



Excellence in Upper-Level Writing 2013/2014

Shelley Manis

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Ask any professional, any business person, or any employer about the most important qualifications for college-educated workers, and the answer will be nearly universal: the ability to write well. The Upper Level Writing Requirement (ULWR) was established to enable undergraduates in the College of Literature Science and the Arts to develop their capacities as writers. Originally designed, in 1978, to help students “understand and communicate effectively the central concepts, approaches, and materials of their discipline,” the ULWR supports a slightly different goal in today’s more interdisciplinary context. A significant percentage of students now have more than one major, and/or choose to fulfill the ULWR in a field outside their major. Likewise, some faculty members are more concerned with preparing students to write for multiple audiences rather than for a discipline-based audience. However, whether students fulfill the ULWR within or outside their majors, they are held to the same standards of effective writing. This collection demonstrates the continuing value of the ULWR. Courses like the ones in which students produced these essays create contexts where students meet the expectations of the ULWR and can push beyond them to an even more impressive level of accomplishment. While the specifics of what counts as evidence and how one makes a convincing argument vary across the essays included here, each one embodies qualities that mark effective writing. The authors deal with a wide variety of topics, but in every case they combine deep understanding of a specific area with excellent prose. They take risks and adhere to conventions; they synthesize complex ideas and provide rich detail; they exert intellectual independence and respect disciplinary conventions. You will see these qualities as you read about family policy in cold war Germany, an economic perspective on education, a comparison of the camel songs of the Tuareg and the Bedouin, the effect of compost on ryegrass, record keeping in ancient civilizations, and new supergiant stars. We have been honoring students for outstanding writing in ULWR courses since 2010, but this year, thanks to a generous gift from the Granader Family, the prizes are more substantial. We are grateful to the Granaders for choosing to recognize student writing in this way. This collection is another form of recognition for the award-winning students. By publishing this student writing both online and in hard copy we make it available as a model and as a source of inspiration for others. Talented and committed as they are, these students represented here did not become award-winners entirely on their own. Each of them benefitted from well-designed assignments, careful reading, and suggestions for revision from the instructors who nominated them. The instructors’ introductions for each selection provide a window into student learning as well as into the specific dimensions of each student’s achievements.

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