Fall 2012 English 1A

**In-class diagnostic essay: Are we “Declining by Degrees”?** (combined prompt)  
   
**Procedure:**   
\* Write a well-developed essay in which you both respond to the question I’m giving you AND refer to the ideas and evidence in the film. By “evidence” I mean both stats you might have remembered or noted down and the profiles of the students, teachers, and administrators. The idea is to respond with your own views on the subject. You should have a point to make, supported by what you have seen so far, both in the film and in your own life.  
   
\* Draw on your own personal experience, observations, and reading to support your thesis. Try to avoid clichés, especially in your thesis.  
   
\* Remember to develop your ideas with descriptive details, tell stories, use compare/contrast, etc.  
   
\* Write for your peers and anyone else who might read The Spartan Daily (faculty, staff, administrators, parents of college students.)  
   
\*Aim for at LEAST 3 pages, double-spaced, if your handwriting is average size. More is better, usually. PLEASE write legibly! I have to read 75 of these.  
   
Choose ONE Question from the two below:

1. **Students who just can’t afford a university education:** Considering that there are academically qualified, hard-working students like Ceylon (the one who had to work 48 hours per week at a factory to support her schooling) who are getting squeezed out of college by unmet financial needs, what (if anything) do you think should be done to help students like her?
2. **The party-hearty culture:** How do you feel about the kind of student who wants to party through college with as little work as possible, and who might try to find ways to get the professor to go easy on the class (wasting class time, for instance, by dominating the class discussion even though they obviously didn’t do the reading, or deliberately drawing the professor onto a sidetrack or dragging out a question about something they should have read)? How do you feel about students who try to get you to help them cheat? Obviously this sort of student exists in the lower grades, too, but maybe you weren’t expecting to see them in college, too? Should they be left alone, as long as they’re paying their tuition and passing their classes?
3. **Lecture Hall:** We all can agree that the astronomy class with the cool special effects technology had the most engaged students of all the lecture-sized classes we saw, even though it was “just a gen ed class” for most of them. However, even after the professor presented the information in a lively way with great visuals and then let the students discuss it among themselves, only half of them got the material for the one example we saw. What do you think this shows? Are large lecture-sized classes ever effective? What should/can be done about them? Remember, like so many decisions college administrators make, this one is influenced by budgets. Small classes cost more, as it means hiring more professors (whether that means tenure-track people, lecturers like the astronomy prof, or graduate students who teach).
4. **Treading Water:** At colleges like ASU and the University of West Kentucky, most of the classes were presented as being dominated by students who were just “sleepwalking” or “treading water” rather than challenging themselves. Do you think colleges should let students slide by? Do you think it is possible for a mature, motivated student to get a good education even when stuck in an environment where a majority of students are content to just slide by? Are “extraordinary peers”—what the film calls honors students—necessary to raise the bar in the classroom?

Fall 2012 English 1A **In-class essay #2 *Film Club***

**Procedure:**

* Read the passage below from David Gilmour’s *Film Club*. Write a well-developed essay in which you both refer to the ideas in the passage you choose and respond with your own views on the subject. You should have a point to make and relate it to the point in the passage you select.
* Draw on your own personal experience, observations, and reading to support your thesis. Try to avoid clichés, especially in your thesis. Bring in what you know about the Film Club experiment from the first reading, and you can refer to “Why Chinese Mothers are Superior,” or anything else we’ve read or discussed. (But that’s not required.) If you bring in anything we haven’t read together, explain it for us.
* Remember to develop your ideas with descriptive details, tell stories, use compare/contrast, etc. Whichever of the modes you think would be effective.
* Aim for at LEAST 4 pages, SKIPPING LINES, if your handwriting is average size. More is better, usually.
* AUDIENCE: Write for your 1A classmates and teacher, as if we had a course wiki to post responses to our readings, and this was in response to this chapter in *Film Club*.

**Context:** Below is a dialog between Jesse and his dad after they watched a film called *The Bicycle*. The dad is the “I” here.

I said, “I used to think my life was going to start when I graduated from university. Then I thought it’d start when I published a novel or got famous or something silly like that.” I told him my brother had said this astonishing thing to me once—that he didn’t think his life was going to start till he was fifty. “What about you?” I said to Jesse. “When do you think your life is going to start?”

“Mine?” Jesse said.

“Yes. Yours.”

“I don’t believe any of that stuff,” he said, rising to his feet in a gust of excitement, the excitement of ideas. “You know what I think? I think your life begins when you’re *born.*”

He stood in the middle of the living room, almost vibrating. “Do you think that’s true? Do you think I’m right?”

“I think you’re a very wise man.”

And then, in a gesture of uncontrollable pleasure, he clapped his hands together, wham!

“You know what *I* think,” I said. “I think you belong in college. That’s what they do there. They sit around talking about stuff like this. Except unlike in a living room, where there’s just your dad, there’s a zillion girls.”

At that he cocked his head. “Really?”

And like that first day—it seemed ages ago—with *The 400 Blows,* I knew to leave it there.

**Fall 2012 English 1A In-class essay #2 Parenting and Self-Esteem**

**Procedure:**

* Read the passage below from Amy Chua’s “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior,” originally published in the *Wall Street Journa*l. Write a well-developed essay in which you both refer to the ideas in the passage you choose and respond with your own views on the subject. You should have a point to make and relate it to the point in the passage you select.
* Draw on your own personal experience, observations, and reading to support your thesis. Try to avoid clichés, especially in your thesis. If you want, you can bring in your thoughts about the film club experiment, too, and you can refer to anything else we’ve read or discussed. (But that’s not required.) If you bring in anything we haven’t read together, explain it for us.
* Remember to develop your ideas with descriptive details, tell stories, use compare/contrast, etc. Whichever of the modes you think would be effective.
* Aim for at LEAST 4 pages, SKIPPING LINES, if your handwriting is average size. More is better, usually.
* AUDIENCE: Write for your 1A classmates and teacher, as if we had a course wiki to post responses to our readings.
* Title: Wiki comments don’t always have titles, but put one anyway, for practice. Try to make it interesting but also relevant to your thesis. Also, try to have an interesting “hook” at the beginning.

“Western parents worry a lot about their children's self-esteem. But as a parent, one of the worst things you can do for your child's self-esteem is to let them give up. On the flip side, there's nothing better for building confidence than learning you can do something you thought you couldn't.

There are all these new books out there portraying Asian mothers as scheming, callous, overdriven people indifferent to their kids' true interests. For their part, many Chinese secretly believe that they care more about their children and are willing to sacrifice much more for them than Westerners, who seem perfectly content to let their children turn out badly. I think it's a misunderstanding on both sides. All decent parents want to do what's best for their children. The Chinese just have a totally different idea of how to do that.

Western parents try to respect their children's individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions, supporting their choices, and providing positive reinforcement and a nurturing environment. By contrast, the Chinese believe that the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future, letting them see what they're capable of, and arming them with skills, work habits and inner confidence that no one can ever take away.”

**In-class essay #3.1 International students’ views of their U.S. peers** (combined prompt)

**Overview:** Below is a passage from the book *My Freshman Year,* by Rebekah Nathan (pseudonym for an anthropology professor). It is from the chapter we read called “Worldliness and World View.” I have moved some bits around to increase the coherence of the passage.

**Prewriting**: Take 5 minutes or so for pre-writing. Circle important words in the prompt, brainstorm a bit, make a simple outline. Sketch out a thesis.

**What to write:**

(1) **Explain the meaning of the passage**, referring to specific ideas and phrases

(2) **Drawing on your own personal experience, observations, and reading**, discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the passage. If you can, **include stories, anecdotes, details about yourself and people you know**. Note: If you can also relate this to essays we’ve read in class, or the documentary we saw, I’ll be *really* impressed.

**Audience/Forum:** Write for an **online forum for college students** interested in global issues.

**Format**/**length**: Aim for **at LEAST four pages**, **skipping lines**, if you have normal-sized handwriting. **Use a title** to draw in your readers.

**Reminders:** Include **both summary of this particular passage AND your response**, with more response, though. Please write neatly! Please **skip lines**

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“The single biggest complaint international students lodged about U.S. students was, to put it bluntly, our ignorance. [. . . .] Despite the critical consensus in these comments, it would be unfair of me to represent international student perspectives as roundly negative. In general, students from outside the US warmly appreciated the American educational system as well as the spirit of the American college student. The criticisms that they did have, though, were pointed and focused. Taken together, they amounted to nothing less than a theory of the relationship among ignorance, intolerance, and ethnocentrism in this country, one that international eyes saw bordering on profound self-delusion. [. . . .] One key toward creating a more positive cycle of information, self-awareness, and tolerance was for many the university and university education itself. Learn a foreign language and study overseas, many recommended for individual students. Use your education to expand your purview beyond your own country. For the university [curriculum], other students recommended a greater emphasis on self-awareness, including a more critical eye directed to our own institutions and history.”

“For the international students I interviewed, American college culture is a world of engagement, choice, individualism, and independence, but it is also one of cross-cultural ignorance and self-delusion that cries out for remediation. [. . . .] The connection between lack of information and intolerance translated occasionally into personal stories of frustration, hitting home in the lives of some [international] students. [. . . .] One key toward creating a more positive cycle of information, self-awareness, and tolerance was for many the university and university education itself. Learn a foreign language and study overseas, many recommended for individual students. Use your education to expand your purview beyond your own country. For the university [curriculum], other students recommended a greater emphasis on self-awareness, including a more critical eye directed to our own institutions and history.”

**In-class essay #3.2 Is This the “Quiet Generation”?**

**Overview:** Below is a passage from a column that was printed in the NY Times toward the end of the last presidential campaign (Obama-McCain). The writer is a regular columnist for the paper and an award-winning writer (three Pulitzer Prizes for international journalism) best known for *The World is Flat.*

**Directions:**

(1) **Explain the meaning of the passage**, referring to specific ideas and phrases

(2) **Drawing on your own personal experience, observations, and reading**, discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the passage. If you can, **include stories, anecdotes, details about yourself and people you know**. Note: If you can also relate this to other essays we’ve read in class, or the documentary we saw, that is nice, too. You could get an excellent essay just from your own experiences.

**Audience/Forum:** Write as if you were commenting on Friedman’s essay on the NY Times Web site. So remember to adjust to this: spell our San Jose State University when you identify yourself as a student (which you should do).

**Format**/**length**: Aim for **at LEAST four pages**, **skipping lines**, if you have normal-sized handwriting. **Use a title** to draw in your readers. Please **skip lines, use pen!**

**Generation Q** By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN October 10, 2007

I just spent the past week visiting several colleges [. . .] and I can report that the more I am around this generation of college students, the more I am both baffled and impressed. I am impressed because they are so much more optimistic and idealistic than they should be. I am baffled because they are so much less radical and politically engaged than they need to be.

[. . . .] [C]ollege students today are not only going abroad to study in record numbers, but they are also going abroad to build homes for the poor in El Salvador in record numbers or volunteering at AIDS clinics in record numbers. Not only has terrorism not deterred them from traveling, they are rolling up their sleeves and diving in deeper than ever [. . . .] It’s for all these reasons that I’ve been calling them “Generation Q” — the Quiet Americans, in the best sense of that term, quietly pursuing their idealism, at home and abroad.

But Generation Q may be too quiet, too online, for its own good, and for the country’s own good. When I think of the huge budget deficit, Social Security deficit and ecological deficit that our generation is leaving this generation, if they are not spitting mad, well, then they’re just not paying attention. And we’ll just keep piling it on them.

[. . . .] Generation Q would be doing itself a favor, and America a favor, if it demanded from every candidate who comes on campus answers to three questions: What is your plan for mitigating climate change? What is your plan for reforming Social Security? What is your plan for dealing with the deficit — so we all won’t be working for China in 20 years? America needs a jolt of the idealism, activism and outrage (it must be in there) of Generation Q. That’s what twentysomethings are for — to light a fire under the country. But they can’t e-mail it in, and an online petition or a mouse click for carbon neutrality won’t cut it. They have to get organized in a way that will force politicians to pay attention rather than just patronize them.