Religion in U.S. writing classes: Challenging the conflict narrative

Phillip P. Marzluf

Kansas State University | USA

Abstract: In the United States, composition researchers have consistently depicted First-Year Composition (FYC) teachers' responses to students' faith-based writing in terms of a conflict narrative. According to Goodburn (1998), Lindholm (2000), Perkins (2001), and Vander Lei and Fitzgerald (2007), FYC teachers hold strict secular expectations and reject the religious identity and expression of their fundamentalist Christian students. This study explores this conflict narrative by analyzing how 24 FYC teachers in the Midwestern United States describe their own religious identities as well as those of their institutions and respond to two faith-based student texts. The study results challenge simplistic depictions of the conflict narrative. The religious affiliations of the FYC teachers coincide with national averages and neither relate to how teachers described the religious environment of their institutions nor the grades the teachers gave the faith-based texts. Furthermore, rhetorical variables such as genre and audience awareness affect teachers' responses to faith-based writing. Composition researchers, this study concludes, need to complicate how they depict situations in which students express their religious identity within secular post-secondary institutions.

Keywords: Religion, faith, pedagogy, teacher-student, First-Year Composition, fundamentalism

In public higher educational institutions in the United States, religion plays an important yet oftentimes divisive role in such debates as the use of school space for religious purposes, academic freedom, the teaching of evolution, values-oriented curricula, and policies governing religious expression. According to several U.S. researchers, college students' high levels of religious engagement contrast with college professors' commitment to secular values (Dively, 1997; Perkins, 2001; Stenberg, 2006; Vander Lei & Fitzgerald, 2007). Survey-based research has revealed the importance of religion and spirituality for U.S. students. For example, Astin et al. (2005a) report that college students demonstrate strong religious engagement, including 80% who claim they possess an "interest in spirituality," 79% who assert a belief in God, and 48% who indicate that their college institutions should "encourage their personal expression of spirituality" (p. 6)[1]. In a similar survey (Ruiz, Sharkness, Kelly, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2010), 83.3% of first-year college students in the United States claim that they discuss religion "frequently" or "occasionally" (p. 50), whereas 9.8% of first-year students report they have experienced religious discrimination (p. 55). As far as college and university faculty are concerned, Astin et al. (2005b) report that religious engagement varies according to the type of higher educational institution as well as academic discipline. Overall, 64% of college faculty consider themselves religious, including 35% who feel strongly committed to their faith (Astin et al., 2005b). Additionally, faculty members' disciplines determined attitudes regarding the extent to which colleges and universities should promote students' "spiritual development": 40% of humanities faculty agreed with this objective, compared to 22% of biological sciences faculty (Astin et al., 2005b, p. 9).

Religion also plays a controversial role in First-Year Composition (FYC) courses, the oftentimes required courses that comprise the bulk of writing instruction for first- and second-year students in U.S. colleges and universities. FYC courses may include expressive, persuasive, academic, literature-focused, or mode-based writing, among many other possibilities (see Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2000), and may be taught by graduate teaching assistants and contingent or part-time faculty within English departments or other academic programs. Religion becomes a controversial aspect of FYC classes when students express their religious identity and beliefs in their writing. For example, for assignments that ask for personal narratives, fundamentalist Christian students may choose to write born-again conversion narratives (Lindholm, 2000); additionally, students may appeal to faith-based sources to support claims about such topics as abortion or gay marriage. Vander Lei and Fitzgerald (2007) and Dively (1997) report that teachers may completely ban writing on religious topics, demand that students ignore religious identity, or ridicule expressions of faith.

These ways of talking about teachers and their responses to the faith-based writing of their students have primarily been expressed in terms of a particular teaching genre, the conflict narrative. Composition research, teacher lore, and politically conservative commentary about U.S. higher education use the conflict narrative in order to express assumptions about pedagogy, literacy, and the values of colleges and universities,

constructing "stock figures" (Helmers, 1994) of secular, liberal teachers and their narrative counterparts, fundamentalist Christian and conservative students. The dominant conflict narrative depicts instructors as antagonists who ridicule or reject religious expression as a way to talk about identity or to support claims. Once the protagonists, fundamentalist Christian students, enter FYC classes, they may be forced to divorce themselves from the faith-based expressions, appeals, and traditions with which they identify (Browning, 1999; Dively, 1997; Lindholm, 2000; Perkins, 2001; Rand, 2001; Stenberg, 2006).

Classroom and teaching narratives represent powerful literacy and cultural values that, according to Adler-Kassner (2008), inevitably end up marginalizing other values and ways of depicting teaching and learning. Helmers (1994), though she is talking specifically about the teaching testimonial, suggests how narratives do ideological work to produce a common sense for institutions and disciplines: "Testimonials promote the adoptions of certain schools of thought in writing pedagogy and work to bind the community of practitioners together through appeals to common ideas" (p. 20). The conflict narrative competes with alternative writing narratives—the testimonial or the literacy crisis[2], for example—to juxtapose widely different notions of reading and language ideology. At the same time, this narrative supports popular assumptions about FYC classes, such as the assertion that "grammatical correctness" has been usurped by liberal "political correctness" or that FYC courses have replaced writing instruction with the indoctrination of liberal social and cultural values (Fish, 2008; Horowitz, 2007). Another powerful belief is that U.S. higher education is dominated by liberal, anti-religious intellectuals whose bias against religious and conservative students unfairly marginalizes them. According to this belief, the evaluation of students' writing is no longer based upon careful examination of their performances but upon the political or social positions these students take. State ceremonial legislation in the United States, such as the proposed "Religious Viewpoints Antidiscrimination Act" in Oklahoma (Reynolds & Kern, 2009) or the resolution for intellectual diversity in Kansas (Students for Academic Freedom, 2006) perpetuate the conflict narrative. Similarly, Budziszewski's (1991) *How to stay Christian in college* and Horowitz's (2007) *The professors: The 101 most dangerous academics in America* warn prospective college students about the liberalism rampant in higher education. These ways of framing education and writing, Adler-Kassner (2008) reminds us, are adopted by powerful economic, cultural, and political sponsors who have a great deal at stake in how writing and instruction are depicted as well as in how the stock figures of students and teachers are represented.

This qualitative study investigates the conflict narrative constructed by composition researchers that has previously only been examined by anecdotal evidence or single-student case studies (Goodburn, 1998; Lindholm, 2000; Perkins, 2001; Vander Lei & Fitzgerald, 2007). This study reports how 24 FYC instructors from public, Midwestern post-secondary institutions in the United States responded to two faith-based texts. Participating in an online questionnaire, the instructors described their religious identity

as well as the religious environment of their institutions, graded the two faith-based texts, described the student writers, provided formative evaluation comments, and identified talking points for a one-on-one conference with the students. The study examines (1) the different ways FYC instructors experience and respond to faith-based writing and (2) the impact academic genre has on instructors' evaluations.

The fact that this study examines instructors' responses in the Midwest of the United States is significant. The conflict narrative appears often in Midwestern institutions, such as those in Kansas and Oklahoma—two rural and sparsely populated "Red" states that have consistently voted for conservative Republican candidates in presidential elections since 1968 (*2008, n.d.*). Kansas, moreover, has been the site of high-profile anti-abortion protests and challenges to the teaching of evolutionism (see Frank, 2004). The presence of the Westboro Baptist Church, which promulgates hatred against lesbian and gay groups, and the 2009 assassination of George Teller, a physician who advocated late-term abortion rights, further underscore the divisive role that religion plays in Kansas. Because of this context, it is important to investigate and complicate how teachers and students in Midwestern states such as Kansas are characterized in order to avoid perpetuating caricatures of them. This is especially important in FYC classes in which students' religious, political, and social values may not complement the values and expectations of their instructors. Helmers (1994) warns teachers that these essentializing caricatures may produce ideological consequences: "While educators hold to the democratic ideal of equal education for all, we find that constructions of racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic students serve to divide students into groups of those who are always already deserving of education and those who need education to make them proper citizens" (p. 11). In order to avoid homogenizing the Midwestern classroom, composition researchers need to challenge and complicate these conflict narratives and, whenever possible, provide alternatives.

1.   Religious expression as literacy conflict

Using the conflict narrative, composition researchers recognize an alternative student identity, fundamentalist Christianity, which possesses its own epistemologies and literacy practices. Crowley (2006) examines the religious-secular conflict in terms of these contrasting epistemologies and literacies, the values of liberalism and apocalyptic rhetoric. The powerful rhetorical stance of liberalism, on the one hand, privileges a rational examination of values, individual rights and personal freedom, as well as a clearly demarcated private role for emotion. The apocalyptic rhetoric of fundamentalist Christians, on the other hand, legitimates itself by an essentialist account of divine truth derived from scripture, collapses the carefully constructed public and private spheres, privileges emotion and individual belief, and rigidly maintains values and traditional conceptions of identity (pp. 117, 143-145, 150-156). When depicted in terms of the judgments of FYC instructors, these clashes between the religious and the secular,

between emotion and reason, or between competing rhetorical stances represent the conflict between the literacy values of fundamentalist Christian students and those of the teacher and the institution.

The religious identity of fundamentalist Christian students is constituted partly by literacy attitudes and practices. Religious identity, according to Mol (1978), is an ideological and rhetorical power that unites, stabilizes, and makes identity coherent and a system of social reproduction in which certain narratives and concepts are amplified, producing, therefore, an "immunity against persuasion" (p. 13). Other sociologists of religion, when talking about religious identity, deploy biological and military metaphors in which religion represents an internal and authentic core identity that people will defend with the most intensity (Seul, 1999)[3]. In the context of FYC classes, religious identity is expressed by literacy features including "proof-texting," in which students cite Biblical scripture to support their points (Lindholm, 2000); the framing of their experiences in a "Fall/Redemptive narrative" (Lindholm, 2000, p. 61); and "witnessing talk," in which fundamentalist Christian students declare their allegiance to Jesus Christ (Rand, 2001). Goodburn (1998) lists alternative fundamentalist interpretive strategies, such as those that claim the Bible represents the sole source of truth, that an individual's morality endows him or her with interpretive authority, and that interpretations should be based upon "values and knowledge [that] are stable, unitary, universal, and revealed by God" (p. 344).

For Lindholm (2000), Perkins (2001), Goodburn (1998), and Vander Lei and Fitzgerald (2007), students' religious identity is as powerful as race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and class. Vander Lei and Fitzgerald (2007) advocate recognizing religious identity when they describe Fitzgerald's silencing of a student who desired to express her faith. Vander Lei and Fitzgerald write, "Had the student written about any other aspect of her identity—her race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and/or disability—Lauren [Fitzgerald] would have applauded her [student] for using her new-found freedom" (p. 186). Religious identity, thus, interrelates with students' civil rights, an especially powerful rhetorical claim in the United States. Focusing on her students' Christian beliefs as what makes them a "culturally distinctive" identity group, Perkins (2001), similar to Vander Lei and Fitzgerald, claims that these students should be regarded the same as other historically marginalized groups of students (see also Rand, 2001).

In the FYC class, the literacy conflict can be expressed as a "violence" (Stuckey, 1990), in which a dominant literacy—a privileged way of interpreting and responding—becomes naturalized and commonsensical, marginalizing those students with non-dominant home or vernacular literacies. Goodburn (1998), for example, discusses her unwitting complicity in denigrating the literacies of fundamentalist Christian students and replicating a violent and oppressive literacy power against students who "engage in counter-hegemonic practices daily in classrooms where the discourses through which they read the world are delegitimized or challenged" (p. 350). According to these researchers, religious students' literacy practices and beliefs are unjustly marginalized and rejected despite the fact that current composition theories

caution instructors to be self-reflective about the normative judgments they make about language and identity (Dively, 1997). For example, Lindholm depicts the antagonist secular academy and the embattled, marginalized fundamentalist Christian student: "Although members of the academy have become increasingly sensitive to the ways race, class, and gender influence people's assumptions about knowledge or truth, many academics have either ignored or even openly denounced their students' religious backgrounds, thereby disconnecting formal education from many of the traditions that give meaning to human existence" (p. 55). In other words, according to Lindholm, the irony of the conflict narrative is the fact that these students are being asked to make choices between their personal religious identity and their secular public identity at a time when composition studies in the United States privileges the ways in which students use writing to express their identity.

2.   Method

This qualitative study examines how a purposive sample of FYC instructors respond to an online questionnaire about how students express their religious identity. The questionnaire consists of open-ended questions about religious identity and prompts participants to grade and comment upon two faith-based student texts. Phenomenographic data analysis methods are then used to analyze the participants' open-ended responses. The subsections below detail the selection of the purposive sample, the data collection, the questionnaire construction, the data analysis steps, and the methodological limitations.

2.1   Sample selection and data collection

The principal investigator contacted via email approximately 100 potential participants from a wide variety of private and public colleges and universities in Kansas and Oklahoma, two states where instructors may encounter students' faith-based writing. Unfortunately, because the total number of FYC instructors in these two states is unknown, it was impossible to estimate what proportion the number of recruited FYC instructors was to the total population. Whenever possible, the administrators of FYC writing programs were contacted and asked to distribute the request for participation to eligible instructors in their institutions. When contacting an administrator was impossible, online course schedules were searched for possible FYC instructors, who were then solicited directly.

    Participants were required to have at least two years of experience teaching first- and/or second-year students and have recently taught an FYC or a writing-intensive literature course. When participants were first contacted, they were notified about the topic and the study requirements. Thirty-seven instructors volunteered to complete the online questionnaire. Participants received an email that linked them to the Axio Learning Survey system, which collected their responses and protected their anonymity. Twenty-seven (73%) of the initial sample completed the questionnaire. Because of

technical difficulties, three responses were incomplete and, consequently, discarded, resulting in 24 completed questionnaires, 16 from public university and 8 from community college participants. No demographic data, except for institutional affiliation and religious identification, were collected. At the close of the study, participants were compensated with a small stipend.

2.2   Questionnaire construction

An online questionnaire was used for the sake of convenience. The online format enabled the participation of FYC instructors in Kansas and Oklahoma, two rural states that rank in the bottom third of population density in the United States (U.S. Census, 2000). The questionnaire asked participants to select their institution type and then prompted them to describe their personal religious affiliation and the religious environment of their institutions (see Appendix A). Participants were then asked to grade and comment upon two faith-based texts. The texts were constructed by the principal investigator and modeled on previous student texts as well as the features of fundamentalist discourse identified by Lindholm (2000), including "proof-texting" and "witnessing talk" (Rand, 2001). Additionally, the texts represented two different FYC academic genres, a personal narrative and a persuasive research paper. Participants were then prompted to grade the two faith-based texts, describe the student writers, write a final comment, and provide talking points for a one-on-one conference with the students. Participants also had an optional opportunity to write about their additional experiences with faith-based writing. Two expert FYC instructors evaluated the questions and analyzed how representative of their FYC students' work the faith-based texts were. The revisions based upon their comments strengthened the instrument validity of the questionnaire and made the texts more gender neutral.

The first text responded to a "Personal Ethnography" assignment, a variant of the personal narrative, a popular genre in FYC courses emphasizing expressive discourse. The personal ethnography asks students to describe and analyze a personal story that illustrates how they are influenced by such social identity factors as gender, race, ethnicity, and class; it is, consequently, an academic genre that students can use to showcase their religious identity. The first text, "Pearl Mac," (see Appendix B) described the adoption of the writer's younger brother in order to demonstrate the values of the writer's Christian identity. It included features of faith-based discourse, obvious in phrases such as "His Love" and "God has a plan for all of us" and the use of the sacred pronoun "He."

The second text, "Gay Adoption," (see Appendix C) was based upon a "Persuasive Research Essay" assignment that may appear in an introductory course in argumentation. This genre is common in FYC courses that emphasize audience-based reasoning and the evaluation of the credibility of outside sources (e.g., Ramage, Bean, & Johnson, 2010). This assignment asks students to identify and research a controversial issue and attempt to persuade an audience that will be resistant towards their particular point of view on the issue. The hypothetical student in the "Gay Adoption" text argued

to an audience "worried about the number of foster children who need to be adopted" why they should support laws that ban homosexual parents from adopting or serving as foster parents. Relying upon Internet sources from Focus on the Family and the Christian Answers Network, two highly biased U.S. evangelical Christian sources, this argument was framed largely in terms of fundamentalist values.[4]

2.3   Data analysis

The data were analyzed according to the qualitative procedures of phenomenography, a qualitative approach that has been used extensively in educational contexts (Åkerlind, 2008; Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997; Trigwell & Prosser, 2009). Phenomenography examines "the variation in ways of experiencing phenomenon" (Martin and Booth, 1997, p. 111). It is most useful for analyzing how groups express the process of their experiences by considering what aspects of the experience they emphasize and what aspects they take for granted (Åkerlind, 2008). Therefore, phenomenography is ideal for the exploratory purposes of this study, as it does not differentiate individuals, nor does it categorize and compare groups, nor make predictions and judgments about people (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997). Instead, for this particular study, the phenomenographic approach allows the principal investigator to focus on FYC instructors as a group in order to record the variation in their responses to two genres of faith-based writing. Phenomenography also contributes to this study's focus on the narratives of teaching. Narratives resemble the second-order perspectives of the phenomenographic approach, for which investigators "orient [themselves] towards people's ideas about the world" (Marton, 1981, p. 178). Phenomenography, by focusing on the variation in experiences, can complicate the conflict narrative, which simplifies the evaluation judgments that teachers make as well as their complex relationships with students. In order for researchers to understand the phenomenon as much as possible from the participants' perspective, phenomenography requires "bracketing," in which investigators attempt to separate themselves from their preconceptions (Boon, Johnston, & Webber, 2007).

The instructors' responses were first pooled together in three groups: the responses for the expressive "Pearl Mac" essay, responses for the persuasive "Gay Adoption" essay, as well as additional responses about participants' professional experiences with faith-based writing. Second, the researcher identified the variations in the instructors and created an initial set of categories. Third, the researcher analyzed and compared the relationships between the categories in the initial three groups and constructed response categories that represented the overall variation. According to Marton and Booth (1997), "each category tells us something about a particular way of experiencing the phenomenon" (p. 125). Finally, the researcher described the response categories and chose exemplary quotations to illustrate them (Boon et al., 2007).

2.4   Limitations

The reliance on the self-selected purposive sample and the online questionnaire may have compromised internal validity. First, FYC instructors may have decided to participate in the study based on prior attitudes towards or experiences related to Christian students and faith-based writing. Although the researcher directly emailed FYC instructors from religiously-affiliated colleges or universities, none of these potential participants completed the online questionnaire. Second, the effects of social desirability may have influenced participants' responses (Schwarz, 2008), and they may have adapted their responses to what they felt were the expectations of the principal investigator. Third, question order effects may have influenced participants' responses towards the two faith-based texts (Schwarz, 2008). According to Schwarz (2008), instruments that use direct questions to ascertain the attitudes of subjects are highly dependent upon the effects of wording, question format, and question and response ordering (p. 42). The fact that participants were first asked to describe their personal religious identity may have interacted with the ways they responded to the two faith-based texts. Likewise, the fact that participants were asked to grade and respond to the expressive "Pearl Mac" text may also have affected how they graded and responded to the persuasive "Gay Adoption" text. Fourth, the validity of the grades that were given to both faith-based texts may be weakened by the fact that participants were asked to evaluate the texts outside of a realistic educational context. A final methodological limitation is the study's reliance upon the online questionnaire. Phenomenography requires extensive interview methods in order to meet an assumption of "completeness": as the phenomenographer records all of the variation in the subjects' experiences, "nothing in the collective experience as manifested in the population under investigation is left unspoken" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 125); because all of the possible ways of describing the experience are exhausted, generalizations from the sample are possible (Marton & Booth, 1997). However, because this study was based on open-ended questions on an online survey, assumptions about completeness are not granted. Generalizations to other instructors outside of the sample are limited, and the phenomenographic data analysis should be considered an exploratory method.

3.   Results

The subsections below first report how participants identify their religious affiliations as well as the religious environments of their educational institutions. Grade data for the two faith-based texts are then presented. Finally, the six phenomenographic response categories are described.

3.1 Religious identities of instructors and institutions

Composition research in the United States has paid little attention to instructors' religious identity. The conflict narrative of religious expression largely erases this factor, focusing solely on the religiousness of students. An important way to begin complicating the conflict narrative is to pay more attention to the religious identities of instructors and those of their institutions.

As Table 1 shows, 84% of instructors identify themselves in some way with a religious or spiritual faith, consistent with the PEW Forum (2008) findings on religious affiliation in the United States. Affiliation with mainline or evangelical Christian traditions account for 46% of the sample. Nine of the 24 instructors (38%) indicate a wide range of non-Christian faiths or unaffiliated positions.[5]

Table 1. Instructors' religious affiliation

Christian (15)	**63%**
Protestant	46%
Evangelical churches	21%
Mainline churches	25%
Other Christian	17%
Other religions (5)	**21%**
Hindu	4%
Other faiths	17%
Unitarian	4%
Native American religion	4%
Spiritualist	8%
Unaffiliated (4)	**17%**
Atheist	4%
Agnostic	4%
Secular unaffiliated	8%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Also similar to the PEW Forum's (2008) findings, instructors report complicated religious identifications as well as significant changes in how they identify themselves. For example, one participant describes his/her religious identity as "Christian with no current denominational affiliation." Another respondent writes, "I was raised in a strict religious home and currently have a personal faith and relationship with God that does not include regular church attendance." Both of these religious identifications are placed in the "Other Christian" category. Participants describe the changes in their religious identity by identifying, in one instance, a switch from Southern Baptist to Methodist and, in another, a shift from Catholicism to a "non-denominational Vineyard church." A final example illustrates the complexity of these religious identities:

> My affiliation is with Bible Christian Church. My background also includes attending an American Lutheran and a Methodist church. However, I describe myself as a spiritual Christ follower, believing that "religions" are human-made ceremonies, consisting of human-interpreted rules & practices.[6]

Although this participant is categorized as a Christian Protestant Evangelical, he/she also shares qualities with the affiliations of "Other Christian" and "Other Religions."

Participants' description of the "religious environment" of their institutions falls into three categories; however, a considerable amount of overlap blurs the boundaries between the categories. The largest group of responses, made up by 11 participants (46%), identify the intensity of their students' or fellow faculty members' Christian faith. Four respondents, for example, account for the religious intensity of the students by aligning their institutions in the Midwest, within rural "farming communities," or as a part of the "Bible Belt." The instructor responses in this group report that "over half of [the] students identify themselves as Christians," that there are "[p]retty strong religious feelings from a majority of students," and that the "student body of the institution tends to have a stronger religious affiliation than the professors of the university." In the second largest category, consisting of 9 instructors (38%), participants use the language of institutional liberalism to describe their schools' religious atmosphere. These institutions are "tolerant," "neutral," "supportive," and "open" or "somewhat open." According to these participants, their public institutions resist interfering with how students affiliate themselves. Finally, the smallest category, consisting of 4 instructors (17%), emphasizes a religious-secular conflict between students and teachers. One instructor, for instance, comments, "Most of the students are religious, but I would say there is some hostility toward religion in the English Department." Participants in this category also hint that the secular commitments of their institutions are being compromised by a Christian focus. One example is a community college participant who writes, "Although a state institution, our environment is heavily laden with religious elements. Just recently, our graduation speaker asked all of the graduates to 'accept Jesus into your hearts.'"

It is important to note that the descriptions of religious environment are held by instructors across community colleges and universities and that participants' religious affiliation does not correlate with the descriptions of their institution's religious environment. Moreover, the instructors occasionally describe their institutions' religious identity by including at least two of the categories. This description, written by the only Hindu participant, blends all three:

> It is quite religious. Being in the Mid-West, there are a lot of conservative Christians. There is some tendency at trying to convert those who are not Christians and inviting them to attend religious services at a church. On the whole, though, there is also relative open mindedness and a fair level of

acceptance. There is also religious curiosity since students will ask questions about other faiths if they meet people from other religious faiths.

Revealing the complexity of religious expression in Midwest post-secondary institutions, this participant indicates how religion is important in these public spaces, how religious identities may aggressively confront others, and yet, at the same time, how members of the institutional community hold an ideal of "open mindedness" and "acceptance."

3.2   Grade data

In order to grade the two faith-based prompts, participants were required to choose from seven options: A, B, C, D, F, No Grade, or Don't Know.[7] The questionnaire provided no discussion about grades, and participants had to base the grades on their own professional judgment. The grade data in Table 2 below suggest that instructors evaluated the expressive "Pearl Mac" essay positively despite its use of faith-based features. Twenty-one of the participants (88%) passed the essay, and no instructors failed it. For the "Gay Adoption" persuasive research paper, Table 3 indicates that participants responded less positively to it. Only eight participants scored the paper a "B" or an "C," and the mode was the "D" grade. One participant failed the student.

Table 2. Pearl Mac grades

participant	percentage	number
A	0%	0
B	46%	11
C	38%	9
D	4%	1
F	0%	0
No Grade	4%	1
Don't Know	8%	2

Table 3. Gay adoption grades

participant	percentage	number
A	0%	0
B	17%	4
C	17%	4
D	38%	9
F	4%	1
No Grade	21%	5
Don't Know	4%	1

Tables 4 and 5 list instructors' grades by religious affiliation. A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to compare the grades given by Christian-affiliated participants and those given by participants who affiliated themselves with "Other Religions" or as "Unaffiliated." For the "Pearl Mac" essay, the grade variable had two

levels, high (B grades) and low (C and D grades). For the "Gay Adoption" essay, in order to balance the size of the grade variable, the high level included both B and C grades, whereas the low level included D and F grades. All the "No Grade" or "Don't Know" responses were eliminated from the analysis. The relationship between religious affiliation and grade showed no significance for both the "Pearl Mac" text, Pearson r^2 (1, N=21) = 1.53, p = .22, and the "Gay Adoption" text, Pearson r^2 (1, N=18) = 1.17, p = .28.

Table 4. Pearl Mac grades by religious affiliation

	Christian		Other religions		Unaffiliated	
A						
B	40%	6	60%	3	50%	2
C	47%	7	20%	1	25%	1
D	7%	1				
F						
No Grade	7%	1				
Don't Know			20%	1	25%	1

Table 5. Gay adoption grades by religious affiliation

	Christian		Other religions		Unaffiliated	
A						
B	20%	3	20%	1		
C	20%	3	20%	1		
D	27%	4	20%	1	100%	4
F	7%	1				
No Grade	20%	3	40%	2		
Don't Know	7%	1				

3.3   Response categories

The phenomenographic approach results in six response categories that represent the different ways the sample of FYC teachers commented on the two faith-based texts as well as teaching and religion. Because the phenomenographic analysis was conducted on data limited to open-ended questions on an online survey, the response categories should be regarded as exploratory, providing initial conceptions of faith-based writing that require further examination. The response categories are

- Assignment expectations
- Emotion
- Mechanical-syntactic & formal-rhetorical
- Logic & support
- Audience
- Teacher perspective

The response categories are described in more detail in the subsections below. Illustrative quotations are listed to exemplify them.

Response category 1: Assignment expectations. Religion influences teachers' judgments regarding how well the texts fulfilled the assignment guidelines. Religious identity, in particular, challenges teachers' assumptions about identity and culture. In the three comments below, teachers question whether the religious identity in the "Pearl Mac" text represents an appropriate "social system" and whether the student's focus on this identity met the concept of "culture" stated in the assignment:

> The unique/slightly askew topic of religion as culture shows they think outside the box, but also shows that they might not be able to follow directions well.

> I am not sure that it meets the assignment, considering the examples of social systems listed on the prompt. Also, I do not know what other social systems are discussed in the chapter to which the prompt refers.

> I would want to discuss his or her meaning of "culture." I sense that this student does not grasp the fullness of the term. I would want to prewrite with this student to broaden the term beyond "beliefs." I would talk about what this student has learned about life from the behaviors of his or her parents and relatives.

Teachers make statements about their tolerance, their ability to distinguish their personal beliefs from substantive or meaning-based judgments about the assignment. For example, when commenting upon "Gay Adoption," a teacher explains the evaluation in terms of tolerance and assignment expectations:

> I would probably also discuss that even though I completely disagree with the student, he did attempt to adhere to the assignment, so I don't think that I could just fail him outright, but I can find flaws with his techniques and his arguments.

Students' ability to fulfill assignment requirements is also depicted in terms of a process. Teachers need to recognize that the ability to express religious identity and meet assignment goals occurs over time and within an educational context. A teacher comments:

> Many U.S. students write about mission trips to Mexico, Appalachia or to New Orleans to rebuild after Katrina. A lot of them start by "preaching" the doctrines of their church. However, most use the Assignment Guidelines and eventually focus on Narrative strategies that illustrate their culture (religion) and write effective analyses. Through doing the paper, the assignment goes from "Why My

Church Believes in Mission Trips to help the Poor and Misguided" to a Personal Ethnography that reveals this culture more implicitly through narrative strategies of creative non-fiction. Most seem to be able to stay true to their cultural/religious identity while completing the requirements of the assignment.

Students, according to the participants, can "stay true to their cultural/religious identity" and meet assignment expectations.

Response category 2: Emotion. Emotions, passion, or voice are important descriptive terms to describe students' expression of their religious faith. The narrative, as the following comments indicate, is an appropriate academic genre for the interaction of faith and emotion.

This was enjoyable to read, because it reveals a richly evocative sense of faith-in-action. It is written with enthusiasm and genuine authenticity of "voice," which makes the essay vivid and captivating.

Your emotional connection to this event really shines through

[S]tudents genuine voice and enthusiasm are often realized vividly and effectively in reflective /narrative/expressive works—passion and dedication to the subject are often evident.

Teachers, however, may express concern about the students' religious intensity:

If speaking to a colleague, I would describe the student as a little over-the-top with his or her faith.

Response category 3: Mechanical-syntactic & formal-rhetorical. Mechanical-syntactic and formal-rhetorical features (see Hillocks, 1999), including mechanics (e.g., dialogue punctuation), sentence style (e.g., sentence length and word choice), and organization (e.g., thesis statements, topic sentences, and repetition), provide opportunities for teachers to comment on faith-based texts without referencing religion. The following comment shows an example of a teacher who asks for a traditional closed-form structure:

First, the organization of your essay is unclear. Right now, you seem to be throwing information at your reader, just hoping something will stick. Unfortunately, that doesn't really work. To fix this, you need to make sure that your introduction and body paragraphs are sharply focused. In each body paragraph, start with a topic sentence that makes a claim that supports your

thesis; then, add a supporting quote or example; then end with an explanation for how that example proves that your claim is right.

Similarly, claims about students' overall strengths or suggestions about genre-specific concerns are offered in terms of formal-rhetorical features:

> Nice use of specific sensory detail and dialogue to capture the external experience and illustrate the internal reflection resulting from the events narrated.

> I would suggest that the writer re-visit the narrative technique as given in a handbook, then work on building up to the climax of the story.

Response category 4: Logic & support. Substantive claims, logic, research sources, and use and evaluation of the sources are important areas to focus on when evaluating students' faith-based reasoning. The "Gay Adoption" text is judged on the basis of the genre criteria of academic research papers: both the use of research sources and students' analysis of the credibility of these sources are taken into consideration. Faith-based sources are restricted or are regarded as inappropriate for academic purposes.

> I also demand that students not use the Bible as a source, or any source that uses faith-based logic. I carefully explain to them what this means and how faith corrupts reason and vice versa. I also explain that they need to do a source evaluation, which could involve the enormous task of verifying God's credentials.

> You attempted to persuade an audience that homosexuals should not marry; instead, you proved that you fail to recognize the differences among sources and their effectiveness. Using Christianity (religion) as a reason to segregate and belittle sexual orientation is not scholarly and not part of the assignment. Using the same source (Dailey) proved that you relied on him for most of the negative information regarding homosexuals and their family tendencies, which weakened your argument.

> Since my school is in the Bible-belt, many students rely on their religious beliefs, what they have been taught and what the Bible says, without question. In class, I explain the issues of reliability and credibility, and how they differ among individuals. That is, while they believe what the Bible says is true, many other people question its reliability. For that reason, students need to be careful when unquestionably citing the Bible as a source. If students choose to use the Bible/Christianity as sources of information, I usually conference with them and

guide them in how to support their argument in a way that would convince someone who is not a believer.

Substantive comments and questions are posed to prompt students to analyze and develop their religious claims and assumptions. The "Pearl Mac" writer, for example, is encouraged to analyze religious identity more explicitly by developing the narrative and the connections to the narrative. Additionally, the writer is asked to consider how religious identity relates to other social identities. The "Gay Adoption" writer is asked to reflect on the assumptions about adoptions and same-sex parents. Examples of these substantive comments are the following:

> I would ask the student to revisit the assignment: there are places in the narrative where s/he could further examine "cultural identity," and look at how his/her family's identity— as middle class suburban Christians—may differ from the non-Christian middle class suburban families s/he mentions.

> [H]ow does the act of adoption fit into your specific religious beliefs? Was adoption of orphaned children from other countries an important part of your church's tradition either in the long term or specifically in the short-term concerning Russian children?

> See this idea again in terms of how this family story places you within a system such as race or class. Are race and financial status a consideration in an act of faith? Could just anyone who believed deeply enough have adopted Pearl Mac?

> I would go over the comments I wrote on the paper, suggesting that the issue that not all adoptions, regardless of sexual preference, work out.

> In the last paragraph you noted that a child needs a mother and father? How would you address the argument of single parents who raise a child on their own because the other parent is in jail, is abusive, etc.?

Faith-based sources may detract from an argument's persuasiveness and may suggest that the writer is not committed to learning about the multiple sides of an issue and understanding opposing views. In other word, their research and their reading may reflect how well they can perceive other values, claims, or perspectives. All three of the following comments are from the "Gay Adoption" text:

> The sources aren't neutral and will not help the student build a bridge to common ground with members of hostile or neutral audience. Student seems to be preaching to the choir by citing the choir members.

Additionally, he has done research but I do not get the feeling that he has looked at both sides of the issue. He seems to have already made up his mind about the issue and has conducted research just to support his viewpoint.

This student is the classic mid-western small town student. This student has not learned the value of reading outside of his/her comfort zone.

Response category 5: Audience. Audience awareness is a rhetorical quality that is especially significant for faith-based texts. Students need to demonstrate their ability to make appeals that are appropriate and persuasive for readers who do not hold the same beliefs as they do. The following quotations exemplify the participants' concern that the writers do not understand their readers' perspectives or do not envision an audience that holds different assumptions:

How do you imagine your readers? How might you have to accommodate a reader who has a similar Christian background versus one who has a very different background? What can you safely assume about your reader, and how does that affect any "shorthand" (i.e., terms that convey a web of connotations and values) that every writer uses to some degree?

I would also caution that many readers won't accept her claims about God's plan and guidance. However, she could use this statement to describe her personal worldview that has been influenced by this event. In this caution, I would explain that, while I am a Christian and I understood her references to God as the person in the phrase "He was guiding our every step," not every reader will come with that same background knowledge—as such, she needs to be careful not to assume that her readers will understand what she means.

I would point out that to those who believe in the Bible, or at least the same version of the Bible that the student reads, his argument is moot. Obviously, to a Christian, once God has spoken, no other argument is necessary.

I am also afraid that some readers might argue with your statement that this is a Christian nation.

Similarly, faith-based texts may reflect students who possess a narrow worldview and who are "narcissistic" and "closed-minded." These student writers, according to the teachers, show no awareness that an audience existed for them to appeal to:

Based upon this writing I would say this student is narcissistic. Every thing seems to keep coming back to "I" and "we" rather than the child this family adopted.

> This is especially evident toward the end of the essay wherein the author tells of the family's identity and the family's strong value of love.

> I would also point out that she does not have to apologize for her faith, nor should she discount it when writing a personal narrative, but that there must be something else going on in her life. I would point out that the main problem I have had with deeply religious students in the past is that they seem to want to write only about God, and they tend to become simplistic and predictable in ignoring other aspects of whatever topic is at hand.

> The narrow focus of faith based writings concerns me. Student who are so tightly focused on their world view as to exclude all others is deeply troubling to me.

> I would say this student is a paradigmatic island, so closedminded as to be possibly militant. By that I mean I could see this author protesting abortion clinics and gay rights gatherings and being very vocal and perhaps even hostile in doing so.

The use of faith-based sources in arguments also make it difficult for students to fulfill audience expectations. For the persuasive research paper, faith-based claims are problematic because of the inherent resistance of audiences:

> However, research based on Christian fundamentalism [is] usually couched in controversial "buzz" topics, and I do not allow my students to address such issues in a research-based course, since they typically elicit very strong feelings in any audience.

Audience awareness, finally, is a realization that students gradually develop as they draft. Writing in terms of a process can allow students to write on a religious topic and meet the expectations of audiences who hold different beliefs or assumptions.

> I teach all levels of composition: Developmental English, Basic English, English 101 and 102 as well as Creative Writing and Advanced Creative Writing. At each level, I have encountered working with students writing about their religious faith. My most pronounced experience was working with a very black-white fundamental Christian, a student majoring in criminal justice. Each time he wrote an essay, he backed his audience into a tiny corner, assuming his audience should believe as he did. After many conferences, he finally realized not to make assumptions about his audience and that if he truly wanted to be convincing or make a call to action that his audience would follow, he needed to broaden his concept of "audience." He needed to include a broader range of

research and be open to others' ideas. He realized that by only including his faith as evidence, he had the possibility of alienating his audience. This was one factor he hadn't thought of. Imagine!

Response category 6: Teacher perspective & role. Influencing evaluation judgments are teachers' personal religious convictions, their policies regarding the use of faith-based appeals, and their professional interaction with students who write about faith. First, teachers worry about students who may feel that they are being religiously discriminated against if they evaluate their use of faith-based appeals. The following three comments address how the evaluation of faith-based writing is difficult in secular writing classrooms:

> [I]t's the kind of student who will feel persecuted if I call him or her on it. These kinds of essays drive me nuts!

> My students worked on a research topic of their choice and one student wanted to write about how the King James Version of the Bible was the only version of the Bible that was accurate. I conferenced with her and advised against the topic because it was too complex for a simple 5 page paper. She became offended and said that I should not discriminate against her because of her faith. I assured her that was not my intention. However, she refused to listen. I allowed her to begin the paper against my better judgment. She never finished the paper and ended up dropping out of the class. She saw me on campus later and told me she got frustrated because the topic was too complex for her.

> I got my B.A. at a private Christian university, and in my first writing classes I tried turning in some "Christian" drivel that I thought would please my professors. I'm happy to say they weren't pleased and taught me how to be a writer. I wish I felt like I could do the same thing with my students without making them hate me, but I think professors at secular institutions have to be aware that many Christian students are told at home and church to be wary of liberal indoctrination.

Second, teachers limit their roles as educators and contend that they should not transform students' social or religious beliefs.

> I think that many teachers feel like they need to reeducate students who use their faith in their work. I believe that this is dangerous. Just because a student does not have the same views as the teacher does not mean their views are wrong. Students need to think for themselves not be forced to think like us. We just need to teach them how to use these ideas productively. If we automatically

> assume that they are wrong and we are right, we are falling into the same trap as them.

> Overall, I don't feel very comfortable discussing religion in my classes, particularly because I don't see myself as a religious person, and I don't want to offend anyone with what I say and also because I don't know all that I need to in order to have those conversations. I don't feel my job is to change their minds. I do talk about the process that students may be experiencing where they are reparenting themselves.

Finally, students' faith-based texts can be evaluated irregardless of teachers' religious positions. Teachers can distinguish "academic standards" of writing and show tolerance towards those who express their faith.

> I have had lots of students write openly about their religious faiths and beliefs. I have never had a problem with it. I do not feel that I have to agree with the belief systems of my students in order to grade them fairly.

> Because I am a person who has strong convictions about my faith, I have no problems with students sharing their faith in their writing. I do, however, guide them to see that they need to adhere to academic standards while sharing their beliefs.

> One student wrote a commentary citing the biblical Flood and Noah's Ark story. I did not agree with her observations, but I accepted her writing.

4. Conclusion

The study results challenge the dominant role that the conflict narrative plays in how FYC teachers in the Midwestern United States respond to and experience faith-based writing. The widespread assumptions that non- or anti-religious faculty members strictly maintain secular policies and reject faith-based writing in FYC courses are not consistent with the results. First of all, the study participants identify with Christian and other religious faiths comparable with U.S. national averages (PEW Forum, 2008), and only two instructors describe themselves as "atheist" or "agnostic." Their perceptions of the religious environments of their institutions vary and are independent of their religious affiliations. Additionally, the contingency table analyses conducted on teachers' religious affiliation and grades indicate no significant relationships between these two variables. Finally, when responding to and experiencing faith-based writing, the FYC teachers in the study focus on the importance of the teaching and learning context (assignment expectations and teacher perspective & role), students' expression

(emotion), language and structure (mechanical-syntactic & formal-rhetorical), and genre and rhetorical context (logic & support and audience). There is no evidence that the study participants base negative judgments about the students or the faith-based texts solely on a simplistic consideration of religion.

The conflict narrative still plays a role, however, and may appropriately describe teachers' responses and experiences for the specific teaching and rhetorical contexts of argumentative or academic research genres. For the "Gay Adoption" text, teachers articulate the conflict narrative by mentioning the student's feelings of persecution as well as the difficulty of evaluating faith-based arguments in secular institutions. Second, several teachers essentialize the "Gay Adoption" writer's thinking, rhetorical awareness, and behavior. One comment, in which the teacher claimed the "Gay Adoption" writer was "possibly militant" and "hostile," emphasizes the possibility of conflict. Teachers' justification of policies that limit or reject the use of faith-based sources represents an additional interaction between the conflict narrative and the argumentative genre. Teachers base these policies on the rhetorical concerns of evaluating sources for credibility, finding appropriate reasons, and addressing the values of secular readers.

Besides the conflict narrative, the results suggest several alternatives to depict how teachers respond to faith-based writing. One alternative describes teachers who focus solely on mechanical-syntactic and formal-rhetorical features. This traditionalist narrative limits FYC teachers' comments and professional responsibilities to correctness, organization, and style. Alternatively, teachers express their FYC responsibilities in terms of a narrative of tolerance. This narrative is evident when teachers explain how they can evaluate faith-based texts without having to make judgments about the students' belief system or without these beliefs contradicting their own. For their comments on "Pearl Mac," for example, the study participants demonstrate their tolerance, encouraging the writer to use faith-based experiences as a cultural text that can be analyzed and developed.

Another possible narrative is one of process. In this narrative alternative, teachers argue that fundamentalist Christian students and their faith-based texts need to be examined as a process within a learning context. Consequently, even though students at first may struggle with meeting assignment expectations, addressing a secular audience, or finding reasonable support for their claims, they eventually, by drafting and researching, become more aware of the rhetorical situation to which they are responding. Stating that the "Gay Adoption" writer was not typical of their fundamentalist Christian students, several teachers report that, in their own teaching experiences, their students have developed as writers and found ways to express their religious faith appropriately.

Future research is necessary, though, to explore why instructors choose these alternative narratives. Teachers, for example, may justify limiting their comments to mechanical-syntactic and formal-rhetorical features for any number of reasons. This traditionalist narrative may possibly reflect teachers who feel uncomfortable addressing religious topics, either because they feel they lack authority over religious issues or

because they are concerned that they will be perceived as discriminating against their students. The degree to which the tolerance narrative emulates the liberal balance in the U.S. Constitution between the right to express religious views and the limits of religious expression placed on governmental entities (Fitzgerald & Vander Lei, 2007) also warrants future examination.

In the context of Midwestern FYC classes in the United States, future research is especially important to challenge the simplistic conflict narratives that may reinforce regional, geographical, and classist assumptions. Donehower, Hogg, and Schell (2007) argue that students from rural areas, such as those in the Midwest, are stigmatized by discourses that privilege urban metaphors for literacy activities that are part of a "rich, diverse, and varied culture," an "urban bias" that is primarily a "class bias" (p. 17). Donehower, Hogg, and Schell argue that urban discourses frame the literacy of rural students as marginalized practices and traits that need to be modernized, preserved to capture a nostalgic past, or completely erased. Another conflict narrative, therefore, arises between the fundamentalist literacy of students and the secular literacy of instructors, stigmatizing fundamentalist Christian students as primitive, simple, and irrational (Donehower, 2007). By exploring the alternative narratives that emerge in this study as well as the important roles that genre and rhetorical awareness play in instructors' judgments, future research can challenge the essentializing assumptions about rural or Midwestern students and the simplistic depictions about how they interact with their instructors.

Notes

1. The statistics of student religious affiliation resemble national averages. The PEW Forum *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (2008) reports that approximately 83% of Americans affiliate themselves with a Christian or other religious group; out of the 16.1% who defined themselves as "unaffiliated," 12.1% report that they affiliated themselves with "nothing in particular," whereas 1.6% of Americans identified themselves as "atheist" and 2.4% as "agnostic" (pg. 5).
2. According to Helmers (1994), the testimonial is a common way of representing teaching, in which the instructor identifies a "lack or absence in the students" and finds a way to overcome this lack, thereby transforming the students and exalting the teacher as a hero. The literacy crisis, on the other hand, represents literacy and education in the United States in a constant state of decline (Hourigan, 1994).
3. Religious identity is complicated by that fact that it may be considerably less stable than other identity factors, such as race, gender, and socio-economic class. According to the *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (2008), 44% of Americans have changed their religious affiliation, moving either from different forms of Protestantism, or moving from religious affiliation to a nebulous non-affiliated group, which is represented a great deal by younger Americans between the ages of 18 and 29.
4. A basic textual analysis using Coh-Metrix online software indicated that the "Gay Adoption" was more complicated. It represented a 10.2 Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and consisted of 17.2 words per sentence. "Pearl Mac" represented a 4.85 Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and consisted of 11 words per sentence.
5. This study uses the same religious identification categories as the *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (2008). Religious identity is organized according to (1) affiliation with some branch of Christianity, including mainline Protestant groups, Catholicism, evangelical groups, and

Mormonism; (2) affiliation with "other religions," including Unitarianism, spirituality, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other national faiths; and, (3) a secular or religious "non-affiliation" with any religious groups or an atheist or agnostic position.

6. Participants' comments have been edited only for consistency in spacing and punctuation.

7. In FYC courses in the United States, the A and the B indicate an above-average performance and the C a minimally passing performance, whereas the D and F grades indicate an unsatisfactory or failing performance. For the sake of comparison, Connors and Lunsford's (1993) exploratory analysis of the grades on 350 student texts showed that 48% received an A or B, 37% received a C, 12% of students received a D and 3% received an F (p. 221).

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: Responding to Faith-Based Student Writing Questionnaire

Question 1. What type of institution do you primarily teach at?
- Community College
- Religiously-Affiliated College or University
- Public University
- Other Private College, University, or Institution

Question 2. How would you describe the religious environment of your institution?

Question 3. If you have a religious affiliation, how would you describe it? If you do not have a religious affiliation, please write "no religious affiliation" or however you identify yourself in this regard.

Questions for STUDENT TEXT 1—The Personal Ethnography ("Pearl Mac"):

Question 4. What grade would you give this student?
- A
- B
- C
- D
- F
- Wouldn't assign a grade
- Don't know

Question 5. How would you describe this student and this student's writing to a colleague?

Question 6. How would you comment at the end of this student's paper? What overall revision advice would you give?

Question 7. If you met individually with this student about this paper, what questions would you have? What would you want to talk to this student about?

Questions for STUDENT TEXT 2—Persuasive Research Paper ("Gay Adoption"):

Question 8. What grade would you give this student?
- A
- B
- C
- D
- F
- Wouldn't assign a grade

- Don't know

Question 9. How would you describe this student and this student's writing to a colleague?

Question 10. How would you comment at the end of this student's paper? What overall revision advice would you give?

Question 11. If you met individually with this student about this paper, what questions would you have? What would you want to talk to this student about?

Optional Questions:

Question 12. Describe any experiences you have had in which you felt uncomfortable with how a student was writing about, talking about, or using religion.

Question 13. Do you have any additional comments?

Appendix B: STUDENT TEXT 1—The Personal Ethnography ("Pearl Mac")
Assignment Description

The Personal Ethnography asks you to explore how social factors such as gender, class, race, and ethnicity influence your cultural identity. You will use descriptive and narrative strategies to recall a particular experience that illustrates this influence. For example, you might focus on how a specific experience reveals the complex social systems at work in your life. You will analyze how your experience reveals aspects of your cultural identity.

When narrating your experience, remember that stories help us to explore, appreciate, and learn about the human condition. It might be helpful to think in terms of what "cultures" you identify with—culture being defined as the learned behaviors, values, and beliefs that are shared and practiced by a group of people. For example, you might focus on an event that represents your culture, such as a family tradition or a moment when you were first aware of your gender, class, or race. Your options are open, as long as you focus on an incident that somehow reveals your position in a social system.

As you tell your story, you will also analyze the event's significance in terms of your cultural identity, specifically in terms of the social systems explored in this chapter. You will use specific examples to help explain your place in a larger cultural construction. Your Personal Ethnography will be 2-4 pages long.

Pearl Mac

My mother, with her great big heart, still has trouble talking about the first time she saw Pearl Mac. It broke her heart. "The orphanage was so dirty. It was not a place for children." The orphanage was in Russia, though it was very far away from anything. There were no toys there. The walls had no paint on them. The orphanage looked like a great big grey block. "It was not a place for children." Mother and Father were in Russia with an American Church Friendship group; they donated money, volunteered (my Father is a doctor), and spread His word. My mother told me that Pearl Mac's orphanage was the last place they were going to visit. They were leaving in the morning.

"God was watching over us. He made sure that we visited that orphanage," my Mother said.

Most of the children were older. My mother said they crowded around herself. They were looking for money. She then barely saw Pearl Mac out of the corner of her eye. With a grubby doll, a young child (he was only four-years-old then) laid back in a little cot. He was shivering. My mother remembers grabbing my father's arm. "We need to help him." The nurses and my father surrounded his bed. My mother held Pearl Mac's little hand. "He is very sick," my father said.

"We could have easily missed him. He was guiding our every step."

My mother and father stayed an extra week in Russia, helping Pearl Mac. Father made sure he got the best medical care. Mother spent every moment with him. She remembers holding his hand. She was willing him to live.

There was a lot of red-tape, my father had to go back to Russia two times, but they finally were given the chance to adopt him. I now had a new baby brother. I was so excited for his arrival. My grandmother and I waited every day and prayed for his safety and health. We knew he needed Love. It was my mother who called him, "Pearl," because she could not pronounce his real name, "Purleejaa" (my father says his name is from Tibet). I added the "Mac," because our last name is MacGregor. "Pearl Mac, you were guided to us by His Love." My grandmother embroidered for him a pillow shaped like a heart with blue angels floating.

We were all waiting in the living room on the day Pearl Mac arrived. On the walls, there was the sign, "Welcome home, Pearl Mac!!!" My mother and grandmother had spent the day cooking. My father was traveling all the way back with Pearl Mac from Finland. All our relatives were there and many of our neighbors. Our home was a complete contrast to the gray orphanage where Pearl Mac came from. We were a family bonded together by our love for each other. There was a lot of warmth—and a lot of good food too! I remember running around, excited about my new baby brother. "I am going to be a grandmother again," my grandmother said. "That was God's wish."

"You will need to be a good role model for your little brother."

I said I was going to try. I ran around the room holding two little American flags: one for me and one for Pearl Mac.

Then the door swung open. Father entered, holding up his finger to his lips. In his arms, he held the blue cotton bundle of Love: Pearl Mac. "He's sleeping," my Father said.

My mother was the first to hold him. She held him gently and rocked him. She started to cry. Everyone had teary eyes. I touched his little hands, the same hands Mother had held so long ago. "He's now a MacGregor, just like us," my Father said.

Pearl Mac started to cry and rub his eyes. We all laughed.

"Welcome to America, Pearl Mac!"

"Welcome to Love."

In this personal ethnography, I focused on the most important event in my family's life: the day Pearl Mac arrived. This was the day that I gained a little brother. This event is so important because it tells a lot about my family's identity. We are a traditional American middle-class family. My father is a doctor, and so we are blessed with many comforts that many other people do not share. My mother and grandmother are very active in church, and I wanted to show in this personal ethnography the importance of our Christian faith in our identity. Everything that we do is because of His plan. If you took out our faith from our family, then I'm not sure what would be left. We would only be another suburban middle-class family. Of course, the fact that my Mother and

Father saved Pearl Mac is one example of our Christian faith. Pearl Mac was very sick and has many health problems, but my parents never even put that into consideration. They knew they were guided to Pearl Mac and were responsible for him. That is the most important value of our Christian faith, that we do not think of ourselves only but think of others.

Love is the other important value of our family. We are always telling each other how much we love each other. My grandmother has since passed away, but her love is still strong, and I tried to show that in this personal ethnography. Pearl Mac is very lucky because He guided my Mother and Father to him. God has a plan for all of us, and we need to keep our hearts and minds open, and try to follow His plan as well as we possibly can.

Appendix C: STUDENT TEXT 2 - Persuasive Research Paper ("Gay Adoption")

Assignment Description

For this assignment, you will identify and research a controversial issue and write a persuasive essay that attempts to sway a resistant audience towards your particular point of view on this issue. Make sure that you thoroughly conduct research on your issue and that you narrow the issue and provide an explicit claim and reasons. Make sure that your reasons are persuasive to an audience that may be resistant to your claim. Choose an appropriate organizational strategy and incorporate your research smoothly. Make sure that you edit and proofread and that you consistently document your sources.

Strong persuasive research essays will indicate that you have a personal investment in this issue and will connect strongly with the audience's values, concerns, and beliefs. Although you are required to use outside sources, make sure that they are credible and make sure you use them appropriately. You should be in control of your sources, rather than let your sources control you.

Gay Adoption: A Problem for Individuals and Societies?

Audience: People who are worried about the number of foster children who need to be adopted.

Like you, I am worried about the number of children who need to be adopted. In a USA Today article, Andrea Stone states that there are 520,00 children currently in foster care; only 50,000 of these children will get the chance to be adopted ("Both Sides"). This is a national tragedy, with Thom O'Reilly, who is a gay man trying to adopt, "Nobody's stepping up to adopt." (Stone) O'Reilly says that he, and many other homosexual couples, are in the position to help. But, even though I think that O'Reilly has good intentions, he should not be allowed to adopt; he should also not allowed to be a foster parent, despite the large number of foster children in American society today. Kansas, according to Stone, is one of 16 states that is considering introducing a law banning adoption and foster parenting by homosexual couples. Kansas, thus, might join states like Utah and Florida, that already have a ban against homosexual parents ("Drives to Ban Gay Adoption"). For many reasons, I think you should vote for banning homosexual parents who want to adopt children. The high number of foster children is a problem. Though, do we want to create more problems for our society? Do we want to harm the lives of these children who we care about? Finally, do we want to spread the message that homosexuality is okay and normal? We should ban homosexual couples who want to adopt because homosexual parents may create home

environments that are harmful for innocent children and homosexual adoptions may give society the wrong message about homosexuality.

First, some people claim that giving homosexuals the right to marry is similar to giving African Americans the right to vote. Yet, this is completely unfair. "Marriage has nothing to do with race… Marriage is about bringing the genders together and that is good" (Stanton). Saying that denying homosexuals the right to marry is the same as supporting slavery is a false analogy. There are many supporters of adoptions of children from many races and by parents of many different races.

Gay marriage is "unnatural, shameful, contrary to sound doctrine and deny entrance to the Kingdom of God" (Edmiston). In other words, we should not support gay adoption because it can be harmful to children. There is a lot of evidence that shows that homosexual people may not make good parents. It is well known that homosexual men are much more promiscuous and that gay couples do not believe in monogamy as strongly as heterosexual couples. In The Male Couple, by David McWhirter and Andrew Mattison, it says that in a study of 156 homosexual couples, there was not a single one that lasted more than five years without an extra-marital sexual activity (Dailey). Compare this to heterosexual couples, that show 75%-85% of people who do not have sex outside the marriage bonds (Dailey). Is this the type of homes that you would want to bring innocent children into? More shocking is the high number of child abuse cases by homosexual parents. 29% of adult children with homosexual parents reported being sexually molested! (Dailey) This behavior places children at extreme risks. Child molestation can lead to a lifetime of trauma. "Children in foster care are already scarred by abuse and neglect, says Bill Maier, a child psychologist with the conservative Focus on the Family. "We would want to do everything we could to place them in the optimal home environment." (Stone, "Both Sides") Timothy Dailey also lists other problems with homosexual parents: they are more violent, they have mental health problems, and their children experiment more sexually. ("Homosexual Parenting") Homosexual parents cannot provide a good, nurturing environment for children. Brad Hayton says, "Homosexuals… model a poor view of marriage to children. They are taught by example and belief that marital relationships are transitory and mostly sexual in nature. Sexual relationships are primarily for pleasure rather than procreation. And they are taught that monogamy in a marriage is not the norm [and] should be discouraged if one wants a good 'marital' relationship" (qtd. in Dailey).Even though there are a large number of children waiting to be adopted, it does not make sense to solve this problem by allowing homosexual parents to adopt. These are not Christian homes. Many more problems can occur.

What kind of message is this sending to our society? God will judge such societies with same sex marriage laws (Edmiston). We cannot forget that we are a Christian nation. We must be careful to continue the beliefs and values of Christianity if we are to remain who we are. These values, most importantly, show that the family is the bedrock of society and that families are a bond between a man and a woman. "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27 qtd in Edmiston). We have to make assumptions about

how to live our lives, and how we want our society to be organized. It is normal to base our society on a family that includes a man and a woman. Not a man and a man. Not a woman and a woman. The Bible is one important source that tells us about our society's values. There is a reason for why marriages by a man and a woman makes the most sense. It allows the society to recreate itself, something that same-sex couples cannot. It is a healthy and a natural relationship. Unlike gay marriage, which "carries a high risk of disease, this is recognized in Scripture where gay men are said to receive in their bodies the due penalty for their error" (Edmiston). In other words, marriage based upon heterosexual couples is natural and healthy and leads to a natural, healthy society. Marriages based upon homosexual couples are unnatural and unhealthy; they lead to unnatural and unhealthy societies. John Edmiston believes that God "will judge a society that permits adoption of children or the use of sperm banks by same sex couples. His Word stands over society and when it is deliberately flaunted in the name of progress and enlightenment, then it is not light but deep darkness that results. We cannot bend the principles of God's Word to suit vocal minority groups" (www.christiananswers.net).

In conclusion, it is a tragedy that there are so many children waiting to be adopted. But, we cannot just allow anyone to adopt them. As I have shown, homosexual parents cannot provide a wholesome, healthy, and Christian environment for children. Also, allowing homosexual couples to adopt children will send the wrong message about our American society. We must find ways to provide more families that can adopt these poor children. We cannot rely, however, on unnatural social experiments. Glenn Stanton, Director of Social Research and Cultural Affairs and Senior Analyst for Marriage and Sexuality at Focus on the Family, says, "We all know that men and women are necessary for the family and that no child should intentionally be denied her mother or father in order to fulfill your adult desires. That is why we cannot accept the same-sex family. It serves no public purpose." (www.family.org). I completely agree. Despite their good intentions, homosexual parents are bad for the individual children. They are also bad for the society in general.

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