willing to perform tasks that most people will not perform. They often do not care that the employee is undocumented if they work hard. If illegal immigrants have children in the U.S., this makes the children legal citizens; Sydney Cerza explains in “Fact Sheet: Immigrants and Public Benefits,” those children are provided with an education, and because of the child’s status, they can receive federal benefits. Once they receive the public benefits while being undocumented, it is understandable that illegal immigrants lose the motivation to get a green card or become citizens, especially when the processes are that expensive.

Some people may claim that illegal immigrants are “stealing jobs” from American people. While it is true that illegal immigrants are holding jobs that could be given to American citizens, those jobs help the economy and are often tasks that Americans do not want to do. Those opposed may also ask why undocumented immigrants cannot just become legal and get their papers. Those people fail to recognize the difficult, expensive process of obtaining their green card immigrants must complete before they can apply for citizenship. Furthermore, illegal

immigrants endure those processes at the risk of being deported, so the idea of “getting in line” is far different from the reality.

While the difficult processes of getting a visa and becoming a citizen are the causes of illegal immigration, they can also be the solution. The prices and duration of both of the processes need to be the encouragement for legal immigration, not the deterrent. If Congress, the Department of Homeland Security, and all of the different agencies that control the regulation of immigration lower the costs of entering the United States and becoming a citizen, illegal immigration will likely decrease. America needs to be more accessible to immigrants, so the issue that has been controversial for so long will cease to grow.

If the cost of obtaining a visa or a green card decreased and the process was simpler, America would see a dramatic decrease in the number of illegal immigrants. When these people flee their home countries, they are trying to escape traumatizing situations or create a life for themselves. Most do not have the resources to follow through with the strenuous visa process; however, if given the opportunity, illegal immigrants would become legal and receive all of the benefits that being a legal resident or a citizen provides, because they would not have to worry about the potential consequences of being illegal. Decreasing the prices and simplifying the process of entering the U.S. legally would eliminate the appeal of being illegal. Furthermore, once immigrants receive their visa and enter legally, they are required to renew their visa every time it expires. According to “Almost Half of Illegal Immigrants Entered US Legally but Stayed after Visa Expired,” roughly half of the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants came to the U.S. legally and overstayed their visa. The reason is because a temporary visa costs well over \$100 to renew, and to renew a green card, immigrants have to pay almost \$500. However, if the

renewal fee was decreased, or removed completely, they would not be overstaying, and illegal immigration would reduce even more.

Like the proposed visa process, the naturalization process also needs to be simpler. The process of becoming a citizen takes too long and has too many complications. For example, it is common knowledge that in order to become a U.S. citizen, immigrants need to take a knowledge test on the history of the United States. However, most Americans, as U.S. citizens, do not know everything that immigrants are expected to learn to *become* U.S. citizens. In an already lengthy process, why do immigrants need to take an exam over the history of America when its own citizens cannot do the same? Before any change can be finalized, immigrants need to be held to the same expectation that American citizens are held to and changing or removing the test is just one of many, many reforms that need to be made. The National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) calls out another complication for New Americans with the claim, “Congress must fix the naturalization backlogs and delays and restore and strengthen the citizenship process currently being dismantled by this administration.” Even though the process is already extensive, some immigrants have to experience delays, which only makes naturalization seem unnecessary and unappealing. If immigrants could experience a seamless integration into American citizenship, more undocumented immigrants would cooperate.

Becoming a citizen needs to be cheaper, as well. Assuming immigrants already paid over \$1,000 to enter the U.S., they are now having to pay another costly fee to become American. Illegal immigrants do not come to America to be illegal; they want a life filled with opportunities that America has the ability to give them. Becoming a citizen needs to be more accessible, so more people can take advantage of the opportunity. The more legal citizens in America, the less Americans have to worry about illegal immigrants using taxpayer benefits. Once they are

naturalized, they can contribute more to American society. The author of "National Partnership for New Americans Members Promote Citizenship and Call on Congress to Fix the Naturalization Process," writes, "Citizenship benefits not only immigrants and their families but our communities and nation as well. New citizens experience 8-11% more in personal earnings, spend more, pay higher taxes, buy more homes, and help fuel our economy." Immigrants will become citizens and benefit the economy, but only if the U.S. will simplify and cheapen the citizenship process to let them.

Some may argue that if the visa and naturalization processes were simpler and cheaper, then more unwanted, threatening people would take advantage of the changes and come into the U.S. However, the same number and type of people would come. The only difference is that they would be legally entering the United States. Furthermore, the simplification of those processes does not mean that the background checks will be eliminated or decreased. People entering the U.S. will still be vetted at the border; the goal is to at least get them to that point. According to Scott Horsley, the Chief Economics Correspondent for NPR, "Visa applicants are already fingerprinted and checked against various terrorist databases" (qtd. In "Trump Proposes 'Extreme Vetting' for Immigrants, but How Would It Work?"). Simplifying the naturalization process will not affect the precautions already taken. It will only allow more people to positively contribute to American society.

The motivation to immigrate to the United States for most immigrants is the promise of the American dream. Unfortunately, due to the obstacles set in place to come to the "promised land," America makes that dream distant for people not born in the U.S. The overwhelming number of illegal immigrants in the U.S. is caused by the challenging process of obtaining a visa and staying past the expiration date, the costly path to becoming a citizen, and the benefits that



support them in America. However, with less taxing and expensive visa and citizenship processes, America will see a drastic decrease in illegal immigration and an increase in legalized immigrants and citizens, which will fuel the economy and create a more unified America.

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