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# Blogs and Feature Articles: Foster Youth in Higher Education, Superheroine Figures in Film, and More

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**Blogs and Feature Articles:  
Foster Youth in Higher Education, Superheroine  
Figures in Film, and More**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements of the University Honors Program  
of Loyola Marymount University

by

**Amanda Hayes**

**May 2, 2016**

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## ***Portfolio Introduction***

Herein is a portfolio of my creative work in ENGL 3301.01 Writing for Journalism: Workshop course taught by Professor Jessica Langlois. Since the beginning of Spring semester 2016, Professor Langlois has been my designated thesis mentor. This collection exhibits several examples of two main types of journalistic writing: the blog and feature article. In place of Friday meetings, students were required to research and write blog posts related to their related topic of choice, or "beat." These blogs were posted on a publically shared class forum on WordPress.com. The first two blog posts had prompts, but the rest were up to us, students. The purpose of the blogs was to: (a) develop expertise in our beat, (b) improve our writing through regular practice, and (c) learn to build a platform for ourselves as a writer. Blog entries were clearly focused and included research and/or reporting. Each blog had to fall into one of the four primary journalistic blog formats (creator, conversationalist, critic, or collector). Blogs had to be 300-500 words and include hyperlinks, Images were optional but recommended (I did not include any

images in this portfolio). Students wrote three stories on their chosen beat. Stories become increasingly advanced over the course of the semester. All stories required reporting and research. All stories went through a drafting process and were peer-edited. Final drafts consisted of substantive revisions of initial drafts and they adhered to the word count and followed AP Style. My blog beat focused on foster youth in higher education with a special interest in college-based Guardian Scholar Programs. My reaction story, directly focused on my beat. The in-depth profile story was somewhat related to my beat but it did not directly focus on *foster youth* due to limitations in being able to get in touch with foster students or alumni to conduct interviews. However, I shifted away from my beat completely for the trend/issue story to gain more knowledge about a different topic (modern film culture) and to write on a topic that would allow for easier source contacts and development of a stronger storyline all within the provided deadline. In this portfolio, blogs are closely representative of how they appeared in the WordPress blog forum and articles are presented in AP Style.

***Abstract Submission for LMU Undergraduate Research Symposium***

This is the original submission of my abstract to LMU's Undergraduate Research Symposium this year. My project was accepted for presentation but unfortunately I was not able to present at the event due to a scheduled interview I had for graduate school on the same day. This is my official documentation of thesis dissemination (or attempt thereof).

**Guardian Scholars Program:  
Social Supports for Foster Youth College Students in Los Angeles**

Amanda Hayes

According to the Department of Education there are approximately 1.5 million homeless and foster youth enrolled in U.S. public schools. Additionally, a recent survey of California foster youth showed that approximately 75% of them stated intentions to enroll in a college or university; however, less than 5% ever attain an undergraduate degree. Many foster youth students have to overcome major socioeconomic barriers in order to receive a higher education and successfully complete an undergraduate degree. In response to the rising need for foster youth students to complete college, campuses have begun to create networks of specialized programs called Guardian Scholars Programs that provide the necessary resources to foster youth such as food pantries and year-round housing so they can be successful while in college. As a current LMU Guardian Scholar, my interest lies in covering news and feature stories that highlight these Guardian Scholars Programs on other college campuses in the greater Los Angeles area and what various social support services they are providing to their students to help them combat the hurdles of economic hardship and the lack of family support. I intend to create a final portfolio of related news stories including a reaction story, an in-depth profile, and trend story that showcases a comprehensive exploration of Guardian Scholars Programs, its staff, and the effects that these programs are having on foster student members. While these articles offer a glimpse at diversity on college campuses, ultimately they will illustrate a universal human experience of perseverance and determination.



### ***Blog 1: "Different Types of Blogging"***

"Different Types of Blogging" is a blog piece posted on the course account of Wordpress.com. It was the very first blog assignment prompting students to find and briefly explain the main types of blogs that are written in modern journalism. The blog mainly required online research and basic blog formatting.

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### Different Types of Blogging

January 15, 2016 by achaze

#### Creator Blog

Author Nathan Bransford’s blog is a great example of a creator blog—something that generates new content on a particular theme. In his case, his blog specifically focuses on offering his own writing advice and publishing essentials. Bransford also talks about his journey as a former literary agent, getting into the business of writing, and the process of writing his own books.

Link: [blog.nathanbransford.com](http://blog.nathanbransford.com)

#### Conversationalist Blog

This sports blog is part of the larger San Francisco Gate that was headed by John Shea during the baseball season over this past summer. On Friday July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Shea opened himself up for a “midseason chat” with everyone who had a Bay Area baseball-related question.

Link: <http://blog.sfgate.com/johnshea/2015/07/16/bring-your-baseball-questions-as-giants-midseason-chat/>

#### Critic Blog

*Blogcritics* appears to be a mainstream blog site for every topic that could possibly be criticized on, from the world of gaming to music to science and technology. I specifically took a look at a blog piece written by Adriana Delgado who (positively) criticized the recent film “Carol” starring Cate Blanchett.

Link: <http://blogcritics.org/movie-review-todd-hayness-carol/>

### **Collector Blog**

Similar to a few other blogs I've viewed, *Freepeopleblog* is a mainstream blog site that offers the opportunity to blog about multiple topics including fashion, beauty, and décor. However, each sub-page curates current trends and news on that particular subject. For instance, their fashion page features blog pieces that focus on the new trend of women's bodysuit outfits, feature New York model Abby Brothers, and new fashion label New Romantics. It appears that many of these stories are collected from outside fashion culture outlets and media (e.g. fashion magazines, Youtube videos/channels).

Link: <http://blog.freepeople.com/fashion/>

## ***Blog 2: "Foster Youth in Higher Education"***

"Foster Youth in Higher Education" is the second prompt-based blog where students had to pitch their own prospective writing topic, or "beat" which they would cover in their journalistic writing for most of the semester. In the following blog, I pitched my beat which was foster youth students in college and university, particularly those who were or are currently members of college-based Guardian Scholars Programs. The blog required research of social media feeds related to my beat and basic blog formatting.

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### **Foster Youth in Higher Education**

January 22, 2016 by achaze

For my beat I intend to report on the support services and related resources that have been established and provided for current/former foster youth, emancipated minors, homeless and independent students who are currently enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college/university in the surrounding LA area including LMU. I would like to specifically inform my audience of the current Guardian Scholar Programs (GSP) at LMU, UCLA, SMC, and UC Davis and how this program along with their related foundations/initiatives are impacting its student members and professional staff.

According to the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2% of foster youth graduate from college although 70% of them express an interest in attaining a college education. I believe this topic is especially important to convey right now because of the small numbers of foster youth who are currently entering college and successfully completing an undergraduate program. And what is interesting is that these numbers are steadily growing because of the implementation of specialized college programs for this unique population of students.

It is widely known that LA has one of the most taxed foster care systems in the nation yet LA is also home to some of the most well-known colleges and universities on the West Coast. For the small number of foster youth who become of age and enter into higher education, support services are much needed as part of their college experience. Fortunately, Guardian Scholar Programs have narrowed the gap between foster care and

higher education here in LA, helping with matriculation, personal navigation, and retention.

However, what are their resources, how does the programs' funding effect these resources and ultimately the students, what is their intention for growth as the number of students from foster care and alternative backgrounds increase, how does the LA environ affect college foster youth programs and its students?

These questions may be a little broad but I hope to narrow down my inquiries as I continue to investigate this topic. As a current member of the Guardian Scholars Program (GSP) here at LMU, I think that I can cover this topic rather extensively and deeply by utilizing my own personal experience to relate to important issues and also reaching out to the tremendous contacts I have within the diverse GSP network that could help enrich my reporting.

Here's a quick list of links to niche publications and Twitter handles of journalists who cover higher education and/or social services/foster care:

*Los Angeles Times*

*The Guardian*

*The Chronicle of Higher Education*

*InsideHigherEd*

*The Economist*

Annie Murphy Paul [@anniemurphypaul](https://twitter.com/anniemurphypaul)

Craig Melvin [@craigmelvin](https://twitter.com/craigmelvin)

Stephen Sawchuck [@Stephen\\_Sawchuk](https://twitter.com/Stephen_Sawchuk)

Branwen Jeffreys [@branwenjeffreys](https://twitter.com/branwenjeffreys)

Beth Fertig [@bethfertig](https://twitter.com/bethfertig)

***Blog 3: "Suite Talk: GSP Resources for Foster Youth Students"***

"Suite Talk: GSP Resources for Foster Youth Students" is the first prompt-free blog where students were allowed to write on their chosen beats. Herein, I chose to share a glimpse of my experience as a current Guardian Scholar member at Loyola Marymount University. This blog included some online research and reporting as well as basic blog formatting.

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### **Suite Talk: GSP Resources for Foster Youth Students**

January 29, 2016 by achaze

It's 5:00pm—a cool Thursday evening on campus and I just finished my work study shift in the Psychology department research lab. Once again, I somehow managed to make it through another long day of back-to-back lectures, in-class group activities, last-minute assignment submissions, and a few grueling hours of data analysis as the ultimate finale.

Feeling a bit drained and famished, I know exactly where to go.

I eagerly rush across campus to the Malone building, reach the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and walk through the familiar entrance of the Student Success Office where I'm immediately hit by a delicious wave of Italian food and surrounded by my fellow Guardian Scholars and friendly staff congregating at our free family dinners.

This is my home—home of LMU's Guardian Scholars Program.

The Guardian Scholars Program (GSP) at LMU, which initially began at the university in Fall 2013, provides resources and services to former and current foster youth, emancipated minors, homeless and independent students. The program helps these students, such as myself, develop leadership abilities, engage in community activities on and off campus, and gain work experience and professional skills.

Most of all, GSP is focused on assisting foster youth and independent students in completing college and preparing for life beyond graduation. In addition to the tremendous help Guardian Scholars receive with financial aid, housing, and



professional training, the free social dinners the program puts on every other week during the school semester allows us to not only supplement our own food supply but also connect with our fellow GSP peers in a family-style setting.

The program is part of a larger GSP cohort established by the West LA Guardian Scholars Network which also has partnerships with UCLA and SMC and focuses on increasing foster youth enrollment in college and successful completion of a degree program here in California.

As a former ward-of-the-court and current independent student, I met the GSP qualifications and joined the program in the beginning of my sophomore year. Since then, GSP has been my go-to resource and I attribute a large portion of my college success to the diligent one-one-one counseling and assistance I've received from GSP coordinators. More specifically, GSP has (on many occasions) provided me generous financial support that has helped me pay my rent, utility bills, and emergency expenses—even GRE testing fees.

Financial help is one of the biggest and most important aspects of attaining a college education and it can be especially critical for foster youth students. LMU's Guardian Scholars Program serves as a tremendous resource that helps students not only navigate their financial aid but provide basic funding for some expenses. Yet, much of the program's ability to provide all these great services including individual funding hinges on the initial funding the program receives from larger outside entities.

"There's a lot of monies that won't go to private institutions," says Julia Keighley, co-coordinator of the LMU Guardian Scholar Program. This past Wednesday, Ms. Keighley briefly explained to me that in contrast to foster youth support programs at state-run colleges who receive most funding from government sources, similar programs

at private universities such as LMU have to rely more on reserved grants from private institutions such as the Stuart and John Burton Foundations as well as tuition.

Though I was briefly set back by this fact, Ms. Keighley helped me see the more positive side of it. “At least there’s more money to be directed to larger programs that can support foster youth especially [those] in community colleges.”

Fortunately, the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act of 2015, a recent proposal made by Congresswoman Katherine Clark in November 2015 and that is currently under review, will allow colleges and universities to reform their financial aid in a way that will allow unaccompanied foster youth under the age of 24 to qualify for full financial aid as independent students (rather than as a dependent student where aid is less) increasing their ability to afford a college education. The Act will also increase funding for college access programs that support homeless and foster youth students.

In my upcoming reaction story, I will be talking to GSP coordinators and financial aid officers at UCLA and SMC to gather their thoughts and ideas concerning the possible implementation of this Act.

If the Act is passed this may in turn be very beneficial to LMU’s Guardian Scholar Program and university’s greater foster youth community by possibly receiving more funds from government resources. It would be interesting to see the effects of this piece of legislature.

Stay tuned!

***Blog 4: "Politicians Play a Major Role in Foster Youth Success"***

"Politicians Play a Major Role in Foster Youth Success" is a considered a critic blog where I responded to a news story or event on my beat. Herein, the event I blogged on concerned a former foster youth who, under the guidance of Senator Hillary Clinton, became a very successful lawyer. This blog required online research and basic critic blog formatting.

## **Politicians Play a Major Role in Foster Youth Success**

February 4, 2016 by achaze

As we all know, the presidential race has been well on its way. Ever since it began, we have been bombarded with constant news stories about campaigns, caucuses, and debates—not to mention the swarming details of conflicts both political, personal, and everything Trump.

In light of the current presidential race I wanted to draw a unique connection between foster youth in higher education and how our national leaders have (and *can*) play a role in these disadvantaged youth attaining a professional degree.

Congresswoman Karen Bass (D-Calif.) recently wrote a HuffPost article “How Hillary Clinton Inspired a Foster Youth to Become a Lawyer” on February 1<sup>st</sup> about how presidential candidate Hillary Clinton (who’s also known as a major juvenile justice activist) played a large role in the life of a former foster youth and directed him towards a path of ultimately becoming a lawyer.

In the article, Bass wrote that she was originally inspired by a video created by Clinton for her Let’s Talk Hillary Project that highlighted former foster youth and current attorney, Jelani Johnson.

One of the major highlights of the article was a moment during Johnson’s 2003 internship in Clinton’s office where he encountered her talking about his accomplishments with Senator Ted Kennedy. This happenstance seemed to be very influential to Johnson.

“I grew up...just wanting someone to be proud of me," he says in the Youtube video and later transcribed in Bass' article. "It was moments like that when Hillary would brag about me and build me up that I really, really treasure.”

Clearly, Hillary Clinton was one of the most important role models in Jelani's life and I agree with Bass that it's nice to see a politician get down on a more personal level. “It's not often we get these glimpses into a presidential candidate's personal side,” Bass wrote in her article.

Bass appears to be a huge proponent for Hillary and her various efforts to support reforms that positively impact disadvantaged youth including those in foster care.

However, looking beyond just one politician (for I do not intend for this writing to be an endorsement of any one person or thing), Bass also notes that any politician can get involved and influence young people that come from underprivileged backgrounds. “I'm hopeful that Hillary's example can inspire others in this country to offer support,” she writes.

In fact, Bass accounts part of the success of former foster youth to politicians like Hillary. “Jelani's story follows a pattern. If you had successful former foster children how they came to succeed, I'd be willing to bet a person like Hillary played a role,” Bass writes. This can be extremely crucial for these youth who are known to struggle with the lack of parental and family support.

With the help of powerful government leaders, foster youth are able to identify with a level of high achievement and have a sense of a greater purpose unimpeded by societal barriers. “...many more foster kids can be business leaders or civil rights activists--maybe, one day, the President of the United States.”

I look forward to voting for that candidate one day.

***Blog 5: "Beyond the Barriers: Foster Youth Succeed"***

"Beyond the Barriers: Foster Youth Succeed" is a critic blog commenting on a recent news story from Foster Care to Success, an organization dedicated to providing educational resources to college-bound foster youth. Herein, I blog on a former foster youth who volunteered her time to be a guest speaker at a sponsored event sharing her experiences with other foster youth about effective money management as an independent student. This blog included online research and basic critic blog formatting.

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### Beyond the Barriers: Foster Youth Succeed

February 12, 2016 by achaze

What does John Lennon, Marilyn Monroe, Willie Nelson, Malcom X, and Steve Jobs all have in common...besides their global notoriety? *Their backgrounds as former foster youth.*

I, myself, was quite surprised to hear that some of these celebrities had once faced the challenges of socioeconomic hardship and the lack of stable family support. It is amazing to reflect on how these individuals overcame major hurdles and transformed themselves into the people we know today—famous movie stars, brilliant musicians, and powerful political activists—not to mention that nearly all of us currently own or use at least one device created by the former foster youth who became one of the most well-known tech moguls in modern history.

It's quite apparent that the barriers of being a foster youth does not have to define one's potential for greatness. As I begin to brainstorm a few ideas about who I would like to interview for the upcoming in-depth profile assignment I would like to focus on (former) foster youth students who has demonstrated characteristics of perseverance and achievement in their own special way.

To help with my brainstorming I wanted to learn about a couple extraordinary foster youth students who are currently a part of Foster Care to Success, a non-profit organization that works with college bound foster youth.

One of the student success stories that are featured on the website is about Lacrosha White, a soon-to-be 18-year-old foster student who has taken the responsibility to be a panel presenter on money management and shed light on the struggles of stepping out of the foster care system and having to be in charge of your finances. “I’m strongly passionate about being an advocate for foster youth and all the challenges that we face,” White explained in the article.

When asked what professional will hopefully learn about her panel discussion about financial challenges she said, “I hope that they learned that it’s not just about having the supply of resources available for foster youth...Professionals must be able to put that into a course or workshop that actually tailors to a foster youth’s level and present state at that time.”

I found Lacrosha’s story to be particularly interesting after covering the reformed Higher Education Act of 1965 which mainly focuses on streamlining financial aid eligibility requirements for foster youth. Passing legislature is a tremendous step towards providing financial resources to foster youth in order succeed in college; however, as White explained in the article it just as important for these youth to hear from someone who has gone through similar experiences of financial hardship and who they can ultimately relate to.

I truly believe that Lacrosha is a great example of a foster youth student who is doing extraordinary things and is therefore the perfect candidate for a profile story. I hope to get in touch with someone like Lacrosha in a Guardian Scholars Program at UCLA, SMC, and/or CSUN to feature in my in-depth profile.

Check out the entire article: <http://www.fc2success.org/featuredstories/lacrosha-explains-why-money-matters/>



***Blog 6: "Robert Bodden Article: Profile Discussion Questions"***

"Robert Bodden Article: Profile Discussion Questions" is a blog based on an optional topic assigned by Professor Langlois. Students had the choice to either continue blogging on their beat or blog on the optional assignment. The assignment requested that students further analyze, reflect, and comment on a profile article that was previously read and discussed in class. Several discussion questions were provided by the instructor for students to respond to in their blogs. The purpose of the optional assignment was to help students to identify and become more familiar with the effective elements of writing a profile article prior to writing our own. This blog required reflection on class readings.

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### Robert Bodden Article: Profile Discussion Questions

February 18, 2016 by achaze

For my blog post this week I wanted to continue finishing the profile discussion questions on the article featuring Robert Bodden, starting with question three.

*#3: At what point do we ‘see’ the subject, either in his/her environment or physically?*

*What details do we get?*

Personally, this was a little difficult to detect but based on the article it looks like Ryan physically “appears” by paragraph five where Tom Molanphy sits next to Ryan’s bed and he began to talk about school. We get a glimpse of Ryan’s bedroom environment and Molanphy provides many facial details about Ryan prior to him even speaking though I’m not too sure if these descriptions are necessary or provide useful context to the story. Ryan is seen once again in room 401 a few days later (if I judged correctly)—on the other side of the article handout. Similar to first mentioning Ryan’s presence, Molanphy describes Ryan’s facial characteristics and conveys his emotions quite clearly.

*#4: Who else does the writer talk to in order to round out this profile, or make it timely? What does the profile say about 'The Way We Live Now'?*

It looks like the writer also talks to Paul Fleming, director of Physical Plant in order to get an idea of how well Loyola was equipped to accommodate handicapped students. He also spoke with Robert Reed, director of Residential Life to get more information about handicap accommodations in resident halls. This may be a current

issue to the rising number of college students who have disabilities. This story provides an in-depth glimpse into how a student copes with day-to-day college functioning though it tips more over to the side of “portrait-ness.”

*#5: What is the purpose of the writer being present as a character in the story? Do we need to have either writer in the story to get a complete picture of this subject?*

I think main purpose of the writer being present in the story was to make the story more personable and more “agreeable” towards the subject he was interviewing. I’m not really sure if we need the writer’s first person perspective in the story—it may take away from Robert as the highlight of the story. It also feeds into making it more of a subjective portrait story rather than one that focuses on all facets (good and bad) of Robert’s struggle.

### ***Blog 7: "Foster Youth Extraordinaire Wanted"***

"Foster Youth Extraordinaire Wanted" is a blog based on an optional topic assigned by Professor Langlois. Students had the choice to either continue blogging on their beat or blog on the optional assignment. The assignment requested that students develop and write several prospective interview questions that would be asked towards the person we would be writing a profile article on. The purpose of the assignment was to begin the process of planning for our profile articles, practice how to formulate relative and poignant questions to our interviewee that would produce meaningful journalistic content, and gather constructive feedback on our interview questions from the instructor and fellow peers. It required basic blog formatting.

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### Foster Youth Extraordinaire Wanted

February 25, 2016 by achaze

For my interview, I hope to be interviewing a current or former foster youth (young or old) who has persevered through hardship to reach a level of unique success. I've been reaching out to some of my contacts throughout the week to see if they know of any one that fits this description...I'm still patiently waiting and continuing to forge through with my efforts to find "the One," so to speak. Nevertheless, I devised some basic questions that I could possibly ask my interviewee-to-be. *Mind the brackets*. Of course, depending upon who that person winds up being, I will make my questions more specific and research-based. Please feel free to share your thoughts, ideas, or even a possible contact I can reach! Thanks.

1. Can you give me a main overview of yourself? How did you get started in [activity person is involved in] and what drew you to the [adjective] movement [or activity]?
2. What do you hope to be the main takeaway from [what you're doing]? What do you hope people, especially foster youth, will hold onto? (OR What are your hopes for the [whatever person is involved in]?)
3. How has the process been in becoming/starting [activity]?
4. What was your favorite or proudest moment as [what person is doing/is now]?  
What has been the most challenging?
5. What made you want to do/start [activity]?

6. How has this process changed you as a person?
7. How has your experience as a former foster youth uniquely added to your experience or journey in becoming [adj. or activity]?
8. Describe the turning point/moment that caused you to [do what person is doing]?
9. Did/do you have any influential people that inspired you to...? Describe one of those people for me or an influential moment that you had with that person?
10. How would you describe your support group?
11. Describe any moments of trepidations you had in [action]?
12. What advice would you give to foster youth who are striving to reach outside the box?

### ***Blog 8: "The Grace Hopper Experience"***

"The Grace Hopper Experience" is a creator blog where I produce and share new content with the blog audience. The blog is mainly about my recent experience volunteering at Grace Hopper Academy, an all-girls middle school in Inglewood, California that provides a high school preparatory STEM education to at-risk and foster youth girls who live in South and East Los Angeles. Basic blog formatting was required.

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### **The Grace Hopper Experience**

March 11, 2016 by achaze

As a senior psychology major, I've been in the midst of exploring multiple graduate school programs and squeezing in time to labor over many personal statement essays that are an inherent part of most admission applications. One of the many grad programs I have been interested in and just recently submitted an application to is UC Davis' teaching credential/MA Education program. As part of the application requirement, you must complete at least 30 hours of classroom observation in an elementary, middle, or high school in order to get a close-up feel of the classroom structure and the interaction between teachers and students.

Over the past few weeks, I have been privileged to complete a majority of my classroom observation time at Grace Hopper STEM Academy, a new all-girls charter school in Inglewood. During my time at Grace Hopper, I've been under the sponsorship of Mrs. Adell Walker who is currently the academy's Director of Education as well as a longtime family friend.

I never would have expected to have such a great experience at the school. To be honest, prior to stepping foot into any classroom as a volunteer or even as a mere observer, I was completely nervous about the whole idea of showing up and potentially becoming one of three things (if not all them): the center of unwanted attention, a feeble role model, or an embarrassed contestant on You Think You're Smarter Than a 5<sup>th</sup> Grader show. I was relieved to find that at Grace Hopper, I didn't fall into any of those



categories with maybe the slight exception of being an embarrassed contestant considering the fact that I was surrounded by bright young ladies getting educated in mathematics, sciences, and engineering—three of my weakest subjects.

Among my most challenging yet rewarding experiences during my time in the classroom has been interacting and helping the students at Grace Hopper. A majority of the students are African-American and Hispanic/Latino and come from foster care homes, the human trafficking trade and/or alternative family backgrounds. A part of what has helped me with this task is my training as a Psychology major and having a similar upbringing. I've come to discover that I have a special affinity with this group of students since I am a former ward-of-the-court that has an alternative family background. I understand their challenges and concerns about being successful in school.

I went from observing to helping students in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades with in-class projects and assignments, and also aiding students where they were struggling. I did in fact, become the center of attention but in a good way—I couldn't seem to free myself from the flow of questions that girls had about my college experience and what LMU was like but I was more than happy to share with them what I could offer.

I'll be returning to Grace Hopper this next week to continue my observation hours and gain more experience with being in an elementary grade classroom. In addition, I think I've found the one! A good interviewee, that is. For my profile I intend to interview Mrs. Walker's older sister, Dr. Margaret White who retired as an accomplished school counselor, school teacher and former executive of the U.S. Department of Energy. She has done extensive work with youth who come from foster care and alternative family backgrounds including myself. I hope to gain more insight

into how she has positive influenced young lives as a former counselor and teacher and how it has subsequently shaped her.

***Blog 9: "Attaining the College Mindset with First Star Academy"***

"Attaining the College Mindset with First Star Academy" is a critic blog where I commented on an up-and-coming foster youth program called First Star Academy. The program provides summer enrichment opportunities for foster youth to better prepare them for attaining a college education. The blog required online research and basic blog formatting.

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### **Attaining the College Mindset with First Star Academy**

March 17, 2016 by achaze

According to a March 1<sup>st</sup> Youth Today article, a foster youth program called First Star Academy has recently opened a new chapter at the University of Central Florida. It currently has chapters at UCLA, the University of Rhode Island, the University of Connecticut and several other east coast institutions. This summer it will be opening doors on two other east coast campuses.

First Star Academy Program, which was created in 2011, is a nonprofit organization that was founded in Washington D.C. by film producer Peter Samuelson who had the desire to create a pathway for high school foster youth to attain a higher education. According to the article, the program is opening up, on average, three new academies per year. Pretty soon, First Star will be on most major college campuses which will widen the opportunity for foster students to attain a college education.

So what is First Star exactly? It's a summer enrichment program that takes place on a participating college campus that is specially designed for foster students in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. Students stay in campus housing together while they complete courses that provide high school and college credit, competency in reading, writing, and math skills, and assistance with college preparation. The program also incorporates extracurricular activities throughout the summer semester. Foster youth who join the program stay throughout their entire duration of high school so by the time they graduate they are well prepared to be successful in a two- or four-year college or

university of their choice. In addition to summer courses, youth have access to career counseling and social welfare resources. Director of First Star, Josephine Jones said “We continue to work on academic skill building and character development, as well as team building.”

Since its inception, First Star Academy has been a great success. At UCLA’s Bruin Guardians Academy, 100 percent of its alumni are high school graduates and 90 percent of them are enrolled in college.

For many it has opened up a brand new world of opportunity. “Nothing I have now would have been possible without it,” said Justin Turner. Growing up in a troubled home where addiction was prevalent and dealing with the challenges of foster care since he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he originally thought going to college was just a dream. “A kid from my background, where I came from, college wasn’t really an option, or even a dream. It was just unreal,” Turner said. Fortunately, in the Bruins Guardian Program he found a bond among his peers and received the support he needed from First Academy staff to make going to college possible. Now, Turner is a first year student at UC Riverside and hopes to become an educator.

I am so glad that programs like First Star Academy exists and creative people like Samuelson are sensitive to the issues concerning foster youth and higher education. I hope that in the near future most colleges across the country including LMU have a First Star chapter. Please check out the article, it is very informative!

***Blog 10: "Rise in Female Superheroes and Comic Readership"***

"Rise in Female Superheroes and Comic Readership" is a blog where I pitched my beat for the feature article. The article assignment was completed in groups of two and my partner and I decided to move away from our original beats and write about women roles in film and television. We both shared strong interests in learning more about current film culture plus we were not able to cover a significant and large enough trend/issue story within our own beats given the limited time that was allotted to complete the article. This blog required some online research and it follows basic blog formatting.

## **Writing for Journalism: Workshop**

*Loyola Marymount University – Professor Langlois – Spring 2016*

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### **Rise in Female Superheroes and Comic Readership**

April 1, 2016 by achaze

For this assignment we are looking to investigate and report on how the increase in female superhero and comic leads may have an effect on the increase in female comic book readership among LMU students, particularly those who are majors and/or minors in the School of Film and Television.

According to an article by The Guardian there has been over a 45% increase in female comic book readership despite the fact that overall comic book sales are on the decline. Interestingly, we haven't found too many articles about how the increase in female superhero leads in films and movies have directly impacted comic book readership among women—this is why this story may be unique and relevant.

Though we haven't completed any reporting yet, we do have some ideas of who we would like to talk to and gather further insight into this potential story. Some of our sources may include SFTV students here at LMU including Senior animation and screenwriting majors Summer Shigetani and Brianna Arambula as well as fellow GSP member and sophomore screenwriting major Olivia Curnett; Katie Kaniewski, a recent LMU alumni and current employee (featured in this week's Loyolan) at Marvel Comics—she may also have good contacts at Marvel whom we can speak to; female Loyolan comic writers such as Emily Noriega; and professors from SFTV and/or Women's Studies.

***Blog 11: "The Rise of the Female Lead in Film and Theses"***

"The Rise of the Female Lead in Film and Theses" is a blog that reflects on the current reporting process for the feature article assignment. In this blog, I explain the beginning processes of reaching out to potential sources to interview as well as brief e-interviews that I had already conducted with LMU film students. This blog required some online research, reporting and proper blog formatting.



## **Writing for Journalism: Workshop**

*Loyola Marymount University – Professor Langlois – Spring 2016*

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### **The Rise of the Female Lead in Film and Theses**

April 7, 2016 by achaze

After Wednesday's "newsroom" day which replaced our typical journalism class, our story is finally coming together...somewhat; at least in terms of reaching out to potential SFTV professors such as Professor Gloria Kim whose areas of research includes gender and sexuality in Hollywood films and Professor Jay Oliva who has done storyboarding for many comic/superhero films such as the recent *Batman vs Superman*, *Man of Steel*, and *The Dark Knight Returns*. We also reached out to a few potential film students via Facebook chat to gain a student perspective on the trend of female superheroes in film/tv as well as the rise of female comic book readership.

While both Professors Kim and Oliva have agreed to speak with us next week, I was able to get some immediate feedback (via FB chat) from senior film production/screenwriting major, Brianna Arambula and senior animation major, Carl Andrews. Both expressed high hopes for the continuing rise of female leads in the big (and little) screen industry; on the same note, they both also expressed their dissatisfaction with the cliché roles women have had in film history.

"We're disappointed that female characters in Marvel like black widow aren't getting their own films and have kind of been tossed to the side," Ms. Arambula expressed in a Facebook chat. Mr. Andrews similarly expressed in Facebook chat that he's "tired of the damsel-in-distress trope that [he's] seen for years." I openly agreed

with this point. As it relates to the rise of female readership in the comics worlds, Andrews was specifically happy to hear about this growth.

“I'm happy that female readership of comics have risen because I believe the comic book medium should be inviting to everyone,” he said. He also mentioned for me to check out a video game called “Visions” that has a strong female lead. This brought on an interesting and fresh point of female roles in video games.

Despite the need for more female leads and its current state of work-in-progress, Arambula and Andrews both expressed that the steady increase in this area is correlated with the increase in student’s film and animation theses that feature strong female leads. “The animation theses are full of strong female characters and I think it's great that everyone agrees with these female roles instead of questioning them,” said Andrews.

Arambula is actually completing her film thesis now about a lonely young woman who is on a quest to find her inner strength and define who she is despite her critics...sounds like a Wonder Woman feature in the making. We hope to gain more information about Ms. Arambula’s thesis and/or those of other film students to show how this trend is impacting women (and men) filmmakers in the making here at LMU.

### ***Blog 12: "Final Reflection Paper"***

"Final Reflection Paper" is a freestyle blog where I optioned to reach out to my fellow journalism classmates and gather feedback on what I should write my final reflection paper on. Fellow peers gave me very constructive feedback and most of them suggested that I based my reflection on fourth option where I deliberate on what I've learned in taking the journalism workshop class. This blog follows appropriate formatting.

## **Writing for Journalism: Workshop**

*Loyola Marymount University – Professor Langlois – Spring 2016*

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### **Final Reflection Paper**

April 15, 2016 by achaze

For this week's blog I would like to propose a few options for a final reflection piece on my beat (foster youth and higher education/Guardian Scholars Programs) to meet my Honors Portfolio requirement. I am hoping to use this last assignment as an introspective/creative piece that can somehow recap and/or evaluate the work I've done on my beat thus far and the things that I've learned about this particular area through my research and reporting. The reflection is due the week of finals and will be a part of my portfolio submission, so while time is limited I hope to produce a quality piece of writing that's between 5 to 10 pages. Any suggestions or ideas are greatly appreciated. Thanks for your input!

1. Reflect upon what I've learned in terms of on-campus resources and funding for Guardian Scholars Programs as well as the future/socio-cultural implications for this program and how it may continue to impact the foster youth community; this may or may not include reporting but if it did I could interview GSP coordinators and students once again to gain further insight into how the program has helped them and what their hopes are in terms of continuing the program on campus.
2. Reflect upon how being a member of the Guardian Scholars Program myself has impacted me in several ways including my path to graduate school program at UC Davis with the help of their Guardian Professions Program

coordinator Sylvia Sensiper. Guardian Professions Program is a program at UC Davis that is similar to GSP but it specifically helps former foster youth get into graduate school programs at UC Davis and elsewhere.

3. Expand on one of my blogs that I've already written concerning foster youth in college or GSP, maybe the blog where I wrote about my experience as a GSP member here at LMU or my experience at Grace Hopper STEM Academy and how programs like GSP can help younger at-risk students attend and eventually succeed in college
4. Reflect upon what I've learned in this journalism workshop class including style, structure, the reporting/interview process, blogging, etc. This may possibly include interviewing a few of my fellow classmates (you guys) to get some info on how this class has impacted you and what you've learned about journalism writing through taking this course.

### ***Blog 13: "Feature Story Reflection"***

"Feature Story Reflection" is a blog based on what was assigned by Professor Langlois where students were asked to reflect upon their experiences working in groups to complete their feature article. Things to reflect upon were largely open to us, students but could include first impressions about doing group work, things we learned about the subject matter we covered, the interviewing process, and any obstacles or challenges that arose during the drafting/reporting/writing process.

## **Writing for Journalism: Workshop**

*Loyola Marymount University – Professor Langlois – Spring 2016*

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### **Feature Story Reflection**

April 21, 2016 by achaze

Completing this assignment seemed very daunting at first. Being assigned into groups was comforting and lifted the load of having to do all of the research, reporting, and writing on a solo. What was especially helpful was being able to brainstorm and bounce ideas around with our partner. Without the input of my partner, Stephanie, I would not have been able to be a part of such a creative and enlightening project! With the assistance of a group partner interviews were much more manageable as well.

Interestingly, our story idea of the rise in the female superhero in Hollywood was originally seen as a trend story. However, as we completed additional interviews we began to learn more about the film industry and the plight of the female superhero. As we reflected upon the (strong, passionate, and multi-faceted) comments and input of our interviewees we recognized that women in film has been an ongoing debate for decades. Based on our interviews with film majors, we didn't find any particular (or substantial) cause-and-effect trend related to female superheroes and students' works. Instead, many of our experts and players brought up how gender in media and Hollywood remains unresolved and up-and-coming.

So far, I've actually enjoyed the process of interviewing the experts for this project, especially some of the film professors. I've become so familiar and somewhat attached to the Psychology Village in University Hall (being a psychology major) that it was great to venture into the miniature world of film on LMU campus. I especially

enjoyed interviewing Professor Susan Scheibler which some of you may have come across if you read our article draft. As a comic book and superhero film enthusiast, I instantly fell in love with her enthusiasm and passion in explaining her viewpoint on the matter of women superheroes both in the world of comics, television, and film. After meeting her, we wished we weren't seniors so we could take one of her media studies classes next semester! However, I hope to stay in touch with her in the future and rekindle my long lost love for LA Times comics.



## ***Reaction Story Introduction***

The reaction story was the first article assignment in the course and worth 15% of students' overall grade. Students had to learn how to approach many people for on-the-spot interviews on a timely issue related to your beat that impacts Angelenos. This required students to assess the relevance and impact of their comments for a specific readership, consider the context of their chosen reporting field, strive for balanced viewpoints, and convey the results in a concise, engaging story. The structure of the article was news feature and a lead, nut graf, and quotes/paraphrases from sources and additional research. Students were required to interview 3-5 first hand interviews from sources that were not affiliated with LMU. Word count was approximately 600. For my reaction story, "Homeless and foster youth may get better access to a college education," I gathered reactions from Guardian Scholar coordinators and advocates about a prospective legislative bill that is has been under recent congressional review. The bill proposes to increase financial aid support and resources for college-bound foster and homeless youth. The article includes three sources. The article follows standard AP (Associated Press) style.



# Homeless and foster youth may get better access to a college education

By Amanda Hayes

February 2, 2016

Word Count: 539

In November there was a proposed amendment to the 1965 Higher Education Act to improve the financial aid process for homeless and foster care youth in colleges and universities.

Those who work with foster youth in high school and college say this act signifies progress in providing educational opportunity to disadvantaged students, but they are also concerned about how the new policy will be implemented across different college campuses if the act became law.

“I’m a former foster youth and back in 1998 when I came to Cal State Northridge there was absolutely no support programs and support networks other than the Educational Opportunity Program,” said Terriel Cox, current director of the Guardian Scholars Program at UCLA. “So I think policies like this will continue to improve the outcome of homeless and foster youth.”

However, Cox says it’s up to each campus to make real changes.

“But, you also have to take into account that each campus climate is different. If campuses are not implementing or adhering to these policies then it will not make an impact,” she said.

Jennifer Ellspermann, a grant writer at St. Mary’s High School in Inglewood said in an email that she has big hopes for the bill but thinks it will benefit some colleges more than others.

“This policy would have more direct impact on community colleges and public universities,” Ellspermann wrote. She also remarked that there needs to be a “concerted effort to

provide full scholarships” to foster and homeless youth so they can also have the opportunity to receive a private education if they choose “and not be weighed down by debt.”

Destiny Johnson, a former foster youth and current financial aid literacy assistant at Cal State Northridge, said that the act’s revised financial aid policies could allow displaced and foster youth to spend more time on their studies.

“Some people don’t have that support from family so I do like how the act has a plan that deals with homelessness. It decreases a barrier because then foster youth can be focused on their academic work,” she said.

Johnson also noted that the Homeless and Foster Youth Act proposed to create designated liaisons on college campuses who can help homeless and foster youth navigate financial aid requirements and on-campus housing resources.

“I think it’s very beneficial for incoming students to know that they will have some type of support especially in the housing aspect because...during breaks some people don’t have that support as far as family or have friends where they can go sleep on their couch,” she said.

Like the others, Johnson had her concerns about how the act would be implemented. “How long will it take to get these plans on board? If you’re going to pass something you want to make sure that it says that it’s going to be effective by a certain time frame,” she said.

The bill doesn’t outline specific dates but it is still in its early stages.

Nevertheless, Johnson says an act like this is never too late. “It’s overdue. I think we should have already had something in place but it’s a good start.”

### ***Profile Story Introduction***

The profile story was the second article assignment in the course and worth 20% of the overall grade. Students used the news judgment, field reporting and concise writing skills learned from the reaction story. In addition, students had to draw on creative writing skills, developing a nuanced character, a rich sensory experience and a compelling narrative arc. Students chose an individual based on the criteria outlined in *Feature & Magazine Writing* textbook, and produce a “photograph-style” story based on one or more interviews, shadowing, as well as outside research and secondary interviews. The structure of the article was feature structure with a narrative lead and nut graf. Students were required to complete one or more in-person interviews with the profile subject, observe scenes/details from the subject’s life, and interview at least one other person (in-person, phone, email) who knows the profile subject. The word count was approximately 1,000-1,200. For my in-depth profile I interviewed a family friend, Dr. Margaret Batchelor White, and share her unique story about being a retired school teacher and executive who is now a devoted professional volunteer. The article follows standard AP style.



# **Dr. Margaret Batchelor White continues to help others as a professional volunteer**

By Amanda Hayes

March 22, 2016

Word Count: 1,241

It's Tuesday evening, 8:30pm to be exact and Dr. Margaret Batchelor White sits comfortably in her lounge chair enjoying a hot cup of orange spice tea. She's calm, cool, and very much at peace with herself—packed with knowledge and experience.

We're in a small television room on the top floor of a three-story townhome, book cases are overcrowded by family photos—dated and recent. Several small glass tables are teeming with ceramic angel figurines, nutcracker dolls, and intricate music boxes. And in between the ornaments are over two dozen specially crafted greeting cards—all partially opened, revealing heartwarming notes of appreciation from friends, family, and colleagues even brief acquaintances.

Over several decades, Dr. White has continuously been involved in the business of helping others. Even beyond retirement as a school teacher, counselor, and departmental manager at the U.S. Department of Energy, the 85-year-old has now taken on a new job title as a professional volunteer. The people she has positively impacted including close family members consider her ongoing community service as extremely giving, but Dr. White simply sees it as her duty. "That's just how I am. It's my pay check, doing things for other people. I'm paying back for all the blessings that *I* have."

This being so, it is no wonder that White is involved in over seven civic and social organizations including the Links Incorporated, The Girl Friends Organization, and The Black Woman's Agenda. Most of these groups provide services to minority high school students and young adults. Many of these people come from alternative family homes which have impacted

them mentally, socially, and economically. Nevertheless, Dr. White tries her best to assist the minority population as best she can through her work in community groups. And the positive impact she is able to have on others is the most important goal. “These are people that have all kinds of situations. They may have sorrow in their lives. They don’t want to tell all the circumstances. But if you see there is a need, see what you could do to fulfill it.”

Dr. White’s experience as an associate professor at University of Massachusetts as well as her 23-year stint as a managerial director for the Department of Energy has helped her to take on leadership roles as a professional volunteer. In most all of the organizations she has been a part of she has been either the president or vice-president of that group’s specific chapter. With the position comes the many responsibilities of arranging regular executive board meetings, creating the group’s financial budget and agenda in addition to managing scholarship applications.

Many of her travels during her years at the Department of Energy as an ambassador helped her formulate a more global perspective. Dr. White didn’t hesitate to pull out a thick photo album sitting beside her lounge chair and showed several pictures of her in various places around the world including Beijing, London, and Nairobi, Kenya. There was even a slightly faded picture dated September 1994 of her traversing past Egyptian pyramids by camelback.

Although she cannot pinpoint exactly when she initially wanted to get involve in the profession of helping others, Dr. White said that it was her mother who was most influential. “My mother was so loving, giving and caring. She would give weddings for people. I grew up seeing my mother doing this and I fashioned myself after her.” Dr. Whites’ mother paid dues for her to join the NAACP and Urban League where she had her first experience with volunteerism.



As a longtime mother herself, Dr. White has some familiarity with wanting her adult daughter, Pam Wiltz, to get involved in civic groups and organizations. However, unlike herself, Dr. White's daughter who is a certified psychologist is not that enthusiastic about joining civic groups. "Pam has a different perspective. She helps people but she's not big on volunteering. I tried to put her in two organizations but she does what she has to do. She's not a person that does a lot of joining. I'm more friendly; she's a little more clinical."

Although she has not been too keen with becoming a professional volunteer, Ms. Wiltz says she is very proud of her mother's hard work and life-long dedication to helping people. "I think my mom is wonderful. She loves what she does and I love it."

Yet Dr. White sometimes needs a break from her busy schedule. She says that volunteering her time in her organizations should not be chore but something that she wants to do. "Sometimes I get sick of them. The days that I get tired of it, I don't want it to be an ordeal; I just want to participate because I want to."

No matter how tired she may feel, Dr. White continues to be of service to those she feels needs the help. Her high level of organization has helped her manage the many things she is involved in both pertaining to her memberships as well as her personal life. Rummaging through her overstuffed closet of freshly pressed tailor-made linens she found a green diary with the words "Record" engraved on the green leather cover. It was a journal she has kept since 1989. She says journal keeping has been her way to reference things and stay in touch.

Oddly enough, with such great note-taking skills, Dr. White never prided herself on becoming a secretary for any of the organizations she's been a part of. "I just don't think I would do well with that. But I do write stuff down and carry it with me to meetings; stuff I need to talk about."

When asked what personal challenges she has had to overcome to become the successful person she is today, it was a bit surprising when she immediately pointed out that she doesn't have a husband and that she hadn't had much success in long time marriages. "I don't tolerate too much of that. I've always had good jobs, made lots of money. I want to tell people up front that I don't do too well with men. I've been so independent." Dr. White views her independence as more of a positive. "I'm able to do a lot of things on my own."

One of those things is her ability to travel extensively. She recently returned from a week-long trip to Talladega, Florida where the winter national conference for the Black Woman's Agenda was held. The trip was generously sponsored by Proctor and Gamble, an employer of one the BWA members and donor of over \$85,000 to offer workshops in fifteen different cities nationwide about child and elderly care, parenting, and family well-being. At the end of May, Dr. White will be staying in Las Vegas for several days for the Links annual national assembly.

Dr. White's age has not played a major factor in doing what she can to be a full-time participant in her civic groups even if it means catching a 3:00am redeye flight from Raleigh, North Carolina to the beaches of Miami. In many ways, it may never be too late for her. But she is adamant that time is precious but giving has a lasting effect. "People talk about how it's never too late, but you should recognize people...because you never know if you'll ever see them again. That's one of the nice things about doing what I do. It's like giving people their roses."

### ***Issue/Trend Story Introduction***

The trend/issue story was the last article assignment in the course and 25% of the overall grade. Students applied the skills they learned while writing the profile to include character development, setting descriptions, anecdotes, and/or dialogue. We delved deeper for more substantial proof or context of a substantial trend or an important issue. It was required to find a focused angle, pursue balance in terms of sources and viewpoints, and meticulously verify all of our information. For this story, students worked in pairs and each group declared what each partner worked on for this piece and the instructor graded the person individually. The structure of the article is feature structure with a narrative lead, research-driven nut graf, development of anecdotes, and thoughtful conclusion. The word count was 1,500. Students were required to incorporate at least four participant sources including one "buzz" character, one more experts on the subject matter, numbers and data, and a balance of viewpoints. For the issue/trend story my partner and I covered the issue concerning the lack of superheroine representation in film. We interviewed six people which included three experts (one of them was our buzz character as well),

two LMU film students (as participants), and one LMU alum (as an expert and participant). The article follows standard AP style.

# **At Risk: The Lack of Accurate Representation and Investment in Superheroines in Film**

By Amanda Hayes and Stephanie Williams

April 26, 2016

Word Count: 1,499

When Professor Sue Scheibler was in the 5th grade, she was devoted to reading comic books. Ever since she inherited her older brother's collection, she was hooked to everything Marvel, from "Wonder Woman" to "X-Men" to "Fantastic 4." But keeping up with the comic book world was really hard to do in 1960s Kansas, especially in her household. Anything that was left lying around was simply tossed in the trash then incinerated.

One day, Scheibler accidentally let some of her favorite comics go unattended on the indoor stairway, so her mother automatically considered them disposable and were never to be seen again. It was so devastating that she lost them that she reminisces about it even to this day. "Now I'm like 'Do you know how much those things are worth right now?'" Scheibler exclaimed.

Yet, it was more than just her mother's dislike of stuff lying around the house; it was also an issue of lying around reading comic books all the time. While being raised in a traditional Christian family, the Bible was considered the best thing to read. But if it wasn't that, the next best thing was reading the World Book Encyclopedia. Reading comics wasn't considered good use of Scheibler's time, so novels often took their place as well.

However, this never singed her enjoyment of comic books. In fact, Scheibler is still devoted to reading them, so much so that it may be on the side of excess. Casting a glance around her office which is overstuffed with an endless number of superhero comic books, she seemed to be consciously aware of her immense collection. "My friend says I was spending so much on comic books a month it was a car payment," Scheibler said.

Similar to Scheibler, there are a lot of female comic readers. Female readership is at an “all-time high” at 47 percent (The News & Advance). However, the rise in female comic book readership is not reflected in the superhero content created by major studios. Female superhero leads are seen more in TV shows and comic books than movies. Moreover, men still outnumber women five to one production roles, and the percentage of female creators remains stagnant at around 10%.

The dominant male writers have clung to very stereotypical woman: femme fatales, coy virgins, and stern battleaxes. However, things are changing for the superhero genre with additions like Jessica Jones and Agent Carter and the female Avengers and Captain Marvel. Writers are moving away from things like the “Smurfette Principle,” where there is only one woman on a team of men and the “Sexy Lamp Test,” where a female character can be replaced with a sexy lamp and the story still works. While these changes have begun to receive recent attention, they have been occurring for a while now.

LMU media studies Professor Gloria Shin believes that “girl culture” has been around since the 1990s, but has begun to gain momentum in recent years. “It’s been a 25-year process, and we are noticing it.” She notes that much of the rise and success of strong female leads, in general, is due to the increase in female authorship. “There is new material bought and filmed for the movies, and that includes a younger generation of women who are authors who get their books sold and filmed; that’s a trend that interests producers,” she said.

Among the young generation of female writers who may be motivated by the flux in female roles are undergraduate SFTV students at LMU such as Jennifer Pierce, a senior animation major. “I’ve always been a fan of superheroes, and as much as they inspire me, it were the heroines who taught me to be more proactive and be myself,” she said via Facebook chat.

Pierce feels that it is important to create and share work that is relatable to other women much like she did through her student project. “I always feel more connected to women who learn from and are supported by other women. That's why my thesis revolved around that idea...[it] was about a female superhero and her relationship with an estranged friend,” she wrote.

Female roles are not only important to young females like Pierce, but these roles play a vital role in society. Professor Shin reveals the importance of girl culture and female leads. “The girl as an icon does a lot of emotional heavy lifting, her feelings matter a lot, when she’s in pain, it elicits a national pathos, at the highest level people feel for her—a girl in pain, in tears, captures a national moment for instance.”

But even with a more noticeable female presence onscreen and in the comic industry, women are nowhere near close to having equal representation or more relatable female leads. Some women feel like things are not much different from the 1970 era of Three’s Company and Charlie’s Angels which were both considered frontrunners of what was called “Jiggle TV.”

According to LMU Production Professor Jessica Newell, the term rose from years of women fighting for equality in the 1950s and 60s and the overabundance and popularity of male-dominated “buddy films.”

“Jiggle TV” was originally coined by NBC executive Paul Klein describing the presentation of female characters who wore attire where their breasts or buttocks could be seen jiggling on screen. Newell notes that despite the progressive change from the “catchy” days of the 70s, stereotypes still linger. “The superhero leads are all still sexualized. It’s fun to look at girls doing the karate chop and dressing in sexy outfits...Jessica Jones—she strays away from that stereotype,” Newell said.

Ellen Czinski, an LMU senior animation major, believes that there has been virtually no change in female superhero leads in film or television over the past twenty years. She shared via Facebook chat that women who make an appearance have stereotypical and simple roles. Czinski adds that it is really just a matter of having a good script that adds more complex character traits to a woman's role. "There are female love interests and once in a while, when hell freezes over, there's a female supporting character. And yes, occasionally [women] will have slightly more personality than a soggy piece of toast, but that's not something to pat yourself on the back over, that's basic screenwriting 101: Don't write boring characters," Czinski wrote.

For Newell and Czinski the slow changes that have been occurring over the past 25 years are not enough to overshadow their negative views about the stereotypical and limiting female roles that have been popular onscreen. A different, but just as powerful negative view exists of superheroine leads in Hollywood. Hollywood has a core belief that if a male-centric movie fails, then it is rare and insignificant, whereas if a female-centric movie fails then the gender of the protagonist is blamed.

Movie studios do not invest in female superhero movies the same way that they invest in male superhero movies. With flops like Elektra and Catwoman, studios are less likely to take the risk of investing in a female superhero movie. Kelsey Snyder of Wired.com notes that superheroine films are set up to fail with "poorly penned scripts, rom-com female superheroes, lack of female writers, significantly lower budgets, and little, if any, merchandising."

Marvel Studios has been transparent about their lack of investment in female superhero films. Time Magazine's Eliana Dockterman explains how Marvel's president Kevin Feige revealed that studios fear that men will not want to see movies with female stars despite the



success of female characters like Gamora in the new Guardians of the Galaxy film or Black Widow in The Avengers. “That’s why women made up only 15% of protagonists, 29% of major characters and 30% of all speaking characters in movies last year.”

Similarly, Laura Berger of Women and Hollywood discussed the controversy surrounding Marvel CEO Ike Perlmutter discussing his opinion about superheroines in an email exchange with Sony CEO Michael Lynton published by WikiLeaks last year. Perlmutter lists the top superheroine film flops, Elektra, Catwoman, and Supergirl to support the decision not to invest in superheroine films.

The superheroine investment is passed on to television networks that have taken over the genre. Professor Scheibler agrees. “I think the best place for women is television...it’s a likely place for female superheroes,” she said. Television seems to be a better platform for pushing gender boundaries. From Jessica Jones to Super Girl to Agents of Shield, the tube has often been considered the predecessor of female superheroes in cinema. Much of this is attributed to the belief that the quality of storytelling for television is a lot higher.

Even with the success of female superheroes on television, the push for more superheroine movies is not over. Anne Mortensen-Agnew, an LMU alumna and former student of Professor Scheibler, believes that the fight for more superheroines films starts with us. “Studios will invest in superheroine films when fans start demanding them, vote with your dollar, and buy the merchandise [of female superheroes].”

### ***Reflection Introduction***

The reflection is an additional piece of writing that I was assigned by my professor and Honors Thesis mentor, Jessica Langlois to expand upon my portfolio and deliberate on the learning experience of taking a journalism workshop course.

The structure of the piece mostly follows that of an expository essay explaining my own sentiments regarding my progress in the course as well as that of an article where I incorporate a few quotes from fellow classmates who also share their own experiences with taking the class. Quotes from students were based from my own interview questions and students' reflection blogs on the issue/trend story. The instructor required that the reflection be five pages, double-spaced and follow standard MLA or AP style.



# **Student Reflection: The Journey through Journalism Class**

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This reflective essay will be detailing my personal experiences throughout the past semester of my studies, paying particular attention to my journalism course (ENGL 3301) with Professor Langlois as well as referencing any other experiences of note. The underlying theme of the essay is the importance of versatility in modern journalism and how my personal development during this period has branched out into different aspects of the workshop.

My final year has without doubt been one of the most productive here at LMU and I really feel that my university lectures combined with my extra-curricular experiences have allowed me to develop as a beginner journalist and become much more comfortable with journalistic writing.

I feel that I can now adapt my writing style with ease, depending on the assignment, and this is down to the diversity of tasks that I have been given throughout the course. I had always been able to write well but I now feel a lot more confident approaching news and feature stories because of the skills I have acquired, a great example of this being the inverted pyramidal structure. My portfolio assignments enabled me to branch out and produce a variety of different stories, which in turn improved my versatility and prepared me better for journalistic writing opportunities.

Another section of the course that allowed me to enhance my writing ability was the lectures we had about online journalism and utilizing social networking to gain access to professional journalists and conducting interviews. By studying the technicalities of blogs and the transformation of newspapers to online content, my knowledge of the subject was bolstered and my writing improved as a result. Getting familiar with using the blogging platform on

WordPress since the beginning of the semester and posting weekly blogs to build up my portfolio and improve my writing and formatting has helped me become much more familiar and comfortable with the e-journalism.

I was able to successfully put this to practice when I posted blogs on my original beat/topic which was foster youth in higher education. I was able to utilize my research skills as well as personal experiences as a member of LMU's Guardian Scholar Program to publically share information and sentiments with my fellow classmates and instructor. In one of my earlier beat-related blogs, "Suite Talk: GSP Resources for Foster Youth Students," I attempted to apply what I had learned in the course thus far about the elements that make up an interesting story, and gathering anecdotes to incorporate some original reporting. This was the gateway into becoming acquainted with research and reporting for the reaction story. The skills I had learnt from my weekly blogging were crucial in me meeting deadlines and getting lengthier articles completed on a timely basis. By learning that my writing was good enough to appear on a blog site, I was given a great confidence boost for my prospects in blog writing in the future.

The workshop also involved a lot of research and the exercises we had been doing in the classroom helped me greatly in brainstorming, drafting, and producing relevant stories and quality "beginner" feature articles. For all three article assignments, I had to thoroughly research information and/or conduct substantial reporting so I felt this prepared me well for the placement. Interestingly, I feel that without my background in psychology which is a discipline that is heavily research-based and places emphasis on transparency and trying to reach non-biased conclusions/results, I don't think I would have done as well as I did in researching and reporting for the articles.

Other than writing, I feel my interview and pitching techniques have improved by leaps

and bounds during this semester. One of the very first blog assignments required us to write and share our individual pitches for our beats. In subsequent assignments we were required to write and share in class our pitches for our article stories. The live pitching was a bit of a challenge considering that I never done it before but it was a good introductory experience to how pitching is in the real publication world and it was helpful to gain valuable feedback from an instructor who is also a professional journalist herself. Some of the lectures provided us with the time to convene with other students in the class about developing article stories and complete journalistic writing exercises which we also often shared in class. Pitching and journalistic editing was something I had never done before so I was glad to add it to my skills list.

Taking this workshop course also allowed me to build on the interviewing techniques that were needed to gain valuable anecdotal information to enhance and, in some ways, “renovate” my articles. I wrote three feature-structured articles in the workshop and they all required extensive interview pieces, each assignment requiring more in-depth interviewing as the class progressed. For the reaction story article, I was able to interview two of my sources via email; another one of my sources I spoke to via telephone which was my very first conversation-based interview. It was a bit nerve wracking at first. After gathering enough content from my sources I then wrote the article. The writing process was challenging but it went really well and I was pleased with my work, a work that I couldn’t have achieved without the knowledge I have gained from the pitching and interviewing lectures. On Professor Langlois’ recommendation I sometimes viewed professional interviews online via YouTube to help me get an idea of what constituted effective and ineffective interviewing strategies. Online interviews that were viewed and discussed in class were also beneficial.

These tools are absolutely vital for any modern journalist and I am no doubt much more

comfortable with reaching out and gathering sources if needed than I was before. As I had expressed on the first day of workshop, conducting interviews was my biggest worry and it was a big part in making the transition from a psychology student whose often behind the scenes running data analyses to a proactive student reporter “hitting the pavement.”

Fellow classmate and senior psychology major, Stephanie Williams agrees that the interviewing process seemed a bit daunting at first. “It was definitely new territory...It was difficult conducting interviews for the first article, but it got easier for the second and third articles.” she said via email.

By working alongside my classmates during my time in class and having in-class discussions, I also learned a lot about the formatting side of journalism and how styles and structures differ over a range of stories. This goes back to what I previously mentioned about versatility and just how pertinent it is to be versatile in the journalistic writing. This workshop has taught me, more than anything, just how much being a journalist involves and what hard work it really is.

But aside from the practical elements of journalism, I have really enjoyed the theoretical section of my course this year, as it is vital to know the industry and how it operates. Journalism has changed radically in the last decade and it was interesting to learn about the transition and more about the legal and ethical responsibilities that are involved. It has been fascinating as a journalism student to see how an industry I may possibly want to work in is evolving.

The week of studying journalism ethics and attribution was another important theoretical section of the final year. We discussed the need to be transparent, truthful, and unbiased in one’s researching, reporting and writing—it was interesting and necessary knowledge. As suggested by Professor Langlois, I briefly read some parts in the book *The Elements of Journalism* by Kovach

and Rosenstiel and it was a very informative. It really made me realize just what a moral responsibility you have as a journalist and how careful you have to be to remain objective and be a “product” of the people.

Having always held an interest in creative writing, storytelling, and movie culture, one aspect of the year I thoroughly enjoyed was completing the issue/trend story. The article assignment intertwined group work (working in pairs), creative storytelling, and research very well and allowed me to expand my arsenal of skills that I had acquired throughout the course. Our story was about the rise of female superheroes in film and television and the potential discrepancy between the presence of superheroines in film versus television.

With a couple months of learning about the basic elements of meaningful writing, interviewing, and feature story structure, I was already somewhat prepared going into completing the assignment. However, taking on the task still seemed fairly daunting due to the amount of work that was involved in completing a quality article on a subject that was meaty and appealing. This is a part of the reason why I chose to divert from my original beat of foster youth in higher education for this last article installment—I had already covered so much ground through my blogs and two previous articles plus there was the difficulty in attaining several quality sources to speak upon a relevant topic.

Other students in the workshop class such as English major Eleonora Comaschi also shared some apprehension at the beginning of the assignment. “The Trend/Issue Story assignment appeared daunting at first. Specifically, I remember feeling overwhelmed about the 1500-word limit considering that each prior assignment was a lot shorter,” wrote in her final reflection blog.

The phrase, “group projects” can immediately spark a sense of dread among some



students but thankfully for me it wasn't so dreadful. I was partnered with and working alongside my fellow classmate and best friend, Stephanie Williams and working with her was a major relief! It definitely made completing the article much more manageable and exciting particularly with the interviewing process. Additionally, Williams is a natural-born researcher so I trusted her with most of the research-driven parts of the article.

Comaschi seemed to have a similar experience working with her partner, Mikael Andersson. "...working with Mikael significantly eased this writing process and the burdens of what we had to cover. At first, I will admit that discovering that this assignment was a group project made me dread the whole thing. Group projects are quite literally the bane of my existence...However, thankfully, I know Mikael and know that he is both hardworking and reliable," she wrote.

Yet, finishing the article did not come without its challenges. One of the biggest challenges we faced was figuring out what our article was about and whether it was a trend or issue story. Fortunately, we gathered enough information and sources to tailor our story and redirect our interview questions as needed to transition our final article from a trend to an issue. Another challenge was identifying our buzz character but this was easily resolved and in the end we found the perfect person for the part!

Journalism student and classmate, Amanda Rae, shared on her reflection blog how she also struggled in the beginning with finding a buzz character for her article. "...our main struggle was that we did not know who our buzz character was going to be. After a weekend of contacting more sources and organizing what we have so far, we were actually able to make great headway," Rae wrote.

I primarily focused on writing the creative lead, incorporating excerpts from sources, and

do some overall editing. The foundations that allowed me to flourish during the completion of this last assignment all stemmed from in-class experiences and help from Professor Langlois—it was an experience that I couldn't have enjoyed more. The class lectures combined with appointment time in office hours and brainstorming with my partner provided me with the skills to successfully complete a quality article and also make new contacts with film professors and students.

Overall I couldn't have been more pleased with the progress I feel I have made in the journalism workshop class this semester. I have always been able to write well, but by adding tools such interviewing, pitching, editing techniques and journalistic writing as a whole, I am now a much more rounded writer. These abilities combined with the numerous blogs and articles I've written will only serve to enhance my portfolio and increase my prospects in potentially becoming a journalist or blogger.

Thank you Professor Langlois for your expertise, instruction, and guidance throughout this semester!