

Reflective Essay

I became a history major almost immediately upon my arrival at the College of Charleston. I admit I was a bit premature compared to many of my fellow classmates. Most people flounder about for the first part of the college career but I was positive I wanted to study history. I enrolled in my first history class the next semester, History of the New South with Dr. Gleeson. I thought I was an excellent history student and that I would certainly excel in all of my classes; however, I was definitely wrong. History at the undergraduate level was quite different from history in high school. I struggled a bit at the beginning; however, as a result of being challenged I have been able to further develop and define my writing style.

My tenure in History of the New South definitely taught me some things about studying history at the collegiate level. Rather than emphasizing the retention and recitation of facts, collegiate history emphasized writing. Of course I had written plenty of papers during my high school career; however, the vast majority of them had been English papers, not history papers. Essentially, by the time I had begun college, the only history essays I had written were on the Advanced Placement exam. Dr. Gleeson taught me a lot about writing at the undergraduate level. Through his reading response papers I learned how to effectively analyze secondary sources. This skill in particular is paramount to the success of a history student as it teaches them not to merely accept the validity of what another historian has said but to question it as well. While I left his class with a "B," I was adequately prepared to succeed in future history classes at the College of Charleston.

I took three history classes during my sophomore year: History of Disease and Medicine, The Irish in the Atlantic World and I did an internship. While I certainly did learn a lot from Dr.

Peter McCandless, I yet again learned the most from Dr. Gleeson. During spring 2007, I was both Dr. Gleeson's student and intern. Driven by the "B" I had received from him during my freshman year, I was adamant about getting an "A" from him this time. I worked tirelessly on all of my assignments for his class, especially the research paper. It was during his class that I finally understood the true intent of a research paper assignment. The professor meant for the student to continuously work on the research paper for the entirety of the semester and that I did. I took full advantage of the library's resources, probably checking out at least ten books through PASCAL (by the way, this resource is paramount to the success of history students and you should do all that you can to ensure that future students have access to the service). I read both senior and graduate theses in addition to numerous articles from online databases. Through the Irish in the Atlantic World Conference I even had the opportunity to meet several of the authors of the books and articles that I was using for my paper and discuss the topic with them. After weeks of in-depth research, I wrote a detailed and articulate paper that eventually totaled sixteen pages (four more pages than assigned). I think the most important thing I learned through this paper, however, was how to cite correctly. Dr. Gleeson is a stickler for correct Turabian citations and on my paper he actually commented on the accuracy of my citations. Correct citation is a skill that definitely helped me to succeed in my undergraduate studies as it prevented me from plagiarizing.

The first semester of my junior year was a little more trying than others. I admit I procrastinated a bit on my papers that semesters but I was feeling fine about my progress until the day before Thanksgiving break. I had two papers due in the two weeks before the last day of classes and I was completely confident that I would be able to get them done before then. However, on that Monday, my computer completely crashed. I was able to save what little I had

of my papers but the computer had to be shipped off to be repaired. I had to borrow my roommates' computers to finish the first paper by its due date but they both had papers due on the last day of classes too so I was not going to be able to use their computers to write my last paper. Luckily, my computer arrived on Friday afternoon and I was able to use it to write my last paper of the semester. Unfortunately, that only gave me two days to write a ten page paper. It was a long weekend; however, I was able to get the paper done. It was the first time I had truly turned in a paper without being confident of success. Fortunately, I was able to get an "A" on the paper because of my excellent research. The downside was that the professor, Dr. Knee, thought that writing was my Achilles heel. I had never been told that before. However, after calming down and examining my paper once again, I saw his point. My writing style was too flowery. Through Dr. Knee's comments, I learned that historical writing should be more direct and to the point, without any of the flowery literary elements reminiscent of an English paper.

I believe that the three and a half years I have spent studying history here at the College of Charleston have fully prepared me for success in both my research seminar and future career. From the many teachers I have had here at the college, I have learned how to conduct independent research and the twenty-five page paper that seemed so daunting at the beginning of my college career aren't as daunting now that I am a senior. I'm not sure if every student feels as prepared as I do to write such a lengthy paper; however, excellent professors such as Dr. David Gleason and Dr. Stuart Knee have prepared me for my future through constructive criticism and guidance.