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Mankato

5-2018

Elizabeth Guss Honors Portfolio

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Guss, Elizabeth Marie, "Elizabeth Guss Honors Portfolio" (2018). *Honors Capstone Portfolios*. 32.
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In today's shrinking world, it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to find an identity and a sense of power.

With my degrees in Social Work and Spanish, I will work to support individuals with unique and diverse histories as they rediscover their voice.



MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO

My name is Libby Guss and I am a fourth-year student at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU). I am majoring in Social Work (BSSW) and Spanish (B.S.) with a plan to graduate from MNSU in 2018 and then pursue my Master's degree in Clinical Social Work. I am a member of the Honors Program and throughout my years at MNSU, I have been building my competence in leadership, research, and global citizenship. I invite you to look around my portfolio. Thank you!

in ✉



EDUCATION

LEARN MORE

I am a student at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU) and previously graduated from Mankato West High School.



HONORS

LEARN MORE

I am a member of the Honors Program and am developing myself in our three competencies: leadership, research, and global citizenship.



ABOUT ME

LEARN MORE

I grew up in Mankato, Minnesota and know the community very well. I also have two jobs and hold multiple volunteer positions.



MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO

In August of 2014, I started my undergraduate career at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU). I have completed my [Spanish degree](#) and am finishing the curriculum for both the [Honors Program](#) and the undergraduate [Social Work program](#).

I have been a recipient of a 2017-2018 Affinity Plus Foundation Scholarship, a graduate of the [Maximo Nivel Study Abroad Program](#), a recipient of a 2016 Who's Who award for the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, a recipient of a 2017 Community Service award for the same college, a nominee for the 2017 Davy Family Volunteer of the Year Award, and been listed on the Dean's List for all eight semesters of my undergraduate career to date.

At MNSU, I have been involved with the [Honors Program](#), Spanish Club, [Social Work Club](#), [Phi Alpha Social Work Honors Society](#), College Democrats, [IELI Language Partner Program](#), Student Ambassadors, and more.



MANKATO WEST HIGH SCHOOL



I attended Mankato West High School and graduated in 2014 in the top 10% of my class. I participated in many activities, including National Honor Society, History Club, and the Speech team (member of the National Forensics League with a Degree of Distinction).





HONORS

"The mission of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato is to create future leaders, researchers and global citizens by providing high ability and motivated students with exceptional learning opportunities, mentoring relationships, and a community of scholars that foster their development as future leaders in a global society."

mnsu.edu/honors

LEADERSHIP

RESEARCH

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

LEADERSHIP



YMCA
BROTHER/SISTER
PROGRAM

HONORS FYEX
LEADERSHIP
REFLECTION

PHI ALPHA SOCIAL
WORK HONORS
SOCIETY

MAYO CLINIC
HEALTH SYSTEM-
MANKATO

HONORS BEACON:
GROWTH

SOCIAL WORK
CLUB PRESIDENT

The ability to be a strong leader is increasingly important in today's global society. Methods of communication are growing, perceived distances are shrinking, and our collective knowledge is being added to at an exponential rate. As I prepare to graduate, I have had the opportunity to reflect on my personal leadership values, my experiences as a leader, and what leadership means to me.

In my freshman year, I took the [Strengths Finder Assessment](#) to learn more about my leadership values. This assessment listed my three primary values as Executing (with specific traits being consistency and discipline), Relationship Building (developer and adaptability), and Strategic Thinking (input). I originally did not agree with this assessment of my leadership strengths because I had not had many opportunities to build my leadership skills. Now, however, after my four years at Minnesota State University- Mankato (MNSU), I have come to realize that this assessment is accurate. My executive role as a leader was exemplified in my experience as the Vice-President and President of the [Social Work Club](#) and also as the Treasurer of [Phi Alpha Social Work Honors Society- Eta Chapter](#). I found myself rising up to these leadership roles naturally through my comfort in guiding groups, voicing opinions, and working with other organizations. In these organizations, I remained consistent in the expectations set for group members, meeting frequency, volunteer opportunities offered, and goal-setting with the group. I also learned how to cultivate a strong sense of discipline for myself in remaining organized and setting personal deadlines. My relationship-building leadership value was brought out in my experience with the [YMCA Brother/Sister Program](#), the [Honors Beacon](#), and [Mayo Clinic Health System \(MCHS\) - Mankato](#). In these organizations, I worked hard to help others develop their own strengths and use their voice to create change.

In my experiences as a leader, I always try to apply a democratic model of leadership. Depending on the situation, however, I would change my style of leadership to better fit the task at hand. For example, when I took on the role of the treasurer in [Phi Alpha](#), I used a more autocratic style of leadership in simple tasks such as ordering food for meetings since the organization already had set expectations for what to get. With any leadership style, challenges can arise, such as when my little sister from the [Brother/Sister Program](#) and I were unable to come up with ideas of what to do during our meetings. I wanted to make sure she had an equal amount of input into what we did but was struggling because when I asked what she wanted to do, she would say "I don't know." I learned to work through this challenge by offering several different choices that she would be able to have the final say on. I believe that leadership is earned and that there should always be a follow-through on goals. These goals need to be set together as a group and each member of the group should feel comfortable to voice their opinions and find opportunities to help fulfill outcomes. On campus, I applied this model to my leadership style when I served as the [President of the Social Work Club](#) for a year. In the community, I applied this model to my mentor role in the [Brother/Sister Program](#). Over the course of my undergraduate career, I have learned that a leader needs to recognize when they are more helpful not by doing, but by supporting. I also have seen how the person fulfilling the role of the leader can shift between members of a group depending on the situation. Being a leader is not about holding the power, but sharing a purpose with a group.

Groups are composed of individuals with different roles to fulfill. A group cannot properly function without the full participation of the different roles. Each role is just as important to accomplishing a goal and I have found that, in a strong group, when one role is not being fulfilled, other individuals will take on that responsibility. Roles can be assumed through a variety of ways. Through voting, request, application, or stepping up, I believe that it is important that an individual's strengths align with the role they are taking on so as best to accomplish a goal. One example of a time that I worked with others toward a common goal was when I helped to establish the new [Volunteer Ambassador program](#) at MCHS with the director of the volunteer program and another volunteer with years of experience at the hospital. In working with them, I utilized my skills to mediate between the interests of both college students and older adults, organized meetings, and planned deadlines for when various steps needed to be accomplished. In reaching the goal of setting up this new program, I tapped into other people's strengths when we needed to make sure we were reaching training requirements and learning the history of the organization. Our mutual respect and open communication worked well to accomplish our goal. If we were to establish a new program again, I would like to make the deadlines and expectations clearer for each member so that the process can proceed in a more efficient manner.

Leadership is a quality everyone has inside. We all have different strengths and different experiences that have helped shape who we are and what we bring to the table. As a leader, I believe it is important to emphasize the importance of each individual's voice and cultivate a sense of belonging for everyone in the group. A leader needs to serve the best interests of the group as a whole and remain self-aware so as to know when their strengths serve as an asset and when their weaknesses present an opportunity for growth. In my future career as a Social Worker, I will utilize my personal leadership philosophy when working with colleagues and clients at all levels. Social Work is heavily based in group work and goal setting and I believe my past experiences will serve as a solid foundation on which to continue building my competence as a leader.



RESEARCH

IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTING

OPIOID ADDICTION AND THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

MISSISSIPPI: RACE, CULTURE, AND CIVIL RIGHTS

HONORS FYEX RESEARCH

MEDICAID POLICY ANALYSIS

Two foundations the profession of Social Work is built on are practice-informed research and research-informed practice. Throughout my years at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU), I have gained a multitude of experiences in research and have been able to build my competence as a researcher as I prepare to take the next step in my Social Work education.

Information literacy is one of the most important qualities of a competent researcher.

Through various research papers and projects, I have learned how to effectively, efficiently, and critically select relevant information and remain ethical while doing so. These were skills I had begun developing in my freshman year in the Honors FYEX course and have since been able to apply to different classes. During my sophomore year, I wrote a research paper for my Human Development class on the subject of domestic violence and its impact on the mental health and development of children. In the process of writing it, I learned about various search engines- such as Google Scholar and ProQuest- that allow me to find scholarly sources in an efficient manner. When I was evaluating potential sources to use for this project, I learned to ensure the sources were both peer-reviewed and recent. Using these skills and resources allowed me to ensure I was writing a paper that would synthesize reliable information and remain ethical in my continuation of research in the field.

Properly synthesizing information is a process I have had many opportunities to practice. Fall of my senior year, I took Social Work in Health Care Settings and wrote a research paper on opioid addiction and the opioid epidemic as it relates to Social Work practice. In working through the various perspectives that surround opioid addiction (many having to do with the stigma), I explored the literature and then delved deeper into each topic. In the same semester, I analyzed Medicaid from a policy perspective with a group of other students for another class. We had different ideas on how to approach the topic and we broke it down in such a way so as to address all the required parts of the assignment while remaining succinct and clear. Just as in my Opioid paper, we put all the information together in a way that would best support the claims we made in the paper. A unique research opportunity I had occurred in my freshman year when I took the Honors course based on the Common Read book that year: "Coming of Age in Mississippi" by Anne Moody. For this project, I made a photo essay about our trip to Mississippi. The biggest challenge of my research was to find a way to show my conclusions while still allowing the viewers of the photos to draw their own conclusions. To accomplish this, I laid out the information I had learned in my research with photos that showed evidence that supported my standpoint. This sort of research opportunity also helped me learn about the importance of remaining ethical while conducting research. I had to keep any personal biases in check to make sure that the information I presented was accurate and relevant.

While at MNSU, I have also had the opportunity to produce original research. My research focuses on MNSU Social Work students' perceptions of sexual assault reporting. In writing the survey I will send out to students, it became clear that the subject matter could be triggering for individuals with a prior history of sexual violence. In my consent form and IRB application, I addressed this issue to remain ethical and protect the well-being of participants. This research project is allowing me to take national data and create questions from it that I can then send to students to apply prior research to our campus climate. My goal with this research is to learn more about how MNSU is addressing the issue of sexual assault and what barriers exist to reporting here. I look forward to presenting this research at the Undergraduate Research Symposium in April.

From these different research opportunities, I have grown stronger as a researcher and am prepared to continue my growth in the discipline as I start my graduate school career.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP



ADULT BASIC ED
& AVID INTERN

AMERICAN SIGN
LANGUAGE

ADDICTION IN
OUR SOCIETY

HONORS FYEX
REFLECTION

SPANISH (B.S.)
DEGREE

IELI LANGUAGE
PARTNER

In this global community that we live in today, it is becoming increasingly important to know how to be culturally responsive. Throughout the past few years at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU), I have had many opportunities to build my competence as a global citizen in my self-awareness, knowledge and understanding, and communication skills.

Self-awareness is a necessary building block to becoming a global citizen. During my freshman year in the [Honors First Year Experience \(FYEX\)](#) class, I reflected on what global citizenship means to me and how my values are based in the culture in which I was raised. I learned to recognize that my biases and stereotypes are a reflection of this.

I had another opportunity to become more self-aware when I tutored international students with the Intensive English Language Institute's [\(IELI\) Language Partner Program](#). Through IELI, I was able to take a step back and look at the traditions in my own culture and how they reflect the history I was taught- whether that history is the truth or not. My experience becoming fluent in [Spanish](#) also helped me to place my life in a broader context. I realized that I may not necessarily be fully *competent* in global citizenship- many people never are. Instead, I believe I have been able to learn broad skills for interacting with people from different cultures that allow me to be more culturally responsive.

Being culturally responsive also requires one to have a strong knowledge and understanding about other cultures. Through [IELI Language Partner Program](#), I learned about how people my age live in other cultures by having conversations with the international students I was tutoring instead of reading facts out of a textbook. This allowed me to have a bigger worldview and a stronger understanding of my own place in this society. A similar cultural experience I had was through my internship with the [Adult Basic Education Program](#). This program allowed me to reflect on the many similarities and differences both within and between groups. I was able to talk to many different students and learn more about their lives and where they have come from. We all learned from each other there, including students who were from the same countries. People cannot be broken down to one culture based on where they come from; we are all unique people and do not always represent the main culture we were raised in. Another opportunity I had to learn about a different culture was through a [Sensitivity to Disability](#) course in which I interviewed someone who is recovering from addiction. While many people might define culture as specifically related to a place someone comes from or a language someone speaks, I have learned that it can also describe a community someone identifies with- such as the communities build up around addiction. Through this experience, I learned to pause and not judge someone's actions right away and instead get to know the person as a unique individual who is not defined by just one aspect of their identity.

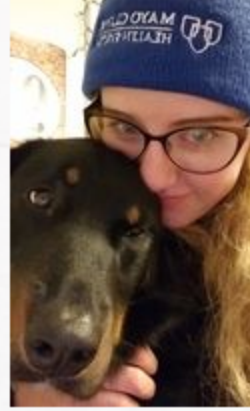
Communication serves as a third important facet of global citizenship. Through a class I took on [American Sign Language \(ASL\)](#), I was able to learn basic signs and also a great deal about deaf culture. I also wrote a paper for this class comparing ASL to Mexican Sign Language. This research was very interesting for me as I majored in Spanish and wanted to see how the two sign languages are affected by the spoken languages they are surrounded by. My [Spanish major](#) provided me with many significant opportunities to further develop my competence as a global citizen. Being able to speak Spanish and understanding how difficult it can be to learn a new language and properly convey ideas in that language is very important for my future career. I now have a better understanding of how everyone is smart in their own way; their language level does not tell everything about them. After this kind of an extended cultural experience, I have learned to value the many different ways in which communication can take place and how important it is to be able to communicate with others. I have also learned a great deal about the power of place and the different ways in which people define each other.

Being culturally responsive in an increasingly globalized society is necessary for any career, especially one in Social Work. Through my many experiences outlined above, I have a strong foundation on which to build additional skills for working across and within other cultures.

CLASSES + WORK + VOLUNTEERING + HOBBIES + FAMILY ROOTS



I spend a lot of time in class and doing homework, but I also advocate for individuals recovering from chemical dependency, sell books, discharge patients, and mentor a teenage girl.



WORK



In March of 2017, I accepted a position as a Recovery Advocate at House of Hope in Mankato. I work at both the men's and women's facilities to support individuals in their recoveries from alcohol and substance abuse. This position has taught me so much about privilege, stereotyping, mental health, coping mechanisms, support systems, and more. No one ever deserves to be forgotten or given up on, and I have found that this field of work is one of my great passions.

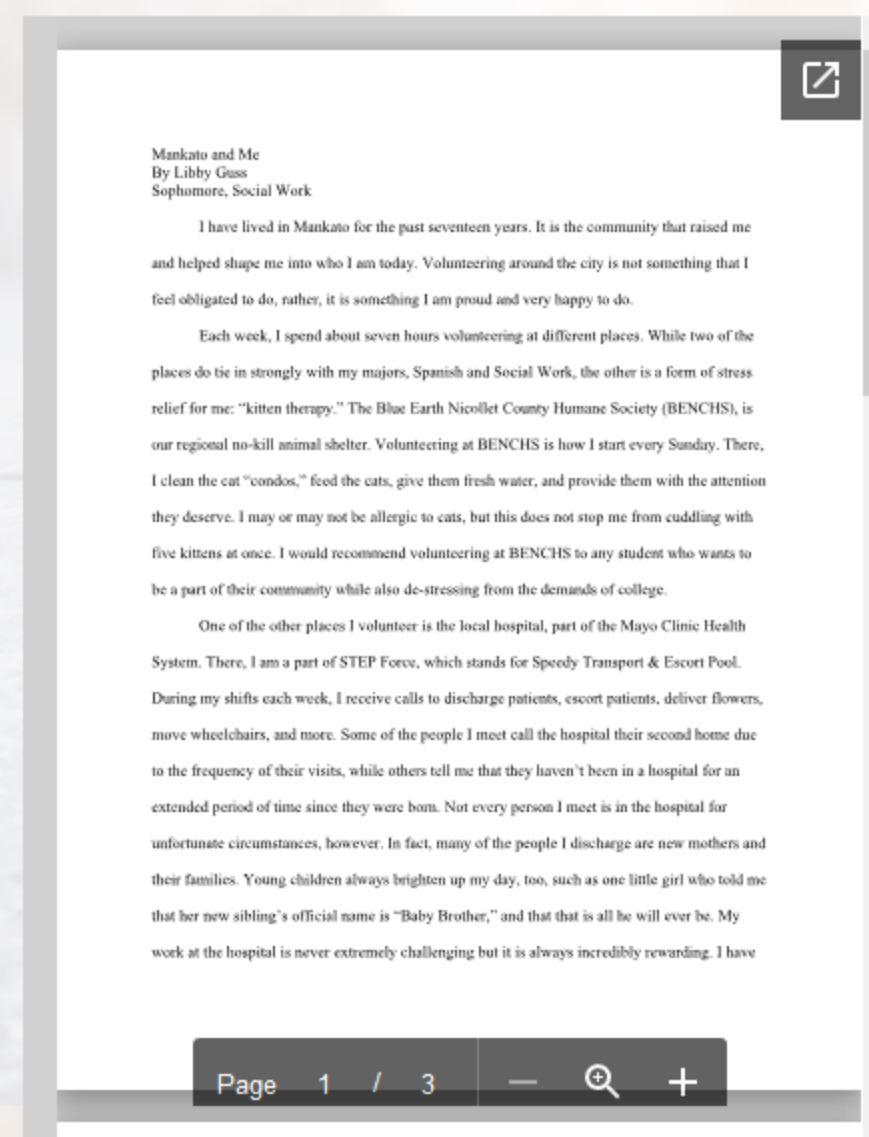


I work at the on-campus bookstore, Barnes & Noble, selling textbooks, helping people find what they need, and a variety of other tasks. My managers and co-workers have all helped me to learn more about the school and the graduation process as well as what to expect along my road to graduation. My managers have seen many students move through this job and have remarked that college freshmen are "baby adults," and that the four short years of college shape the baby adults into people capable of taking on the world.



I also worked as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) with REM Heartland (part of The Mentor Network) in Mankato from March 2016- March 2017. In this position, I worked with four adults with developmental and physical disabilities at a group home in town. I was responsible for making sure that they were safe, living life as independently as possible, and comfortable in their lives. I was also responsible for administering their medications and documenting many aspects of their lives. Prior to this job, I had never had much experience with this population, but now my eyes have been opened to the large community that exists in Mankato and around the world and how important these individuals are to every community. The individuals that I worked with have taught me a lot about how to interact and convey ideas using fewer words. One of the biggest things that I have learned through this job is to be very patient and understand that everyone does things at their own rate and everyone's goals are different. The individuals I worked with were also extremely patient with me as I assisted them in their daily tasks and learned more about their own lives. I am very grateful for the opportunity for growth that this job has provided me. Having experience working with this population is invaluable, not only for my future career, but also for my personal growth in general.

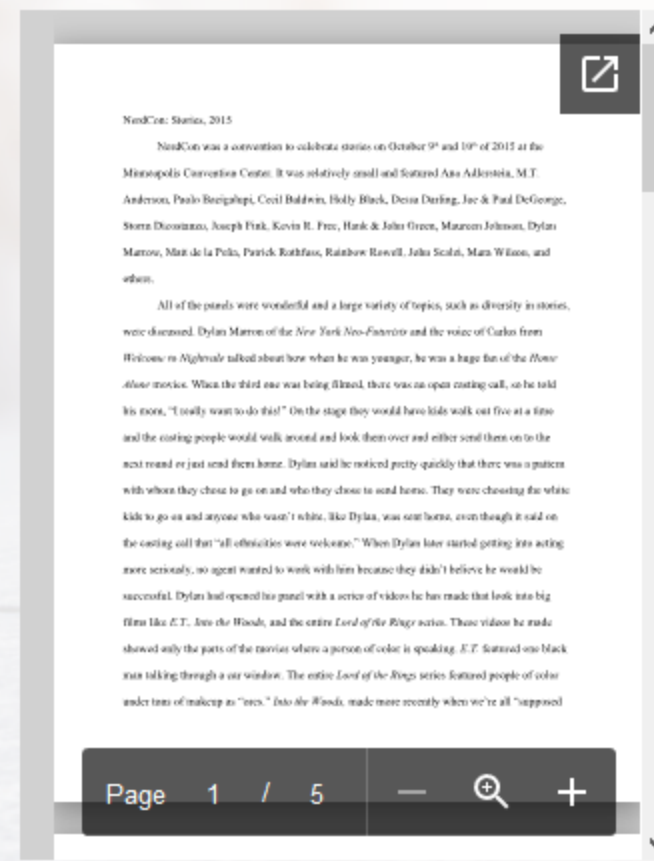
VOLUNTEERING



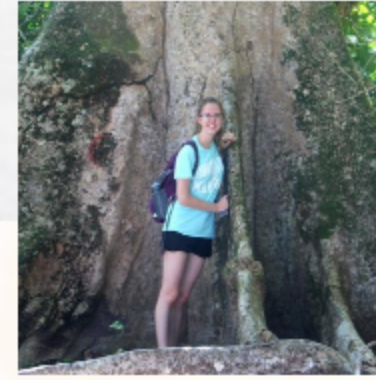
I volunteer roughly 3 hours each week at the hospital in town (part of the Mayo Clinic Health System) and about 3 hours each week with the YMCA Brother/Sister Program.

HOBBIES

In my spare time, I enjoy hiking, (poorly) knitting, and going to nerdy conferences, to name a few things.

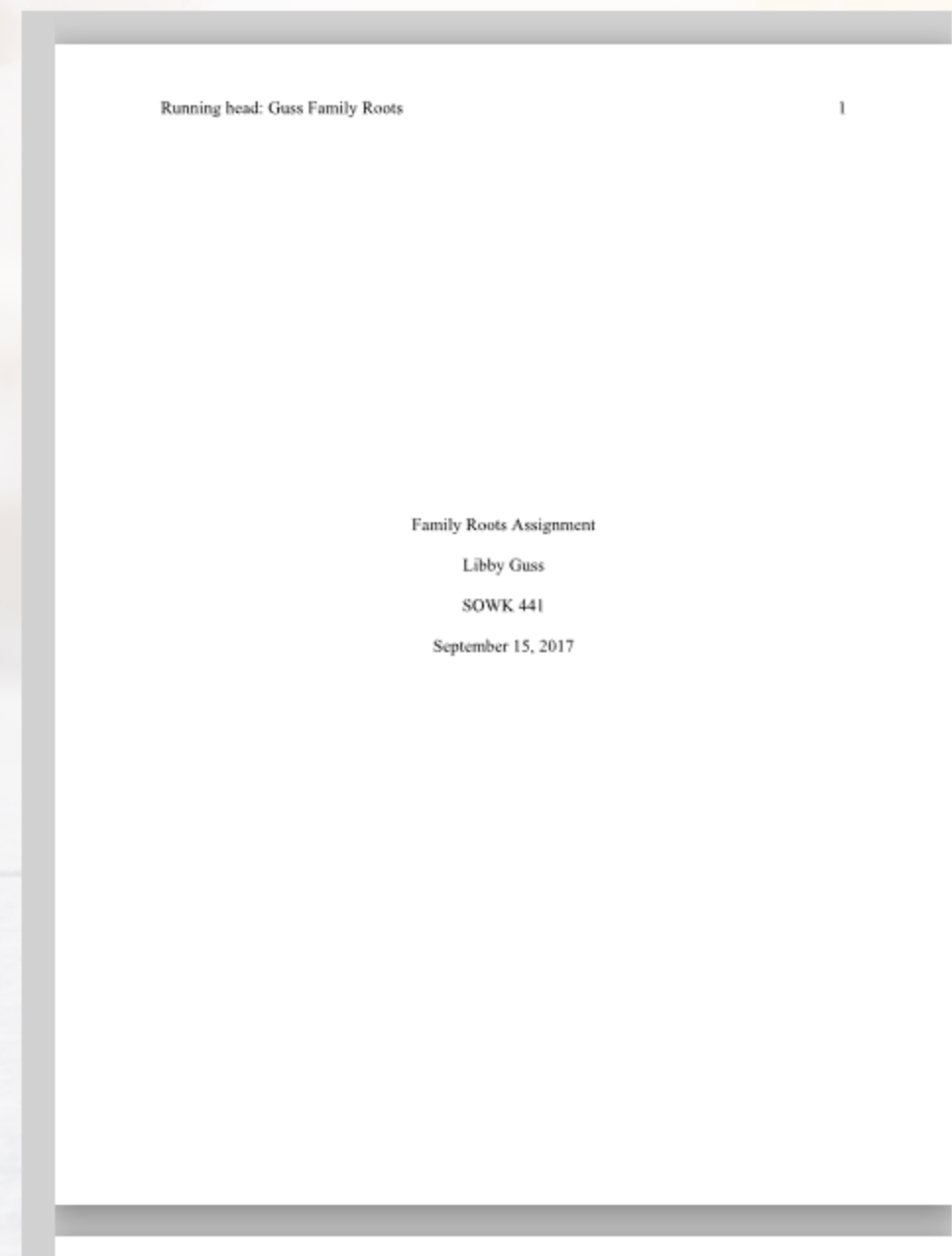


ABOVE: Hank Green, Paolo Bacigalupi, Leslie Datsis, Jacqueline Woodson, Ana Adlerstein, and Nalo Hopkinson discussing how to tell the truth in fiction and if a fictional story can have more truth than reality.



MY FAMILY ROOTS

During the fall semester of my senior year, I had the opportunity to learn more about my family's journey and the historical events that have helped shape who we are today. Knowing more about my background has helped me to better conceptualize my place in a global society. Connecting what I know of my family today with what I learned about our historical journey has been eye-opening. I am a product of the family that raised me and the global community that we reside in.



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Libby Guss

HOME

EDUCATION

HONORS

ABOUT ME

CONTACT

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