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### **PERSPECTIVE: LIBERAL ARTS CAN SAVE THE WORLD**

When first given the task at the beginning of the spring semester to complete a portfolio I really struggled with gathering my ideas on the focus of my essay. I completed an entirely different essay for the portfolio in February, however I was not very happy with my outcome. I sent my essay to my portfolio advisor Dr. C. Headington and he rendered some very sound advice on how to structure my paper. He stated, "I'd rather you locate the main strands of thought that you followed throughout your MALS career... Is that possible for you? Maybe it's not. Maybe you had no idea what you were up to and just took the course and engaged its ideas. And that's okay because that's how it is sometimes." I cherished these words because it symbolized not only his confidence in me and my ideas but it also reminded me of why Liberal Arts was the important piece of my life that has now made things complete. For a moment I believed that I had no idea why I was taking specific courses, it was not until the near end of my final semester that I realized my main strands of thought throughout my MALS career. So here we are over one thousand words later with a reflective essay that grasps my development culturally, economically and socially.

When reflecting upon my flight through the MALS program I have learned and gained much; how to apply knowledge in real world settings, how to evaluate information critically and even how to formulate my thoughts, ideas and perspectives but my greatest gain is my new perception of how I view the earth, my community and myself. I have therefore realized that this world that we live in currently provides us (humans, animals and ecosystems) with life, food, and access to all necessities. However, humans are sadly but surely destroying our world and eventually without major changes life on this great planet will too suffer. I have acquired vital and necessary material and evidence from three major classes; Topics: Livable and Sustainable Cities, Religion and Ecology and Topics: Simple Living in a Complex Age, these classes has allowed me to clench a greater understanding of my social responsibility to be globally aware, care for the earth

and support myself and others to actively live a sustainable lifestyle for the benefit of all organisms and multi-cellular organisms.

*“There's nothing fundamentally wrong with people. Given a story to enact that puts them in accord with the world, they will live in accord with the world... But given a story to enact that puts them at odds with the world, as yours does, they will live at odds with the world. And, given a story to enact in which the world is a foe to be conquered, they will conquer it like a foe, and one day, inevitably, their foe will lie bleeding to death at their feet, as the world is now.”*

*-Daniel Quinn, Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*

This quote was taken from *Ishmael*, an assigned book in one of my favorite courses; Religion and Ecology. The book specifically reached to help readers understand how humanity has the ability to effectively reconnect to the world and have a more eco-friendly interaction with it however because of our mindset of human supremacy, we are contributing greatly to Earth's destruction. Daniel Quinn speaks urgently about the idea of Mother Culture and it being the force behind the taker theory (people who practice the act of taking and ruling, they have a sense of entitlement and are the dominant culture whose greed is effecting the Earth and its natural resources). Mother Culture has programmed us from birth through media, money and teaching that the taker mentality is the proper and just way to live. In order for humankind to release themselves from this mindset we must first realize the nature of our confinement.

This book and more directly this course allowed me to dig deeper into the overarching problem and realize the consequence. As I read Quinn and delved into the course I began to understand that humans are not fundamentally flawed as most of the heavy population religions tend to teach and believe, however we have a fundamental flaw in not realizing how we should live and care for our planet. We must not act as rulers or dominators of a world that does not belong to us, we must connect to the Earth in a way that contributes to all life. A leaver mentality, live simply and follow the rules of life that help govern other populations.

While I have not yet mastered the concept of living simply and following the rules of life, I definitely have a greater understanding and a better sense of importance and care of the things I do to and on this Earth. Fortunately, with this I have been

able to account for my own social responsibility and I have shared and made others aware that we need to give back to the Earth as the Earth has done for us.

After finally recognizing my social responsibility to the Earth and my environment, I had yet another eureka encounter while taking the course Topics: Simple Living in a Complex Age. Life is more than just the materials that we purchase, it is about the personal and professional relationships you build, family and friends. While many Americans, including myself before this course suffered from the very contagious disease affluenza, the good news is, it is curable but the bad news is that the majority of America are infected with it and do not realize it. According to John de Graaf, David Wann and Thomas H., affluenza is defined as a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more. While we continue to try to keep up with The Jones's we compromise all of our time for money. We spend our time working longer hours to make more money to purchase products that are either no longer usable after a few years, or products that we focus on that take more time away from yourself and the people that really matter. Not only that, but if we do not slow down our way of living "the American dream" or "keeping up with the Jones's" (in short overconsumption) then we will not only lose ourselves but again we will lose our earth.

*Affluenza's costs and consequences are immense, though often concealed. Untreated, the disease can cause permanent discontent. In our view, the affluenza epidemic is rooted in the obsessive, almost religious quest for economic expansion that has become the core principle of what is called the American dream.... If we don't begin to reject our culture's incessant demands to "buy now," we will "pay later" in ways we can scarcely imagine... At its most extreme, affluenza threatens to exhaust the earth itself.*

*-Graaf, John, and David Wann. Affluenza: How Overconsumption is Killing Us--and How We Can Fight Back.*

Dr. Headington helped my classmates and I understand the severe importance of becoming a downshifter, releasing the trap of advertising and that simple living can be a remedy to our social ills. Advertising is all around us, everywhere we go... it gives off the idea that what we have is not enough... We need more! However, the reality is... We do not. We need to focus on connecting to the community and earth

and spending time with family and friends never compromising our morals and values, living simply while gaining a better sense of self.

Another exceptional feature of this course that I found very interesting was how influential women are to the world. Women and nature's roles or ideals are extremely important to our society. I was introduced to the feminine principle which is an ideal based on inclusiveness, it does not intend to leave anyone out. It includes men, women and nature. The feminine principle is a threat to our current living standards of patriarchy (male dominated) however patriarchy is destroying our natural resources, this mindset does not provide the any avenues to putting back in the earth what you take out. Women, specifically in Third World Countries have embraced this concept because they realize how essential the earth is to their everyday life. This trend is slowly growing in the United States but it is not largely publicized. Ironically, as a woman I was unaware of our how necessary we are, but I am glad I learned because even if we are not publicly appreciated or given kudos every time we do something great, for example saving our world... I realize that our existence is about so much more.

*Wouldn't we all benefit from living in societies that were more careful, more resourceful, more respectful and more forward-thinking? - Jane Davidson*

Topics: Livable and Sustainable Cities allowed me to take a closer look at the things we do and use every day and proposed that we change our perspective and rebuild or remake our things in order to create a healthier lifestyle, environment and Earth. Many of the things we engage in and use including our computers, clothes, work environments, cars, chairs and even shoes... the list is extensive, but as ironic as it is these things give off toxins and other harmful elements that can be dangerous to humans. In one of our readings Cradle to Cradle William McDonough states that our current cities must learn to perform like natural systems in order for sustainability to occur. Therefore as we went throughout the course we dissected many different resources including A Pattern Language by Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein and the Reliable Prosperity website to figure out just how to reconstruct our own cities and areas to make them more livable and sustainable. Many urban areas are consumed with high traffic, lack of culture and the connection of communities and fails to identify the limits of the city. With these

observations, it tells us that we need to discover a new pattern language for our urban regions.

*"At the core... is the idea that people should design for themselves their own houses, streets and communities. This idea... comes simply from the observation that most of the wonderful places of the world were not made by architects but by the people".*

*-Christopher Alexander, A Pattern Language*

I was given the opportunity to do extensive research in the area in which I currently live and was able to reconstruct this area using numerous pattern languages for my area to become more ecological, livable and sustainable. This course really encouraged me to understand the construct of living conditions and how small changes can ensure large gains in all aspects of life.

In conclusion, these courses and the MALS program helped me realize how important life is, and how we take so much for granted... like being able to drink clean drinking water for example, but it also helped me realize that without a shift in mindset and action put behind it, we will not have the basic luxuries given by this great planet for long. Even though I have only shared a very small portion of my journey, I want it to be understood that this program has helped reshape the person that I was into the person that I am today. I have gained a better understanding and appreciation for my community, my nation and the world. I have grasped new ideas, improved ways of learning and becoming and information that will be with me for the rest of my life. I am now a more well-rounded, earth conscious and open-minded individual. My professors helped me see things in a different light and encouraged me to explore other aspects of myself and the society that I live in and for that I will be forever grateful for this experience and for the lifelong friendships that I have gained while in this program.