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Analytical Narrative Regarding Artifacts

This Analytical Narrative will describe, explain, and analyze each of the five artifacts represented in the Capstone Portfolio as a requirement for the Masters in Humanities program at American Public University. This narrative includes a background of each item describing each artifact, the defense and analysis of the artifacts to determine how each relates to program and institutional learning objectives and the piece's application to my future career goals. The general theme of the entire portfolio project demonstrates how and when women were able to realize educational goals throughout history through a series of projects developed from various class assignments in humanities program at American Public University. The five selected essays and videos are presented in chronological order to show how women's contribution to the humanities evolved over time from Ancient Greece to the start of the 19th century.

Women's Contribution to the Humanities in the Ancient World.

The first artifact, "Trepidation of Women Revealed in Homer's Odyssey," is an essay from the class HUMN510: The Ancient World focusing on how women are represented in Homer's epic work, *The Odyssey*. Homer's epic work is a man's tale told by a man for men, however, many different female characters throughout the poem including goddesses, demi-goddesses, wives, and slaves reflect the real-life trepidation experienced by Greek men toward women in Greek culture. The essay uses examples and excerpts from ancient epic poems to explain why women

did not contribute to public arts like writing poetry and plays, acting and watching theater productions, or creating paintings and sculpture.

The essay explores how women were excluded in the production of arts because to the many time-consuming and significant responsibilities obligations during this era which revolved around childbearing, childrearing, domestic obligations and religious duties. However, it is important to add that woman, in retrospect, contributed to the arts through weaving as part of their domestic duties, which can be considered a form of creative storytelling.

The essay's relation to the humanities program includes the exploration of gender issues in the ancient world and how propaganda was used as a teaching tool for men to learn about the different types of women. This is reflected the program objective "applying classical logic to historical and contemporary issues of human behavior, society, and civilization" (APUS). The inclusion of such great works as *The Odyssey* (800 BCE), *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 2100–1200 BC), and *Medea* (c. 431 BCE), helps to "critically analyze literary works for their contribution to the body of human knowledge" (APUS), reflecting another objective of the humanities program.

One of my career goals is to reveal the importance women's contribution to the arts throughout history and to explore the reasons why they could not contribute to the humanities for much of history, especially ancient history. As we have witnessed throughout modern history, and some classical history, it was not because women were not capable of creating works of art, but because they were busy with many time-consuming domestic responsibilities. This essay is an important application to my career to provide content for future blogs and documentaries to be presented to a larger audience to demonstrate why woman artists and writers were so rare and not taken as serious as men in the arts and the sciences for most of history.

Women's Contribution to the Humanities During the Middle Ages.

The second project that I chose to further explore the theme of the overall portfolio is an eight-minute video called “Abelard versus Heloise: When the Student Teaches the Teacher” that was produced for the class HUMN520: Antiquity and Medieval World. The video portrays the tragedy of Abelard and Heloise by using excerpts from the letters they wrote each other while they were both self-exiled, meaning that they chose their isolation rather than it being forced upon them as punishment. The music and paintings from the Medieval period were used in the video to enhance the visual experience in portraying the consequences of their reckless passion, ultimately resulting in her pregnancy and his unfortunate castration. Both Abelard and Heloise chose to become teachers, and while Abelard continued to teach philosophy, Heloise decided to dedicate her life to improving the lives of the anchoresses in a convent that she chose to spend the rest of her life in. It is important to stress the fact that both Abelard and Heloise accepted their fate, relinquishing their former affluent positions to lead a pious life dedicated to exploring philosophy and teaching to bring them both closer to God.

By including specific letters that Heloise wrote to Abelard, the video illustrates how Heloise established a much-improved educational experience for women who chose to become anchoresses in the Medieval World. The video includes Heloise’s instructions, veiled as seeking advice from Abelard, which discusses in detail her ideas on how to create a better educational experience for the women. The changes made at the convent, based on Heloise and Abelard’s discussions, were a significant step toward proving evidence of the intellectual capabilities of woman which ultimately aided in the advancement of women’s contribution to the humanities. In this way, I am using the documentary to reveal a significant step in the establishing a timeline of educating women through the projects that I developed in the humanities program. Developing

an emotional video of this love story is a good way to teach interested parties to remember the philosophical ideas expressed by both Abelard and Heloise.

One of the program objectives expressed in this video project includes the “articulation of written positions on ideas that stem from the great works of human thought” (APUS), which was accomplished by examining the letters shared by Abelard and Heloise which focused on educating women. Another program objective to “analyze the origins and implications of the concept of individualism as it applies in concepts of tradition, power, society, and culture” (APUS), was included by exploring Heloise’s desire to become independent rather than reliant on the traditional path for women to get married and raise a family during the Middle Ages.

The ways this project applies to life lessons in general is to reveal how women have contributed to the arts throughout history. Even though Heloise was not an artist, she was a valuable teacher who contributed to improving educational opportunities for women in the future. In the next artifact, which is an essay about the Renaissance, it is revealed that some of the anchoresses during the early 15th century, were painting self portraits in their rooms. I think that it is important for girls to know how lucky they are to be able to obtain an education because of women like Heloise. This video is an important application to my career by providing a good example of my work for a future video channel. The documentary was created for both a general and student audience to demonstrate how women in the Middle Ages were able to obtain some education. It also shows how difficult it was for many women in history and provides an example of one type of career goal that was available for those who did not follow a traditional path.

Women’s Contribution to the Humanities During the Renaissance.

The next project that I have included in the portfolio is the essay “House of Medici Influence on Artists during the Renaissance” written as a final paper for the class HUMN530: The

Renaissance, about how the Medici family contributed to the ability for women to engage in the arts during the Renaissance due to their acceptance and promotion of humanist ideas and the arts. The essay examines how the Medici family paved the way for artists like Leonardo DaVinci, Michelangelo, and Sandro Botticelli to create their notable works of art during the Renaissance. I have also incorporated the works of some female artists, including an artist named “Marcia,” who was known for painting self-portraits using a mirror and Sofonisba Anguissola, who was a notable female artist during mid-16th century.

In defense of adding the woman contributors, I believe that it is necessary for readers to understand how the shift to adopting humanism was instrumental in allowing woman more freedoms as well as men. This essay includes images to reflect the humanist ideas portrayed in the arts, such as exploring anatomy through dissection to help create more realistic nudes and facial expressions in the paintings and sculpture. Adding visual examples of the art aided in demonstrating how humanist ideas, which were supported by the Medici family, allowed for more openness in creating more realistic depictions in portraits and other works of art.

Examining how the establishment of humanist ideas during the Renaissance by the Medici family allowed for more flexibility in individual expression in the arts applies the humanities program objective of “using advanced social science knowledge, methods, and logic to inform and influence scientific and/or social processes and structures” (APUS). The life lessons explored in this essay is to show how the acceptance of Humanism by the rulers allowed women to contribute to the arts in history during the Renaissance, proving that women were indeed capable of creating works of art. Even though most women were still very busy with significant life responsibilities, other options became available during this time in history to create art, either through inheritance or by becoming anchoresses. This essay is an important

application to my career to provide content for future blogs and possibly a documentary to be presented to a larger audience to demonstrate why woman artists and writers were now appearing throughout Europe during the Renaissance.

Women's Contribution to the Humanities During the Enlightenment.

The fourth artifact is a written project which was written for HUMN541: Enlightenment and the Modern World entitled “Wollstonecraft vs Rousseau on the Education of Women” that was revised to include contributions from Mary Wollstonecraft, who also aided in exploring more opportunities for woman to benefit from a secondary education. After the Renaissance, the invention of the printing press led to higher literacy rates among the population as libraries became more accessible. Having better access to great literature combined with the spread of Enlightenment ideas would eventually lead to women seeking more education as ideas turned into plans and plans into action. During the Enlightenment, ideas were formed to produce educational systems for all children, which started appearing in the 17th century for the wealthy and finally for all children starting in the 18th century. In the case of both Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, both had access to great literature in libraries through apprenticeships and both wrote essays related to better ways to educate children, in spite of both authors having past bad reputations.

In defense of selecting this essay, the Enlightenment was a significant time period due to massive changes occurring among the growing middle class—when both men and women needed skills to obtain jobs and careers. As life became more complicated, so did the ways to manage growing cities. Many of the changes occurred because of the rapid spread of ideas expressed by various Enlightenment philosophers. What occurred during the Enlightenment in writing naturally led to the changes that occurred in the upcoming centuries, not only within

society, but in governments. My analysis of the paper led to the addition of Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas for educating women in response to Rousseau's exclusion of women's need for education to balance out the debate regarding the education of children—all children—including girls.

The essay focusing on the debate between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft on the subject of the education for women includes the humanities program objective that “analyzes the origins and implications of the concept of individualism as it applies in concepts of tradition, power, society, and culture” (APUS). The paper is an important inclusion because it was during the Enlightenment that these ideas were expressed seriously leading to public debate.

Women's Contribution to the Humanities During the Early 19th Century.

The final project is another short video created for the class HUMN555: The 19th Century: Romantic and Industrial Revolutions titled “Mary Shelley's Inspiration at the Villa Diodati” which explores the context of how Mary Shelley conceived, wrote, and published her famous novel *Frankenstein* (1818). The 31/2- minute video focuses on the time that Mary Shelley spent at Lord Byron's Villa Diodati with her husband, poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, Polidori and Lord Byron during the stormy summer of 1816. As the group were forced to spend most of the time inside, an idea to write scary stories was approached and it is where Mary Shelley conceived her famous novel *Frankenstein*. The short video examines how her life tragedies coupled with some strange scientific experiments at the time led to her creation of the story. The video is without narration, but includes moody music and images to express the mood and details of her conception of the story.

In defense of this project, I believe that all the other projects gravitate to the beginning of accepting a women's contribution to the literary world of art. My analysis of the video is that it is enjoyable to watch and tells a simple, but significant story of the conception of a very important literary work. I believe that I was successful in showing how Mary's unique and tragic life, and the fact that her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, also a writer who led a tragic life, resulted in such a deep and philosophical tale of horror.

One of the humanities program objectives expressed in this video project is "the use of advanced science and social science knowledge, methods, and logic to inform and influence scientific and/or social processes and structures" (APUS). That Mary Shelley incorporated into her work of horror fiction. Another program objective explored in the video is the "application of classical logic to historical and contemporary issues of human behavior, society, and civilization" (APUS), where Shelley explores a "what if?" situation commonly popular in today's science fiction stories.

The video applies to life experience by exposing how a difficult life under difficult circumstances does not need to turn into goal-ending obstacles. There are ways in which tragedy can be turned into art that could help others navigate life and then teach others how by sharing that experience through many different types of creative devices. The application to career choices for me and other girls who watch the video is to boost confidence as they realize that Mary Shelly was only 18 years old when she wrote *Frankenstein* and even though she led a life of difficulty, sadness, and poverty at the time she wrote the novel, she achieved success. It is important for girls to see how other women reached their goals in such circumstances, especially at a time when women were not yet considered capable of such greatness.

The overall theme of the entire portfolio mostly expresses the humanities program objective “examining the human experience from multidimensional perspectives from antiquity to modern times through examination of the leading authors and works of each age” (APUS). I am hoping that the overall theme clearly shows how women who were only allowed to be represented in epic poetry, which they were not even allowed to participate in or view, elevated their position in society in the Western cultures to finally being allowed to get their work published and even reaching critical acclaim for their work such as the case of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and her 1818 publication of *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*.

Works Cited

(APUS) American Public University Systems, "Program Objectives" Assignment Instructions for Week 2, 2026, HUMN69: Humanities Capstone Portfolio Seminar .