

Editor's Introduction: First Year Writing Special Issue

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First-Year Composition at the University of Missouri—English 1000—is characterized above all by its diversity. While broad guidelines and goals underwrite what a phalanx of instructors implement in nearly 200 sections each year, the freedom instructors possess to teach to their strengths and interests is a hallmark that, if these essays are any indication, is a boon to MU students. As the first century rhetor Quintilian wrote in *Institutio Oratoria*, one of our earliest texts on the teaching of writing, “The gifts of nature are infinite in their variety, and mind differs from mind almost as much as body from body. This is clear from a consideration of the orators themselves, who differ in style to such an extent that no one is like another.” His hope is that by foregrounding individual uniqueness, teachers will work to help each student develop native gifts in addition to the habituating basic skills.

The essays selected here for Artifacts' special issue featuring the work of MU first year writers demonstrate that this is not simply an ideal, but a regular result of actual classroom practice. These essays were culled from a strong set of submissions, and in their variety of subject, method, voice, and form show that from the start our writers are being asked to struggle with the leap from high school writing—most often learned as a formulaic process—toward a more mature understanding of writing as a complex and hard-won balance of personal style, research, creative logic, and the rhetorical considerations of audience and purpose. We think these essays well-represent the hard work so many Mizzou students are putting into their writing.

For example one of our Featured Essays, “The Art of Music, Apple Pie, and Coping,” by Kelly Gehringer, is notable not only for its personal and insightful exploration of ways in which music can enable the acceptance of reality, but also for its parallel narrative—set apart in sidebars throughout—detailing the science and experience of how apple pie offers a similar comfort.

Michelle Horan's “The Anti-ana” takes readers into the world of websites and online communities by and for those who embrace thinness as a lifestyle, rejecting the idea of anorexia or bulimia as a “disorder.” While she sides with those who see these sites as dangerous, this balanced investigation reveals a culture few know exists.

Another world—a virtual one—opened up to non-initiates is Second Life in Jamela Barry's “The New Path of Liberation: Choosing to Be Disabled on Second Life.” Barry looks at the choices disabled persons make when creating a second identity with which to inhabit the online universe, namely whether to use a wheelchair-bound avatar or not.

As if evidence were needed to support the predominant role cyberspace plays in our lives now, another essay, “Facebook: Our Social Tool,” by Sissi Xue, takes a documentary approach—relying heavily on personal interviews—to investigate why people spend so much time on Facebook and how they are using it. Her accompanying PowerPoint extends and graphically augments the essay, examining ways in which various populations employ Facebook to connect with others.

In a more analog piece, Owen Neace gives a close reading of a Sioux folktale, “The End of the World,” which chronicles the forces of colonization with Sioux culture. What Neace does so well here is rather than use the folktale as a place from which to launch into extra-literary political or

historical considerations, he stays within the work and examines what its particular images and motifs reveal about how the Sioux understood these events to impact their traditional ways of life.

Another essay doing a textual/cultural analysis is Sara Whitecotton's "Feminism in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*," which reads Austen's novel alongside the later writings of Mary Wollstoncraft, discovering an early feminist type in the character of Catherine Morland. Whitecotton finds that both authors, across time and genre, foresee women developing an ability to think and act for themselves without regard to a man's judgment.

Patrick Short, in "Gastrointestinal Disease and Diet," writes of his own journey to research the causes and management of Crohn's Disease, documenting his experience with both allopathic and homeopathic courses of treatment. Contrary to what many doctors and those whose research is limited to traditional methods (i.e. drugs), Short finds that diet can dramatically effect how one feels while living with Crohn's, if not possibly curing it.

In another food-related essay, Chelsea Youngberg explores the science of taste and desire with a particular focus on processed foods. In finding that our brains are wired for sugar and fat, she questions the health-promoting rhetoric of those who fail to account for how pleasurable fast food and junk food can be, and argues that satisfying these cravings can be a humane, guilt-free experience so long as one can moderate against over-indulgence.

Finally, Yu Ji examines the tradition of arranged marriage in Eastern cultures. Jumping off from a short story by Iranian writer Firoozeh Dumas, Ji marshals a range of sources from a number of Asian traditions to portray the experience of, and demonstrate the benefits to, those who have for generations joined families and begun lifelong unions this way. What she finds challenges the common, if not reflexive, Western assumption individuals choosing their own mates is in all ways superior.



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