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Echoes in Reverse:

Meditations on Life, Learning, and Likelihoods

When I began my MA in Humanities at APUS, I was overwhelmed and intimidated. I had no background in the humanities and felt significantly behind my peers. I constantly questioned why I was in this program and what on earth I could contribute. What kept me in it was a conviction that the humanities have something to offer everyone, and that they teach people *how* to think rather than *what* to think. While I would not consider myself a scholar, I did learn a few scholarly things. In this paper, I outline what I've learned, how my goals have shifted, and my future career plans.

My academic skills were cultivated and sharpened throughout. I learned to distinguish primary from secondary sources and to recognize why peer-reviewed scholarship is necessary to serious work. I successfully navigated the library system and conducted research appropriate to graduate study. I learned to write an annotated bibliography, an abstract, a call for papers, a literature review, and a research essay, and to produce a literary video project.

APUS stressed citation throughout, and correct citation is crucial to academic work. It was also an area I really struggled with. Learning MLA and then switching to CMOS for history

proved difficult, and I never fully got the hang of either. At times there were discrepancies between the current MLA edition, what the APUS library system showed for article citation, and what individual courses or professors required. My aim was always to attribute credit where it was due and to avoid plagiarism. I feel I met that goal, however I never fully gained command of this area.

That difficulty is one reason I decided against pursuing a PhD. The program clarified for me that the rigor of academic work does not suit me. I will always be a lifelong learner, but now my learning will be centered outside the classroom. Academia is not my home, but the humanities are not confined to academia. There are endless opportunities and creative ways to be both a student and a teacher and to flex my new humanities muscle.

My portfolio represents work oriented toward public consumption, and the ideas in it are invitational. I want readers to engage with the everyday. My thinking evolved over the years and through coursework to incorporate and facilitate this engagement. The struggles individuals and societies contend with are rooted in humanistic questions, and the humanities play a role in naming the struggle clearly enough that a solution becomes thinkable.

I connected themes of power and struggle that run through HUMN 510: The Ancient World to the same configurations they take today. From HUMN 520: Antiquity and the Medieval World, I came to understand the origin of the hero's journey and how Dante's mythic quest lays the structural foundation for a great many of the stories we still tell. HUMN 561: Society, Class, and Wealth brought class consciousness and the origins of economic power into much sharper focus for me, largely through the writings of Adam Smith and Karl Marx. Reflecting on this on the fifteenth anniversary of Occupy Wall Street is well-timed, to say the

least. Reading *The Great Gatsby* in HUMN 500: Research, Study, and Use offered a similar recognition: wealth inequality is rising while social mobility is declining, and the novel's diagnosis has not aged.

HUMN 541: Enlightenment and the Modern World taught me how much Enlightenment thinkers were concerned not only with freedom and liberty, but with the way scientific revolution would change the humans' relationship to the natural world. These ideas bleed into the lessons of HUMN 551: Evolution of Life and Intelligence, where I learned not only about Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution, but also about the emerging technologies shaping the future of life and humanity. We are now contending with the advent of AI and how it will reshape us. HUMN 555: The 19th Century: Romantic and Industrial Revolutions gave us, by harnessing the power of technology, the creature in *Frankenstein*, whose loneliness and isolation are visible everywhere today. But it was HUMN 530: The Renaissance that revealed the most insight into myself. I learned that I am both a skeptic and a humanist, and that humans will always grapple with questions about what it means to be human.

I don't know where my MA in Humanities will take me next. Leaving this program, my feelings run from excitement to nervousness to sadness to a good chunk of bittersweetness. I'm both excited and nervous for the future. Shedding my scholar identity makes me sad, and I feel bittersweet about closing this chapter of my academic career. That said, I would love to carry the skills I've learned into creating an educational curriculum focused on teaching empathy. I'd also like to develop a "Department of Human Flourishing." Humans are a social species who, in order to flourish, need connection and meaning in their lives, and my training in the humanities could

help people attain that. Lastly, I'd like to create a witty comic strip that uses philosophical concepts to solve everyday problems.

As I close out my time at APUS, I'm still overwhelmed and intimidated, but in different ways now. I'm overwhelmed by the possibilities in front of me and intimidated by the amount of knowledge I now possess. Leaving behind the safe cocoon of school and turning into a butterfly spreading her wings to fly out into a wider, uncertain world is scary. I'm grateful for the platform APUS gave me to develop those wings. What I've learned adds to my personal portfolio of knowledge, one I can now demonstrate to an employer. Learning to think critically, examine problems from every angle, and ask relevant, probing questions are vital skills for any profession. But learning to believe in myself and not give up is the most invaluable lesson of all. I'm proud of becoming a person who sees possibilities not only in the future, but in herself.