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MALS Portfolio Essay Spring 2013

Receiving a graduate degree is something that I looked forward to accomplishing, as it would help with my personal and professional goals. There were many options when I started looking for ways to continue my formal education. Initially I enrolled in an aviation university to complete my graduate degree because the subject material was familiar, however, after three classes I was not satisfied with my experience. I found myself in a monotonous routine and was simply going through the motions to complete my education. After the three classes, I evaluated what I wanted to achieve by continuing my education. Through my reflection, I decided that I wanted a degree that would change my life. I was in search for something that would challenge my perceptions and give me an insight to worldviews. I believed that these goals would help me become better at my profession and a better person of the world.

I decided on my first goal of challenging my perceptions because I felt it would expose creative thinking skills that I could use professionally and personally. As a military officer and pilot, making decisions is an integral part of the job and over the past 13 years the leaders that inspired me had creative thinking skills. I have witnessed leaders that made decisions based on a single frame of reference, which led to stagnation. In contrast, I have seen leaders make decisions that were different from the status quo, and led to success. I believed by changing the way I think by challenging my perspectives would enable me to become a more successful leader through my career.

To change my way of thinking, it would require a difficult journey with lots of patience and commitment. My first course in the MALS program did a sufficient job in getting me out of my comfort zone. I took my first class while deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. It was my first deployment of three that I completed during my time at UNCG. It was only fitting that while deployed in a combat zone, I enrolled in a class labeled: Modern Problems of Belief. This class proved to challenge my patience and commitment to reaching my goals. When reviewing the papers I submitted for the course, one of them really stood out to me. In my *Hillman* paper, I discussed the relationship between the psyche and soul. The psyche and soul are striving for a constant balance, but in the Western world we have let the psyche mask the soul. Because there is an imbalance, the psyche works diligently to mask any concerns for the soul. As a result we are lulled into an endless search to satisfy the neglected soul. Eventually, the ego has to overcome the deficit and it begins to

“take on the hero role and carry the burdens of the world on our shoulders.” By taking on all responsibilities onto ourselves, “of course we fail...human interactions cannot bear these superhuman burdens.” (Hillman, 187) We play the role of god and exile the gods that are there to carry us through as if they cease to exist.

With my technical background, Hillman’s perspective was foreign to me. It states that we are constantly busy looking for ways to keep ourselves busy, which further alienates the soul. One of the issues with separation is that the things that are keeping us busy entrap us in a literal world. The literal world is limited with definitions, labels,

right/wrong, and categories. These ideals are prevalent in modern belief and truly limit the potential of a person because it leaves no ability to think of something that hasn't been created and proven. It is important to get past the literal and defined terms in order to build the soul and have a full experience.

A second issue with separation can be seen in another course I completed in the program: Religion and Ecology. I included one of my papers from this class labeled *Are We Gods*. Building off of Hillman's perspective that we attempt to be gods as our ego takes on a hero role, my paper highlights man's (mainly Western) attempt to conquer nature and become gods over the world. Hillman stated that we cannot bear these burdens and Suzuki agrees because "we could never comprehend the complexity and causal effects of our decisions." One example of this is highlighted in my *MRSA* paper from Global Perspectives in Biology. As scientists continue to develop new medications for infections, bacteria and viruses are able to adapt and become resistant to medications. These two papers show the limits of trying to be in complete control of nature and our surroundings.

Whether it is the psyche or nature, an unbalance makes it impossible to see the complexity in a situation. A determined mind that is trapped in a single perspective is unable to comprehend the impacts of decisions or actions. These lessons validated my reasoning for enrolling in the MALS program because it showed the importance of balance and the importance of reflection.

In continuing with my goal of changing the way I think, I also completed the course Dangerous Minds: Terrorism. I took this class for two reasons. For one, it directly complemented my profession. Since 9-11, it has been my job to hunt and kill terrorists

that are a threat to the United States and its interests. Terrorism is a huge part in my life and I wanted to use this course as an introduction to the psychology of terrorist groups throughout the world. The second reason I took this course was that I knew it would give me good insights to cultural issues that other countries have faced or are facing currently. Because I am involved in traveling as a pilot, I seized this opportunity to find out what was going on in certain countries that would cause a group of people to commit violence to achieve their goals. Was it government, society, or personal issues that would drive some one to extreme measures?

Throughout the course, it was revealed the various reasons that led people commit acts of terror to achieve a political agenda. In my paper *Turkey*, I wrote about three separate terrorist groups in one country that each had different agendas. Although I accomplished the goal of learning some of the deep-seated issues that caused terrorists groups to organize, one thing I didn't account for was the damage all the violence caused in the psyche of those that were victims. I also included my paper *Rachida*, because it showed the psychological damage caused by terrorism to innocent bystanders. In the movie *Rachida*, the main character is constantly under pressure from terrorist groups. In fact, a former student attacks her because she would not assist in the rebellion. The constant pressure and graphic violence proves to lead lasting psychological issues.

Revealing the psychological damage caused by terrorism affected me because of my experience in Afghanistan. I know war is devastating, but when people from your own country use the innocent to make a political point, it is easy to see why there is psychological damage. Viewing the goals from terrorist groups and its victims gave me a new perspective.

My second goal in the MALS degree was to become more cognizant of worldviews. Understanding worldviews is important as a pilot and as a contributor to the U.S.'s hard power. The courses I completed (Emerging Powers, China, International Business, and Age of Revolutions) enabled me to get a better understanding in world politics and the events that have led to the distribution of power today.

One of the countries that impressed me the most was Brazil. Brazil is part of the BRICS countries that are emerging as world powers. I included my portion of a group project in my portfolio because Brazil's use energy is an excellent example of how it is proving its place as a world leader. Because of Brazil's investment in energy, it has become almost completely self-sufficient from foreign energy, which has allowed it to avert the energy crises that have affected the world economy.

Studying the emerging powers is an important for my professional goals. Because of my involvement in international affairs, I need to have a good understanding of the future and its effects on the United States. It was also good to see the balance of hard and soft power and how I fit into the picture as a military member.

The capstone of gaining an insight into worldviews was through a trip to Prague for an international business class. As an attached student to the UNCG's MBA program, I was able to participate in an international study. I regretted not taking advantage of international courses during my undergraduate degree, and was excited that the opportunity presented itself again. The only times I get to travel abroad usually are because it is work related. This opportunity gave me the ability to fully capture the culture of the Czech Republic. The combination of cultural events and business visits introduced an experience that was unique because I was able to understand how the

culture in Prague was reflected in their businesses and marketing strategies. Although, I am not involved in an MBA program, the class enabled me achieve my personal goal of gaining insight to worldviews.

My goals in the MALS program were to challenge my current perspective and become familiar with worldviews. The classes I attended helped me achieve my goals and made me better at my profession and a better citizen of the world. Studying in an arts program presented many challenges after a history of studying science. One important part in the arts program that is not in the sciences is the importance of reflection. Instead of simply presenting facts, the arts challenged me to use the information gathered to develop a constructive my own perspective. By committing myself to achieving my goals, the MALS program has taught me lessons that will I will carry for the rest of my life.