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## Reconciling the two cultures : A case study of the University of Northern Iowa

Elizabeth Ann Collins  
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RECONCILING THE TWO CULTURES:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Elizabeth Ann Collins  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 2015

## ABSTRACT

In 1959, chemist and author Charles Percy Snow gave a Rede Lecture at the University of Cambridge in which he named “Two Cultures”—the sciences and the humanities—which, according to his experience as someone who worked in both, were at odds with one another. His words elicited impassioned responses from critics who either agreed with Snow, believing this to be a detriment to society, or vehemently disagreed, believing Snow’s statements to be unfounded, and even antagonistic. This conversation, which had also found relevance in the United States, continues to be important today, and has changed over the years as institutions of higher education have changed.

The University of Northern Iowa, a former teacher’s education college, has evolved its own purpose since its establishment in 1876. During my time as a student at UNI, as an undergraduate and later a graduate student, I experienced my own relationships with the “Two Cultures.” When I learned of Snow’s lecture before starting my graduate program, I intuitively felt he was correct about there not being enough positive association between the sciences and the humanities. But what these associations were for me as a student at a Midwest American university would be different from Snow’s, whose time as a fellow at Cambridge University and subsequent work as an author, civil service commissioner, and politician shaped his views.

Through a series of personal narratives about my experiences as an anthropology major, English major, full-time employee, and finally graduate student, this thesis is an attempt to understand how the “Two Cultures” interact today, and in what other forms they may exist during this time of transition in higher education.

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has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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## INTRODUCTION

A few weeks before I was to start graduate school at the University of Northern Iowa, I drove to the Palisades-Kepler State Park in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for a short hike. I needed some fresh air and exercise to calm my mind, which wasn't yet convinced that I was prepared for all the reading and writing I had just signed up for. I wound through the park in my tenacious little '97 RAV 4 as I admired the scenery. A fit, middle-aged couple was kayaking on the river, a family was eating a lunch at one of several picnic tables, and one young boy was even flying a kite. The Palisades are nuzzled against the Cedar River, resulting in a sandy beach that provides visitors with as close to a coastal experience as they'll get in landlocked Iowa. On this day the sun was out, the wind was just right, and the gnats were tolerable. It was the kind of day that dared to wage war with indoor gaming systems and often won.

I continued past the beach to where the road ended in parking spots, and signs indicated the start of the main trail. Typically, when I went for longer walks I listened to music on my mp3 player—nothing too refined, usually just indulgent nineties rock of my youth—but on that day I was feeling a mimetic weakness for the intellectual community. I was going to be a graduate student after all, and needed to start acting like one. So, naturally, I tuned in to National Public Radio. There was an interview in progress, and an older man was speaking:

I believe that bringing science and the humanities together, in cause-and-effect explanations and then mutual stimulation, is an unexplored field, virtually, that both sides seem to veer away from, scientists because of their extreme specialization, humanities scholars and creative artists because, well, it's just not a domain of thinking that they believe will do them any good. (Wilson)

E.O. Wilson's words, in what I soon discovered was a "Science Friday" interview with Ira Flatow, immediately resonated with me. As an undergraduate at UNI I had been an Anthropology and English dual major. I had minored in Creative Writing and Film Studies, and was also six credits short of an Astronomy minor. I dreamed of being a scientist—I think I still do in a way—but my creativity, passion for art, and way with words over numbers had landed me in the fields of the humanities. Scientists are also capable of having these qualities, of course, but if we are to believe the stereotypes most perpetuated by popular culture, then scientists are like Spock: logical but mostly unfeeling, analytical of numerical truths yet incapable of understanding the complexities of human emotion. Of course, this one-dimensional caricature is a far too simplistic rendering of scientists in real life—it's not even accurate for Spock himself, whose best episodes of *Star Trek* focused on his struggle to reconcile his logical Vulcan half with his inexplicably emotional human half. Nevertheless, I had felt compelled to align myself with one of the two camps—the scientific or the artistic. It was a compulsion that, I realized, I had always pushed back against.

In my bag I had packed some peanut butter crackers, a cheese stick and a bottle of water—all the essentials for an afternoon hike. The trail started out flat. It was a wide dirt path that wound its way deeper into the trees and away from the river. Soon, however, I was confronted with a choice. To the right, a steep set of stone steps turned sharply out of

sight. To the left was a more gradual incline. Both paths would eventually merge back to the same trail, ending at a gazebo sitting atop a bluff overlooking the river. As I weighed my options, I considered the age-old belief that “unity can only be expressed in the binary.” The human tendency to define the world in dualities is clear: night/day, male/female, living/dead. Robert Frost wrote of *two* roads diverging—a third would have further complicated the narrator’s choice (but what of the road moderately travelled?). Whether the binaries are working in accord or in opposition, they are nevertheless two parts of one whole. I chose the steep path on the right. It was the path most travelled, perhaps because its higher elevation awarded a better view. I took a swig of water and hiked on.

While the history of the relationship between science and the humanities is long and complex, particularly within academic institutions, a defining moment for the conflict between the two was at a 1959 Rede Lecture given by chemist and novelist Charles Percy Snow. The lecture, titled “The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution,” accused scientists of being ignorant of standard literary works, and literary folks of being ignorant of standard scientific equations. He named these two contrasting groups the “Two Cultures” and argued that there needed to be more cooperation and understanding between the two if we are to successfully arrive at the Scientific Revolution—which was, to him, a time in the near future when science would eliminate poverty and financial inequality. Responses to Snow’s lecture varied, but they were passionately asserted. The most passionate response of all was from literary critic F.R. Leavis. Leavis’s essay, “Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow” (1962), was

primarily a vicious assault on Snow's credibility, which scientist Stephen Jay Gould later described as "the most intemperate counterattack in the history of modern squabbling" (90). Leavis wrote in "Two Cultures?" that "Snow not only hasn't in him the beginnings of a novelist; he is utterly without a glimmer of what creative literature is, or why it matters" (14). Despite the vitriol, Leavis did make some legitimate criticisms of Snow's lecture that remain important considerations in any "Two Cultures" discussion today.

First, the literary folks Snow refers to, which he terms the "intellectual luddites," are not a clearly defined group. Snow blames these old school classicists, who sneakily hijacked the term "intellectual" from all other academics—including the scientists—for causing the divide. Leavis, however, wrote that "Snow's 'literary intellectual' is the enemy of art and life" (35). It would seem that, according to Leavis, Snow created an antagonist so blatantly wrong in its pompous, stubborn old ways as to strengthen his argument for a divide. Today, it's more difficult, albeit not impossible, to find many of these same sorts of luddites in English departments, clinging singularly to the classics, turning a blind eye to the digital era, unwilling to "stretch their imaginative sympathy" (Snow 26).

Leavis admits that Snow's basic premise—that there is a divide of sorts between these two disciplines—is not incorrect, but argues that the idea is "not very original" (45). What was original, however, was Snow naming these clashing ideologies the "Two Cultures," another point with which Leavis took issue. Snow wrote, of the sciences and the humanities, "Without thinking about it they respond alike. That is what a culture means" (10). Such a broad generalization of such a complex term would not sit well with

anthropologists, certainly, and the use of this label by a novelist and chemist—again, Leavis just could not stand Snow’s lack of credibility—was considered highly inappropriate.

Along these same lines of loose-fitting terminology and bold yet unoriginal claims, Leavis also condemned Snow for being a “journalist,” a serious insult to an academic, whose job it is to conduct thorough, unbiased and unadulterated research, and then submit that research to peers for review. As Leavis points out, however, Snow was often in conversation with the public through newspapers or television interviews about his research. He was riding a wave of popularity for publicly available (and accessible) writing about science that continues to this day, featuring the likes of Stephen Hawking, Brian Greene, and of course E.O. Wilson. But he was riding it for a purpose. Snow truly believed that science held the key to a future free of societal ills. Specifically, he was interested in the disparity between the rich and the poor. Of this disparity he wrote, “Whatever else in the world survives to the year 2000, that won’t” (Snow 44). His optimism is the optimism of scientists, he claimed, whereas traditional culture rather seems to wish the future did not exist (12).

The Snow-Leavis debate over the relationship between the humanities and the sciences was not new to the United Kingdom. In 1882, Matthew Arnold delivered a Rede Lecture titled “Literature and Science,” in which he argued in favor of the humanities, as the natural sciences neglect to account for human nature. Snow’s lecture less than a hundred years later would argue nearly the opposite—that the natural sciences are the best way to enact social change. In America, however, as such a young nation, the late

fifties and early sixties were a time of great introspection and change for American education, and so the debate quickly caught the attention of the American public. The Space Race had inspired a push for science and engineering, and simultaneously the Civil Rights Era's emphasis on social justice and free expression led to a blossoming liberal arts scene. For higher education in the United States at this time, there existed an uncertainty of a changing purpose. While Cambridge, Oxford, and other British institutions that had been operating since the fourteenth century continued on in their traditional way, America was busy defining what education could and would be for them in this new age of industry, technology, and social change. Today, we are in the midst of yet another transition in our educational institutions towards more digital technology in the classroom and the establishment of digital classrooms—a transition that has once again stirred up a familiar uncertainty. What would Snow and Leavis have to say about virtual digital classrooms? I wondered.

I finally arrived at the gazebo. It was a small wooden enclosure with a stone base near the edge of the bluff. I dropped onto a bench and enjoyed the view. A break in the trees framed the far side of the river. It was beautiful and I was breathing heavily. I munched on one of my crackers and watched as two kids ran past. I felt crevices in the stone under my palm, and noticed that all along the bench of the gazebo were carvings of peoples' names and dates; *Nik 2008, Iain 2002*. My first instinct was to be upset at the vandalization, but the installation of a gazebo, a trail, and even the development of the entire park for use by the public was a sort of vandalization of the non-human natural world in its own right. Thoreau himself lived in a cabin and frequented a local town for

supplies, not quite the man of the woods figure that many people are familiar with. Still, he lived simply, surrounded by nature, and his writings were perhaps made more genuine, or at least more relatable by his retention of a civilized lifestyle. He was honest about who he was, and that authenticity continues to lend credibility to his writing.

After sitting at the gazebo for several minutes, I decided I had gone far enough. My legs ached and my lungs were tired. As I hiked back down the trail to my car, I couldn't help but wonder what the Romantic poets were on about when they gushed over nature. The air was refreshing, I had to admit, and if you took a picture in just about any direction it would turn out stunning. As I stepped heavily down the steps, an elderly couple passed me, using their walking sticks and carrying on an upbeat conversation about the weather. I was reminded once again of binaries. Some of the greatest travelers travel in pairs, and are sometimes (if not most of the time) in opposition. I had recently read Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, in which he tells the story of hiking the Appalachian Trail with his overweight mess of a friend Stephen Katz. The two had grown up together in Des Moines, Iowa, but hadn't seen each other in years at the time of the hike. By then Bryson was a successful writer and Katz was a recovering alcoholic. Despite their personality clashes along the trail, Bryson admits to being immensely appreciative of his friend's company. And they both agree that neither of them could have—or would have—hiked as far as they had if they weren't together.

As I got back in the car and wound my way out of the park, I wondered if this isn't the way the "Two Cultures" should ideally interact. Sure, the sciences and the arts have their differences, but in the end are they not both working together to create a more

comprehensive intellectual map of the world? Today, there continues to be books and essays written about the “Two Cultures,” seeking an explanation or solution to what many still view as a problem. E.O. Wilson, whose words I heard on the radio, wrote *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* in 1998, in which he argues that the same synthesis and unification we see in the natural world should incorporate the humanities as well. Scientist Stephen Jay Gould responded with *The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister’s Pox* in 2003 (published posthumously), blaming Snow for stirring up conflict where there need be none, and rejecting Wilson’s “reductionist” solution, arguing that the differences between the sciences and the humanities are “wonderful and illuminating” (265).

Gould and Wilson, two scientists whose voices have perhaps been heard the most in recent years on the “Two Cultures,” approached the subject primarily from historical and philosophical perspectives. Wilson references the Ionian Enchantment—a period of time around the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., during which Greek philosophers began to move past a deity-centered understanding of the world, and adopt more nature-based ideologies that were unifying in their scope (3-7). Gould’s titular analogy—that of the hedgehog and the fox—is also a reference to a Greek expression; the fox who knows many things and the hedgehog who know one thing very well (2). These natural scientists, who in their professions make observations about ants or dinosaur bones and use those observations to make claims about the natural world, instead used the humanities to defend their arguments about academic disciplines. It would be difficult to conduct a field study of a subject as abstract as the “Two Cultures,” but I couldn’t help but wonder if there were a more “scientific” means. As I was in the early stages of brainstorming how to approach



my master's thesis, I considered that the social sciences might be able to provide just that. While I couldn't exactly collect biological matter to scrutinize under a microscope, I could potentially distribute surveys, conduct interviews; collect data. I had been an Anthropology major after all, so I was familiar with these techniques. The results of such a study could yet prove to be an important contribution to the discussion. However, I realized that my push for a scientifically-founded study of the "Two Cultures" was symptomatic of my own apprehension in believing that my own discipline, English, would have anything valuable to say on the matter.

Leavis criticized Snow for telling stories. Snow shared anecdotes of hanging out with his writer buddies and his science pals, and these were presented as evidence. Both the scientific method and traditional methods of literary criticism are vital foundations for scholarly research today, and yet there is something compelling, and even uniquely revealing about a personal narrative that should not be discounted. In addition to my background in anthropology, I had also earned a minor in Creative Writing. I am aware of the power of a good story, and I know Snow was as well. We are all products of imitation and affectation to some extent, but our individual experiences and thoughts, authentically articulated, can provide evidence of an honest desire that connects us all.

My thesis is an attempt to articulate, through stories of my time here at the University of Northern Iowa, as well as historical and even journalistic information, my own experiences with the "Two Cultures." I present the following chapters, told chronologically, as my personal essay case study of UNI, in the hopes of reconciling

what I perceived to be still a problematic rift between the sciences and the humanities with what I honestly experienced.

CHAPTER 1  
UNDECIDED

They left me standing there on the steps of Lawther Hall. After a quick hug from my parents, I watched as they got into their car and drove away down 23rd Street and disappeared. For the first time in my life I didn't know what to do. I wiped a bead of sweat from my forehead and wiped it on my jeans, looking around. There were families everywhere unloading laundry baskets full of clothes, blankets, hair dryers, childhood stuffed animals. Fathers were hauling mini-fridges, televisions, and boxes full of books. I sat down on the steps, holding the door open, wondering what this strange feeling in my gut was.

The decision to attend the University of Northern Iowa was not a simple one. I always knew I would be going to college. My parents both went to Iowa State University—that's where they met. My oldest brother went to Iowa State. Two of my uncles and one of my cousins went to Iowa State. My other older brother, however, changed things up and went to culinary school at Johnson and Wales University in Denver, Colorado. So when it was my turn to decide where to go, I knew I really could go anywhere—just so long as I went somewhere.

At the time that I began my college hunt, I was a junior at John F. Kennedy High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Kennedy is an affluent school in an affluent city in Iowa. In 2015, it was ranked #1 in *U.S. News & World Report's* list of Top Iowa Schools ("Best Education Schools"). My family had just moved to Iowa from a rural town in Maryland, where I attended a high school that was littered with trailers and didn't make any U.S.

News Report rankings, and so the wealth of opportunities I was granted at Kennedy astounded me. I joined the marching band, the chess club, the mahjong club, the junior varsity bowling team, learned some kung fu, and got decent grades. The opportunity that I latched onto the most, however, was Japanese class. My oldest brother and I watched a lot of anime growing up, and I gloated at the chance to be more knowledgeable than him in some facet of our shared interest. Also, coming from Maryland, a state with an abundance of ethnic and cultural diversity, to Iowa, a state with very little diversity, I missed being surrounded by difference, and Japan was about as different as it got.

The class was taught by the most enthusiastic gaijin (literally “outside person,” meaning foreigner) you’ve ever seen. He was a short man in his mid-thirties who made up for his lack of stature in pure energy. In addition to teaching Japanese language courses at all levels—including a few AP levels—he also oversaw a very popular after school Japanese culture club, taught introductory Aikido lessons, coordinated an exchange student program with a high school in Japan, and even organized a trip to Japan for a select few students. I was one of those students fortunate enough to go on this trip.

It was my first time out of the country, and what surprised me the most as we walked around Tokyo, Kyoto, and a small village named Oita, was the entirely unique aesthetic. I was used to cornfields, but there were rice paddies. Not skyscrapers, but pagodas. Each morning the other American students and I walked to the middle school where we were being hosted, and I watched as students stopped and bowed to their teachers’ cars as they drove by. This was a foreign land, indeed. After two weeks abroad, my language skills increased, and when I returned I was able to pass into the level three

class. I felt I was in love with the language and the culture. Partly because I had specialized knowledge that most other kids my age didn't, partly because I had absorbed some residual enthusiasm from my sensei, and partly due to a teenage rebellion against anything normal. But, there was also something very satisfying about studying a culture, which required an understanding of so many intricately woven factors, from language to genetics to history to popular culture. At the time, I was unaware that this was anything but my high school Japanese class, and so when I was ready to begin my college search, my path was clear. I was going to continue studying Japanese and earn my bachelor's degree so that I could join the JET program (Japanese Exchange & Teaching) and teach English in Japan. My sensei had recommended the program to me. He told me it's what he did, and how he ended up living in Japan, and eventually teaching Japanese here in the States. It was all I needed to hear, and it truly felt good to have a plan. But before I could join JET I had to get my bachelor's, and a lot can change in just four years.

The very first school I visited was the University of Northern Iowa. It was a short one-hour drive away, and it wasn't as unreasonably large and unwieldy as the University of Iowa, which was nearer. We took an official tour of the campus, and as we were passing by the campanile, a golf cart pulled up next to our group, and TC (The Cat, UNI's mascot), got out and gave us all high fives. I was disgusted—a common condition for a teenage girl. As my mom and I were driving home I was looking over all the informational material. “They look like cheerleaders,” I groaned, pointing to all the blond-haired, perky faces. “And they don't even offer Japanese.”

In 2005, the Internet was still relatively young. My parents and I marveled at the ease with which we could search for schools online. Printed catalogues were still available, and I checked one of them out at the library to browse through, but the fastest and most up-to-date information was online. One of the schools I found in my online search was Minnesota State University at Moorhead. My search criteria were very simple. It had to be a reasonable size—not too big—and it had to offer Japanese language classes as part of an Asian Studies or related major. Moorhead offered Japanese and a B.A. degree in East Language Studies. What’s more, their mascot was a dragon. So, my mom and I drove up north for a visit in the summer of 2005. I met with two professors, visited the study abroad office, and went on a campus tour with an enthusiastic tour guide. On the ride home—the school was seven hours away—I talked excitedly about how perfect the school was. “It’s awfully far from home, though,” mom would remind me. “And it gets very cold up there.”

Coe College, a small private institution located near downtown Cedar Rapids, was an obvious choice for me to visit next, based on its location near my home. On the campus tour, the mascot, a Kohawk (fictional bird), made his appearance just like TC had done, but thankfully he did not force any high-fives. The tour guides bragged about their school’s reputation. According to their website, Coe is a “nationally recognized four-year coeducational liberal arts institution providing superior educational experiences since 1851” (“About Coe”). I was excited about the prospect of being part of a liberal arts community, in large part because of the prestige associated with it—if age and reputation can amount to prestige. Enrollment at Coe College in 2006 was approximately 1,400

students—600 fewer than in my high school—so it certainly felt exclusive. And the tuition rates reflected that. When I received my acceptance to Coe, I also received a \$12,000 scholarship for my first year—very exciting until I realized that this was a standard scholarship they gave to most incoming freshmen in order to soften the blow of the near \$40,000 price tag for tuition, room and board, and those pesky “student fees.” I could see the fear in my parents’ eyes as I told them about the Japanese exchange student community at Coe, and how I could major in Asian Studies there, and how I really felt that 1,400 was not too small.

We revisited Moorhead, as it was still a top contender, but this time it was a cold and rainy March day, and our tour guide was significantly less enthusiastic. If I was this cold and miserable in March, I thought, I can’t imagine being here in January. The seven-hour drive home was long. Snow in the fields along the interstate had turned a slushy brown. There were clouds in the sky that spit on us occasionally. “Well, what do you think?” Mom asked me. We agreed to cross Moorhead off the list, along with a handful of other contenders: Truman State University, Winona State University, Cornell College. I was left with Coe and UNI. Still balking at the idea, I nevertheless suggested we visit UNI one more time. On our second tour, there was no mascot, and my mom and I took the time to visit the study abroad office. Looking at their brochures, I was overwhelmed with the many opportunities. “Austria,” I showed my mom, “I’d love to go to Austria!” For me, the allure of more opportunity for less money won out over the allure of an exclusive liberal arts club. However, my experience over the next six years would prove to be more grounded in the liberal arts than I could have imagined.

It wasn't until after I had officially decided on UNI that I heard from my grandmother, Shirley (Soeth) Pfeifer, that she had also attended UNI—the Iowa State Teacher's College at the time—from 1949 to 1952. I received my housing assignment to Lawther Hall, and learned that she too had lived in Lawther Hall for two years. As I sat there on the steps on moving day, abandoned, I imagined what it must have been like for her 57 years ago.

After graduating from Gruver High School in rural Gruver, Iowa, my grandmother, Shirley Soeth, enrolled in the Iowa State Teacher's College to become an art teacher. She had always been artistic—her notebooks from elementary school were covered in doodles. Both of her parents had graduated from Buena Vista College in Storm Lake, so the expectation for attending college was there, and with the ISTC's reputation as a leading education school in the state, the decision was made.





Figure 1. Shirley Pfeifer, née Soeth on the steps of Lawther Hall, May 1951

Following the end of World War II and the instatement by the U.S. government of the G.I. Bill, veterans made up an astonishing 49 percent of college admissions (“History and Timeline”). This story was no different for the ISTC, which began construction in the spring of 1946 on a field of Quonset huts in preparation for the influx of married veterans who opted to earn their college education. “Sunset Village,” as it came to be called, was an iconic part of the campus, architecturally speaking, and would remain so as it developed into Campus Courts married housing and eventually the Panther Village in 2011. Perhaps more important than its physical presence, however, was the impact its residents had on the purpose of the college. While many attending ISTC chose to pursue a teaching degree, others wanted to take advantage of the exceptional instruction offered at the college in all disciplines. An editorial in the *Old Gold* newspaper asked the question, “Are we still a teacher’s college, or is there a realization that we are becoming a liberal arts college? Why do students come here anyway?” (Lang 1: 220). These two types of colleges, at the time, were distinct—liberal arts colleges and teacher education colleges. Teacher education colleges were not dissimilar to other professional schools at the time, such as medical or law schools, in that there was a clear and direct path from degree to workforce. The question posed in the *Old Gold* editorial recognized that teacher education training, at least at the Iowa State Teacher’s College, was not necessarily so straightforward anymore. Over the next few decades, as the ISTC evolved its purpose, it would strive to find a way to support both the applicable teacher’s training as well as the more contemplative liberal arts philosophy.

My grandma, like the majority of students there at the time, was a teaching major. As such, she was required to have two minors. True to the original intention of Iowa Normal schools, teaching major graduates were obliged to teach in Iowa schools, many of which were in rural areas. Because there was often a limited number of teachers at each school, teachers in rural areas were needed for multiple subjects, so having a background in a variety of areas helped make graduates more marketable. My grandma has always enjoyed reading, and reading about history in particular, so she added History and English minors. Today, she would be viewed as a real risk taker, and a liability to her parents who supported her all those years, but in 1949 she was highly marketable and prepared for the job market—despite her humanities education.

I was taking a big risk with Asian Studies, I knew. I was so sure of myself when I was in the classroom with Sensei and my peers, but on a foreign campus with a foreign roommate and a foreign schedule, I couldn't help but wonder if it was a risk I was still willing to make. I got up off the steps and went back inside to find my roommate. She was a “non-traditional” student. UNI defines non-traditional students as students 25 years or older, students with children, part-time students, or students who did not attend college directly after high school (“Non-Traditional”). Recently out of the navy, she was in her mid-twenties (old, to an 18 year old), and was taking advantage of her free tuition. We got along just fine. We were both laid back and friendly—she even didn't mind my posters of Japanese pop stars, telling me that she was once stationed in the Philippines, so she also had an appreciation for Asian culture. It took me a moment to register her words. For me it had always been Japanese language and culture, but from that one comment,

Japan began to shrink in my mind's eye. It was part of something bigger; of course it was. When I got back to the room, she was unpacking her CDs. "What do we do now?" I asked, honestly wanting to know. She was older, so she must know. "Want to go to the chow hole?" Together we walked to what would for the next three months be known as the "chow hole," talking about what classes we were signed up for and if we knew where those classes were. Both of our schedules were loaded with Liberal Arts Core classes, and we each expressed a nervous excitement representative of freshman students.

By the time my grandma enrolled at the ISTC, it had already been open for three quarters of a century. The Iowa State Normal School was established in 1876 in response to a growing need for teacher education training in Iowa. Between the years of 1840 and 1860, Iowa's population grew from 43,000 to 675,000. In answer to the resulting need for more and better schools, state senator Edward G. Miller passed the Normal School Bill in 1876, which established "a school for the special instruction and training of teachers for the common schools of the state" (Hart 8). In its first year, the school consisted of seven departments: Art, Didactics and Practice, English Literature, History, Mathematics, Science, and Professional Science. A fairly even mix of humanities and science departments. However, what stood out to me the most is the Professional Science department. The other six are essential grade school courses with which students of the ISNS would need teacher training. Professional Science, however, implies more of a focus on preparation for joining the industrial, agricultural, or technological workforce. The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 had expanded the availability of funds specifically for the establishment of agriculture and industry-based universities—Iowa State

University was the very first college to be labeled as such—and while UNI itself is not a land-grant college, its founders nevertheless would have been influenced by the national push for practical, skills-based programs in higher education.

Still, education was a very practical degree—made even more so by the offer of free tuition to all students who intended to receive their teaching degrees and teach in Iowa. This offer remained until 1883 when tuition hiked up to a whopping \$10 a year. Principal James Gilchrist, the first “president” of the school, had big plans for his school that would see its educational philosophy expanded to include not only an emphasis on the practical, but also an emphasis on more contemplative matters that the liberal arts colleges were already involved in. Towards that end, his successor, Homer Horatio Seerley, inaugurated the school’s first four-year programs in 1904, and it was also around that same time that the professors began to garner more political power within the institution. As President William C. Lang wrote in *A Century of Leadership and Service*, “The rank of *assistant professor* was introduced in 1898, and the holders of this rank became (for a time) members of the governing (voting) faculty” (1: 49). These changes show the ambition of the college leadership to expand upon what was initially a small town teacher education school. Teacher education training, at its core, is—or should be—without a “Two Cultures” divide. The purpose of primary education is to give students a general, yet comprehensive survey of modern knowledge in all subject areas. Most universities follow up on this foundation with their version of a liberal arts core, which requires students to take a class in each of several different disciplines, from both the sciences (natural and social) and the humanities. And yet, after taking those core courses,

students then must specialize in their major field, meaning less interaction with other areas of study, and therefore more possibility for disciplinary discord. As the Iowa State Normal School began to grow into the university it would eventually become, this expanded purpose and move away from the practicalities of primary school teacher training would potentially, then, open up more opportunities for “Two Culture” clashes. However, the adoption of more liberal arts ideals would simultaneously support interdisciplinary interaction, which can lead to better understanding between the two.

At new student orientation, a week after moving in to Lawther, the other freshmen and I each had to sit down with a general advisor who helped us design our fall schedule. When it was my turn, I told my advisor that I wanted to be an Asian Studies major, she looked at me as if I had invented the major myself. “Well,” she said, “let’s sign you up for some liberal arts core classes until you can meet with your major advisor.” Many, if not most, freshmen come in Undecided—this term was recently revised to “Deciding”; the more active voice likely meant to discourage students from getting too comfortable with indecision. Those students who already know they want to teach will begin as teaching majors, and those focused students who are sure they want to be a physicist or a chemist or an accountant may also declare their major right away. But it’s true that college changes you, and as “Deciding” majors, those students are acknowledging that truth. I, however, was entering college resistant to change. It was as though I were ready to continue living my high school life, and hadn’t yet accepted the fact that I was in a new place, academically, socially, and in life in general. Although UNI had certainly changed since my grandma had attended, her continued dedication as an active alumna

inspired my confidence that the ideological foundation—the dedication by faculty and staff to provide a quality education—was still there.

Snow, in his lecture, is less concerned with education either as a problem or as a solution to his “Two Cultures” problem. Instead, he writes of his working association with professional scientists and writers, both within and without academia, and makes general conjectures on why the two might be averse to one another. “Literature changes more slowly than science,” he says, “and so its misguided periods are longer” (9). In contrast, he proposes that the scientific community is “intensive, rigorous, and constantly in action,” and that their arguments are “almost always at a higher conceptual level” (13). These statements are broad, and reflect not only his own personal bias, but also the abstract manner of his reasoning. Snow might be referring to the literary canon—the privileged status its works hold, and how difficult it can be for new works to join the exclusive club. Or, he might be referring to the body of critical work published by scholars, and the relatively more gradual rate of development in interpreting texts. In contrast, science is necessarily a constantly changing field which builds upon past knowledge but also oftentimes entirely dismisses previously held convictions. The two function differently in this regard, but not always in discord. Snow was attempting to expose a conflict of ideologies that goes beyond the university and affects all of humanity—an important, if lofty goal—but his work at the “higher conceptual level” overlooks the day-to-day life of students; the classes taken, sports played, clubs joined, and every other interaction which shapes our perspective on the university and its academic “cultures.”

My day-to-day life at the University of Northern Iowa would be very different from Snow's as a Fellow at Christ's College, Cambridge. Although he did put himself in public positions where he could work towards ending poverty and have an influence in politics—he was appointed a parliamentary private secretary to the Ministry of Technology under Prime Minister Harold Wilson—Snow primarily lived a life of the mind, teaching and writing, and enjoying a good whiskey in his armchair (Watson 597). UNI's development over the years from a teaching college to a liberal arts institution (with a teaching emphasis) makes it an altogether different environment from Cambridge, and yet when I had graduated with my bachelor's degree, I had the same sense Snow had about there being some discordance between the sciences and the humanities. The "Two Cultures" as I experienced them would be very different, however, and my perception of them, and beliefs about how best to go about bridging the two would be formed by my time spent on the campus of UNI.



## CHAPTER 2

### ANTHROPOLOGY

I piled a heaping scoop of the meat mixture onto a bun, zigzagged some ketchup and mustard onto the pile, neatly placed two pickle slices, and added the top bun. The sandwich was positioned near one corner of a red and white checkered paper. I wrapped that short corner over top of the sandwich, then folded the adjacent corners in. Finally, I took the far corner and tucked it underneath. It just kind of hung there, unattached. “You’re gonna have to get faster at that,” my boss told me. I placed the Maid-Rite in a basket and handed it to the customer.

The summer after my freshman year at UNI I had signed up for a summer class, “Our Musical Heritage.” It was one of the Liberal Arts Core class options, and I was under the impression that the sooner I got these LAC courses out of the way, the better. However, I was unprepared for what taking a summer course meant, financially. I had taken out loans for the first year, and would continue to take out more for the next four years. I knew I could use loan money to cover the summer course fees, but after realizing that the dormitories were not an option during the summer, and that any place I rented would require actual cash money, I faced the harsh reality that I was going to have to get a summer job.

Maid-Rite, a loose-meat sandwich restaurant in downtown Cedar Falls, had a “Help Wanted” sign in their window that looked as if it had been there since they opened. Needing help myself, I filled out an application, and after a few questions about how quickly I could pick up new skills and how politely I could speak to customers, I got the

job. It wasn't my first job since I started at UNI. In my first semester I worked at one of the student dining centers—partly because my mom encouraged me to, and partly because all my friends were doing it. They hand these jobs out like candy to any takers, and there are plenty of students in need of some income, whether for student loan payments or for some extra weekend cash. I got paid \$6.75 an hour to rinse rice for the Wok station and wash dishes. It was easy enough work, but by the end of my freshman year, “food service” and “customer service” were the only two services I had any hands-on experience in, so my new job at Maid-Rite was appropriate. The pay was about the same, and the labor was just as tedious. However, I was at the start of a new transition in my college career, perhaps even more so than when I first enrolled. As I attempted to wrap sandwiches I thought about my new life away from home, away from high school, and away from the path I had so confidently foreseen. After just two semesters as an Asian Studies major, I had lost the sense of community that drew me in to Japanese language and culture, and I was beginning to open up to other possibilities. It was a difficult place to be—uncertainty usually is—and my living situation was a daily reminder of what living in uncertainty was like.

I had found an apartment at a campus ministry I had been volunteering at—the Wesley Foundation. It was a three-story building across from campus, and my apartment on the third floor consisted of a narrow hallway ending in a closet-sized room that had (just barely) been approved by the city as a rentable living space. Typically the “apartment” was reserved for international students who needed a temporary place to stay while transitioning to a new apartment, or preparing to fly home. No one was currently

living there, however, so I took up the role of the poor and helpless and moved in. A single mattress on the floor just barely fit, and a small computer desk just barely fit right beside it. The hallway was technically part of the apartment space, and maybe added 50 more square feet, but there was room enough for a mini fridge and small book shelf. The game room, off of which my apartment was attached, was huge in comparison. During the school year the game room hosts a number of events, from Halloween pumpkin carving to Academy Awards viewing party, and on a daily basis students go there to watch movies, play games, or find other ways to be unproductive. During the summer, however, with the diminished student population, the game room became my living room. The room was a hodgepodge of donated items new and old, and at the time I was living there in 2007 it included: a pool table with one stump leg, a ping pong table missing a net, one of those giant one-ton block television sets, two stained faux-suede couches with broken legs, a brown plaid knit couch that was in vogue in the sixties, two broken pinball machines, two different tables with about eight different chairs, a boom box, a cabinet full of cassette tapes, a drum set missing a snare drum, a manual stationary bike, and a popcorn machine. It was a multi-era haven for the poor, and poor was my aesthetic that summer.

My grandma, who involved herself in a different campus ministry, the Presbyterian Fellowship, also found work during her time as a student, but her financial situation was a bit different from mine. In 1949, the year she enrolled, tuition was \$33 per quarter—around \$300 today, considering inflation. By the time she graduated in 1951 it had been raised to \$35. When I enrolled in 2006, tuition was \$3056 per semester, and had

been raised to \$3675 by the time I graduated. To help pay for her education, grandma worked as a resident assistant, taking care of a rowdy group of girls called “Shirl’s Squirrels.” Additionally, she found work as an art lab assistant, and volunteered printing the art covers for the *The Pen*, a student literary magazine. While these experiences allowed her to gain valuable experience working with students, and practicing the art skills she would one day teach, they also fostered a lifelong love of the humanities, and appreciation for higher education.

I have had many experiences similar to those of my grandma—I worked as an editor for UNI’s current literary magazine, *Inner Weather*, I was a TA for an astronomy lab, and I volunteered at a student center for many years. These experiences fostered in me the same appreciation for higher education; however, when I entered as a freshman, there was a much stronger emphasis on receiving a return on one’s investment—and my financial investment was significantly higher. My grandma’s teaching degree was practical, but that practicality never outweighed the experiences of sitting around the radio with her friends on a Friday night, or seeing her artwork published on the cover of the student paper. The value of these experiences become a harder sell when coupled with tens of thousands of dollars of debt, and the weight of such debt is enough to give even the most enthusiastic scholar pause. That summer, I paused often.



Figure 2. Shirley Pfeifer, née Soeth, left, screen printing covers of *The Pen*, 1950

The Maid-Rite is a tiny restaurant that consists of one long bar for customers to sit at. As a server I had to do everything—take the order, make the order, serve the order. I was generally very quiet and kept to myself, and these aren't necessarily the best, most tip-inspiring qualities for a waitress. As with most waitressing jobs, my pay was low—around \$4.75 an hour, and the rest I was to make in tips. However, when the restaurant was loud and busy it was a stressful situation, and I wanted nothing more than to not be there. One afternoon, when we weren't very busy, I overheard my coworker talking with one of the customers. The customer was saying that he had just moved to UNI and was an anthropology professor named Dr. Gaff. I immediately stepped in. "You're an anthropology professor? What do you teach? I just declared an anthropology major!" My coworker was shocked. "I've never heard you say that many words," he said. After weeks of suffering at a miserable job, I had finally met someone I could connect with in archaeologist Dr. Gaff.

Anthropology is considered a "discovered" major. That is, students aren't taught what anthropology is in high school, and are left to discover it for themselves. I had discovered it my second semester in a class called "Human Origins." It was yet another required Liberal Arts Core class. The other option for the "Natural Science and Technology" category of the LAC was "Life: The Natural World," the introductory biology course, but bacteria and DNA and eukaryotes and prokaryotes had never exactly enlivened me. A description for "Human Origins" read: "Introduction to physical and prehistoric development of humankind, including primate and human evolution, modern races and the archaeological cultures of the world." These were just words to me. But

intriguing words. Throughout the entire first class, the professor, a lively middle-aged man, explained how anthropology was applicable to everything. “Say you’re building an airplane,”—he was continually moving around the room—“and you have to decide how big the seats need to be.” He paused to squeak out a messy picture of an airplane interior on the whiteboard. “Well, you would hire a physical anthropologist who knows human bodies and their dimensions to figure it out!” I was enthralled. I never missed a class. College was a whole new world, oh yes. I passed with a C-.

I never got very good grades as an undergraduate. It wasn’t simply that I was lazy—although an argument could be made. No, I’d prefer to blame it on two factors. First, as a student who naturally excelled in grade school, I never really learned any valuable study skills. I didn’t have to. I paid attention in class, did the homework, and didn’t get distracted by sports or popularity. My freshman year at UNI, the Academic Learning Center offered a single-credit course designed to teach a variety of study skills, including speed reading and note taking. I signed up for the course as soon as I saw the flyer. I wanted to succeed, and was willing to do whatever it took. At least superficially, that is. After about three classes of learning how to fold a piece of paper in half, hot-dog ways, to quiz myself about what I’d just read, and practicing how to skim subtitles before reading more closely, I stopped going. The second reason for my unfortunate grades, however, was that just like Shirley Pfeifer before me, I was involved in everything. I was the extracurricular queen.

The term “extracurricular” breaks down to outside of, or in addition to the standard curriculum. Google even includes a secondary definition of “outside the normal

routine.” When we use the word “extra” in everyday life—extra rations, extra actors, extra effort—the implication is that the activity or objects being described are *not necessary*. But universities always encourage students to participate in these “not necessary” activities. One of UNI’s four main emphases in the University’ Mission is: “Development of the life of the university community itself as an effective educational force,” which is often made possible by participation in extracurriculars (see Appendix). There is a strong possibility that students will discover a new passion by joining a club or organization that they hadn’t considered before, and this new passion might become a new major and a career that would otherwise have been left unknown. Relationships developed when participating in extracurriculars are also important. Many husbands and wives met through a university dance team, intermural sports, philosophy club, etc. The fellowship of such activities not only bonds students to each other, but strengthens the bond between students and their school. The most practical reason to participate in extracurricular activities, however, is to build your resume with relevant experience—especially when you have taken a leadership position or otherwise assisted with a “project”—and especially when you have not much more work experience to show than “Dishwasher at the Rialto, Fall 2009.” I joined UNI’s Anthropological Association as soon as I found out that anthropology was a thing. I was eager to bond with a group of students who shared my interest in the field, and to make my uncertainty more certain, but without realizing it at the time, I was also on my way to adding valuable buzzwords to my humble resume.



The first meeting I attended was all business. Six other girls and I sat around two black tables in a small seminar room on the top floor of the Innovative Teaching and Technology Center, where anthropology classes were housed. I was a freshman, new to anthropology, new to a club, wide-eyed and tuck-tailed. They needed to vote on leadership for the next semester. Specifically, they were in need of a new club president. There was a moment of silence as the other girls looked around at each other—*Don't look at me! / I'm just super busy. / What club even is this?*—I hesitantly raised my hand, inspired by my desire to dive head first into everything Anthro, whether I was ready or not, and my half-hearted motion was enough to land me the position.

Of course, at the time I was also involved in Chess Club, UNI Freethinkers and Inquirers, Anime Association, and the Wesley Foundation. This is the advice you're given. Spread your wings! Grades aren't so important the first year or so. Try things out, have fun. Still, anthropology was my number one. I was in love. I ranted to my friends: "Everything is anthropology! There's nothing—everything is anthropology! Even physics, like. It's about space and stuff, sure. But, like. People are the ones doing the science, right? Anthropology!" My friends would just nod along. I was William Wallace trying to inspire Canadians. Very patient, but entirely uninterested Canadians.

I relived this enthusiasm that day when I met the anthropology professor. He was an archeologist and had just moved to town. He was hoping to run a field school next summer—something that UNI's anthropology program had been lacking for some time. At the end of the day I took off my apron and went back up to my "living room." I smelled like grease, my feet hurt, and the thought of going back to the restaurant the next

day gave me a headache, but it was clear to me now that I was no longer going to join the JET program; I was going to be an archaeologist. At each step of the way in our educational careers, there are adults asking us what we want to be when we grow up. For me, the question had primed me to always have a specific answer ready. In elementary school I was going to be a farmer, just like my grandpa. In middle school I was going to be a middle school English teacher, just like my favorite teacher. The first two years of high school I was going to be a band director, because marching band was my life. When I took Japanese, I was going to join JET. And now, I was going to be an archaeologist. My parents continued to ask me, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” but when you reach the college level, the question becomes more urgent, although simultaneously there is an insistence that college is about exploration. Despite my insistence that I would be an archaeologist, I was beginning to understand that maybe there wasn’t ever a single, direct answer to the question. Maybe there wouldn’t ever be one. Nevertheless, when I told my parents that I was now going to be an anthropology major, and an archaeologist specifically, I attempted to assure them that anthropology really was “it” for me. I recreated the lecture from my “Human Origins” class for them. “You can do anything with anthropology!” But outside of the space in which that irritating question of professional intent was raised, I was entirely unconcerned with what I would do with a major in anthropology. It wasn’t important. I was in love with my major, and I had extracurriculars to attend to.

The following summer, I signed up for the archaeological field school that was offered, as promised. There were two sessions, each three-weeks long. Students who

completed both sessions would be qualified to work on Cultural Resource Management (CRM) digs, which can be the most common jobs for non-academic archaeologists. I only signed up for just the first three-week session, as it was all I could afford. After an indoor introduction to the site we would be digging at and the equipment we would need, we met outdoors each day. We were shovel testing at the Hartman Reserve Nature Center in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Our work was to dig sample sections of the land—50cm squares—then screen the soil, looking for signs of human activity. It was grueling work. To begin with, we had to choose a spot to dig, which involved surveying and mapping the land. Our session took place in June, so the heat index was in the 80-something degree range. Nevertheless, hot and sweaty and smelling strongly of bug spray and sun screen, we were eager to begin.

After careful mapping, we could begin digging. But it wasn't that simple. We used nails and tape measures to mark four points of a square, then tied bright pink string around the nails. Using a mini bubble leveler, we determined how even or uneven the surface was. Then, as we carefully dug out the square, we had to maintain as flat and even a floor surface as was humanly possible. The side of the square also had to be straight. To accomplish all of this, we used trowels, meticulously scraping the dirt over and over again. All of the dirt that we dug up was thrown into a standing screen that another person then used to sift through the dirt, searching for important bits and pieces of pottery, charcoal, or chert that would signify potential human activity. It took our crew a day or two, but eventually we all heard an excited "I found one!" Hurrying over to one

of the holes that was now about a foot deep, we saw our crewmate holding up an intact point about an inch and a half long.

Moments like this one made the digging worth it, and over the course of two weeks we found several points and pot sherds. Holding them, knowing that they were created by a human who lived thousands of years ago, is an awe-inspiring experience. And what's more—it's practical. There are four primary areas of anthropology: cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, linguistic anthropology, and archaeology. The most direct line from university to any one of these fields is through a field school, and that was the opportunity offered to my group, and to several other groups after. Unfortunately for me, there was an aspect of archaeology I was not too keen on, and that was the data collecting.

The most important part of modern archaeology is, of course, the data collecting. In the Anthropological Theory class that anthropology majors are required to take, several of our class discussions centered on the question of whether or not anthropology is a science. As its name implies, anthropology is a discipline interested in all aspects of the human race—both biological and cultural. Both are necessary for a more comprehensive understanding, and both can be seen as representing, in a way, Snow's "Two Cultures." Historically, the method of cultural interpretation used by most anthropologists has been the ethnography. The ethnographer can never truly escape bias, whether he or she is studying from within the culture or without. But, the admittance of the complexity of perspectives, and the development of various approaches to minimize human error in our attempt to understand humans is, at its core, a scientific effort.

Biology has a more difficult and regrettable history with Anthropology. As the study of genetics picked up in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, so too did ideas of “Social Darwinism,” and the notion of superior races. Perhaps as a push-back against this association, cultural anthropologists followed the lead of the “Father of Anthropology” Franz Boas, who developed the concept of Cultural Relativism—the idea that there are no “civilized” or “primitive” cultures, and that genetics does not determine cultural status. This rejection of biological determinism caused what E.O. Wilson described as “Two Cultures” within Anthropology:

The biological anthropologists attempt to explain culture as ultimately a product of the genetic history of humanity, renewed each generation by the decisions of individuals influenced by that history. In sharp contrast, the cultural anthropologists, descendants of Boas, see culture as a higher-order phenomenon largely free of genetic history and diverging from one society to the next virtually without limit. (Wilson 202)

Anthropology, then, is one example of a discipline within which the scientific and the cultural have historically been at odds. As I experienced at field school, however, anthropology was very much a science, and the cultural nature of our work did not diminish that distinction. The cultural artifacts we discovered that summer, and the cultural remains that professional archaeologists work to identify and classify, are all used to understand human behaviors, and have little interaction with the biological aspects of the humans they were associated with. However, the process of understanding prehistoric cultures involves more technical and, yes, scientific methods than that of the traditional ethnography.

Although the research methods used by anthropologists are scientific, the discipline falls short of one important distinguishing feature of the sort of science that

C.P. Snow depicted in his lecture. Snow described the scientific process as having two motives: “one is to understand the natural world, the other is to control it” (“A Second Look” 67). Anthropologists seek answers to some of the bigger mysteries of humanity, including how and why we evolved, and, of course, the relationship between biology and culture. The motivation is to understand one peculiar subject of the natural world—humans. But that motivation generally does not go beyond understanding and into controlling. In fact, as history will warn, using anthropological research in an attempt to control the natural world can go horribly awry. Snow is referring to sciences like his own chemistry, hard sciences that lend themselves to technological or medical innovation. But anthropology falls firmly on the “understanding” side of science, which is a desire I was drawn to and was familiar with as it was similar to my desire to understand Japanese culture. I kept this in mind as I was busy recording widths, depths, soil colors, weather conditions, and what we had for lunch. In science, the more data the better, and we collected all the data.

One day as we were digging, a reporter from the *Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier* stopped by to take some pictures and interview us for an article she was writing. When she came to me and asked how I was liking the field school I said, “It’s certainly not what you see in Indiana Jones.” Proud of my sound bite, I had the idea that someone should write about the field school for UNI’s student paper, *The Northern Iowan*, and wondered why that person shouldn’t be me. That fall I wrote and submitted the article with the title “UNI Students Participate in Summer Field School.” However, when I saw it printed in the paper a few days later, the title had been changed to “Real Life Indiana Jones Class.”

Frustrated by the blatant marketing tactic, I was nevertheless proud to be published, and satisfied at having been able to use my skills as a writer to promote a scientific endeavor—one of my first cross-disciplinary experiences. As I took more of my required anthropology courses, my grades did not improve, but inspired by my article publication I began taking more English classes, and what I quickly discovered was that the field I had considered to be a science had a lot more in common with the humanities than I expected.

I was initially drawn to anthropology because I already enjoyed the practice of studying cultures. Adding the major, I had convinced my parents, and myself, that it could be a practical degree. I participated in the field school, and wrapped myself in the words of my Human Origins professor: You can do anything with anthropology! But soon I began to recognize the importance of anthropology as more than just practical, and the purpose of the study of humans as more than just scientific.

## CHAPTER 3

## ENGLISH

It was drizzling as I stood waiting outside at the bus station in Hull, England. I had my backpack on, filled with my laptop, books—one of which, the Penguin edition of *The Sagas of the Icelanders* was no less than a tome—a hoodie, a Union Jack mug (wrapped in the hoodie), and a box of tea. Sipping a can of Tango, I looked down at my boarding pass to double check the numbers. I was very used to travelling at this point, but this was a very important bus—it was taking me to London for the eight-hour flight home.

By the middle of my second year, despite having declared my love for anthropology (and declared the major), my grades were exposing the fact that I just wasn't doing well those classes. I enjoyed reading about different cultures, and discussing how aspects of those cultures reflect what it means to be human. But, just as I had experienced in the field school, collecting the data needed to understand those cultures involved a lot of detail-oriented note taking, chart making, and analysis. At the same time I was struggling with the scientific aspects of anthropology, I was receiving all A's in my English courses. Before I had officially declared the major, I was taking classes just for fun, and so I skipped all of the general surveys required for the major and jumped right into the more topic-oriented classes. One of the first fun English classes I took was "Old English Language and Literature." I barely knew what Old English was when I signed up for the class, but right away we were introduced to an entirely new culture. I wasn't expecting such a similarity with my anthropology classes, but as we took the time to learn



the grammar of the Old English language, and the lifestyles of the people who spoke it, I was amazed by the similarities. Soon after, I took an Asian Literature seminar, once again recalling my love of Japanese language and culture. In both classes I recognized that the difference between the English and anthropology disciplines was not primarily in the purpose. Both are interested in human nature and culture. The research methods for each, however, are very different. Analyzing the remains of an Anglo-Saxon ship burial will reveal a lot about the artwork, weapons, currency, and other material goods of that culture. From information gathered, claims can be made about cultural values and behaviors. At the same time, analyzing an Anglo-Saxon text, such as *Beowulf*, can reveal aspects of Anglo-Saxon life that no collection of artifacts can. Still, the motivation for both is to understand a certain culture, and from there, we can make more substantiated claims about humanity.

The English discipline isn't directly all about humanity, though. In creative writing, language is used to tell stories or create aesthetics about anything at all—including subjects from the natural world and the supernatural world. In the creative writing workshops I took, I read stories on anything from the day-to-day life of a businessman to a vampire horror story. In class we discussed practical techniques for good writing, but we also discussed the relationship between the author and the reader. Purpose, and in particular the question of authorial intent, is oftentimes brought up in literature classes—what meaning did the author intend to communicate, and does that intention necessarily matter to our own interpretations? But when we are the authors, the perspective shifts, and we then begin to question whether or not we even have control

over our own intentions. These perspectives are two sides of the English coin—creation and analysis—and while both are directed at human artistic expression, which includes subjects from all walks of life, they nevertheless ultimately represent the human mind. This is a very good reason for placing English in the humanities, and also why anthropology and English are in such close connection. I would experience that connection even more during my semester in England.

Remembering that one of the reasons I chose to go to UNI in the first place was for its study abroad options, I decided to check out the Study Abroad Fair in early fall. Perhaps because I had recently declared my English major, I decided to investigate the study abroad options in England. The most affordable program offered was with the University of Hull, which had a contract with UNI and allowed students to pay only UNI tuition, which meant that the only other serious expense was housing. Ever wary of the accruing interest on my student loans, I decided that this would be the best option. I had never heard of Hull before, but I was certain that anywhere in England couldn't be bad.

I had fallen asleep on the bus ride from London, and woke just as we were rolling into Hull. What I saw resembled a modern big city slum more than it did the picturesque image of England I had in mind from all the Romantic and Victorian British literature I had read. Not that I had expected to be stepping into a Jane Austen novel, but a scene more akin to the Cambridge University setting would have been welcome. Along the streets of Hull were take-away shops that were strangely familiar; Pizza Hot, Subilicious, Great Wall. Brick alleyways were tattooed with graffiti, streets were covered with cigarette butts. Shortly after classes began, I was warned by an American student who

had already been studying at Hull for a semester to watch out for the “chavs.” Chavs, she told me, were similar to American white trash, but louder, younger, and more aggressive. I had never read about the chavs of Thornfield Hall, nor of King Arthur’s dangerous encounter with the chavs.

The classes I took were not necessarily reflective of the traditional English canon. I had more standard class options, but as usual I opted for a more unusual selection. “British Children’s Literature” offered a critical look at *Alice in Wonderland*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *Harry Potter*, and other earlier works published when children’s literature was just developing as a genre. “The Other Victorians” focused on Victorian literature that challenged mainstream literary ideals of the time, including works by Sensationalist Wilkie Collins and playwright Oscar Wilde, whose trials for indecency stained his popular reputation, and threatened his position in the traditional literary canon. The third and final class I took was “Literature and Culture of the Vikings.” In the Vikings class, while we did read a lot of Viking literature, we also learned a great deal about who the Vikings really were, just as we had done in my Old English class back at UNI. In England, however, when the professor lectured about the Battle of Stamford Bridge, he could tell us exactly what bus to take to go have a look at the site—take bus 10 from Piccadilly, just east of York about seven miles.

The English major at UNI requires students to take two surveys of English literature, one from Old English to Early Modernity, the other from Romantics to Post-Colonialism. Attempting to present such long and complex chunks of time is of course very challenging, and the extent to which Dickens is a better representation of his day

than Collins or Wilde is a matter of ongoing debate over the contents and purpose of the English literary canon. But, the survey classes were not designed to stand as the immovable pillars of English literary greatness. Rather, they are to form a historical foundation upon which all other literature courses, including the more specialized seminars, as well as more modern and digital literature courses, can be built. The “intellectual Luddites” C.P. Snow referred to when he criticized those scholars who would have nothing to do with science, and who would wish the future didn’t exist—those who are “restricted and constrained”—would find little sympathy in UNI’s English department, as I experienced it (5). Just as in the Old English class and the Asian American Literature seminar, there was a strong cultural emphasis in the literature classes which utilized the readings to better understand its contemporary writers and readers. I was pleased to know that the courses I took in England, home of Snow, Leavis, and the traditional English literary canon, were all emphasizing the same contemporary cultural awareness. At the same time, there was very clearly a devotion to the nation’s literary heritage—much of which was, of course, tourism-based.

During spring break, two other American girls and I had designed a full two weeks of travel in a loop around England. We were all English majors, so we included the necessary literary stops. In Stratford-upon-Avon we came to Shakespeare’s childhood home, a light tan half-timber building—mostly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, although much work has been done to keep it standing. We entered the tourist center, which was a much newer building, and bought tickets. They cost all of £23, which I wasn’t expecting on my tight budget, but I handed it over because it was Shakespeare after all. The house was full

of tourists of every nationality. I watched as a Japanese family asked a stranger to take their picture, just as intrigued by Shakespeare's international impact as I was by the house itself.

His works were undeniably transformative for English language and literature, and set the stage, so to speak, for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century English literary canon. Perhaps this is why C.P. Snow, in one of his "Two Cultures" essay's anecdotes, uses Shakespeare as the literary equivalent to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, saying that scientists and writers, respectively, are completely baffled by the other's foundational works (15). I certainly could not recite the Second Law of Thermodynamics off the top of my head, but neither would I expect a scientist to recite Shakespeare. The ability of both "cultures" to appreciate one another and find common ground hinges less on specialized knowledge (even the basics) of each other's discipline, and more on a common purpose. For Snow, that purpose should be to improve the quality of life for all people. In this way, he seems to view the utilization, or "control" of science to be just as important as its attempt to "understand the natural world." And it is this belief that further separates the "Two Cultures" divide: that scientists, in command of nature, have a greater purpose than writers or artists who merely seek expression.

In one of the most cited phrases from Snow's essay, he writes that scientists naturally have "the future in their bones" (11). In contrast, he says that traditional (literary) culture responds to science by "wishing the future did not exist" (12). He uses the examples of George Orwell's *1984*, which, as he says, is "the strongest possible wish that the future should not exist," and J.D. Bernal's *World Without War*, which presents a

utopian future in which science has eliminated the need for war (101). His examples are, in fact, useful illustrations of how the “Two Cultures” can respond to one another in a give-and-take relationship. Where novelist George Orwell warns of the dangers of power and corruption, scientist J.D. Bernal describes the optimistic possibilities of science. Both perspectives are useful in making informed decisions about how to ethically employ future technology. If science were to blindly push forward without a second thought to the potential consequences of its actions—well, we need only look to dystopian science fiction to imagine any number of disastrous outcomes. But that is not to say that novelists, much less humanities scholars, are wishing the future did not exist. Rather, a future in which we might still consider the words of Shakespeare, along with those of contemporary authors/playwrights/artists whose voices may or may not be influenced by the “traditional” canon, is preferable as the world advances.

Snow’s poetic statement regarding scientists and their having that future in their bones emphasizes his devotion not just to advancement, but to progress. As an anthropology major, I was trained to be particularly sensitive about the word “progress.” While our understanding and control of the natural world progresses, humanistic expression does not. Progress, according to Snow, would see the end of poverty, hunger, illness, etc. Certainly a positive and admirable goal, but to put science on such a pedestal can lead to a diminishment of other less technologically advanced cultures. In the humanities, where art and human expression are the primary sources, time and “progress” become less important. The paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci can be admired today in their original state. However, while his technological inventions have inspired future

innovators, they have also been left behind as historic reminders of where our scientific progress has led us. The purpose of studying science, or studying the humanities, then is wrapped up in this idea of progress. If the purpose of life is to “progress,” then English—which, as Snow says, is slow to change—is only holding us back.

But the classes I had taken and time I had spent in England were certainly not a waste, and rather than exhibiting signs of a stagnant department full of literary Luddites, I had experienced a wealth of new subject material—Harry Potter, for one—as well as new perspectives on old standards. When the bus pulled up, I loaded my suitcase into the undercarriage and took a seat in the back. I thought about these classes I had taken, and the sights I had seen, and I felt truly richer for the experience. I remembered being at the Study Abroad Fair, being told by one of the student representatives that studying abroad was an invaluable experience; that you would meet lifelong friends, you would learn so much about another culture, and that your resume would really stand out. It seemed odd to me at the time to present such an opportunity in a practical way, but as I neared graduation as an Anthropology and English dual major, I felt as though I needed all the help I could get.

I was one of a minority of English majors at UNI who did not declare a Teaching emphasis. This didn't make much sense to anyone outside the university who asked me what I wanted to do when I graduated. And it wasn't simply because I was graduating from UNI, where teaching is king—even my grandma minored in English Teaching, with the intention to teach the subject if she needed to. Mostly, the commonly held belief that most English majors want to teach seems to come from a recognition of English as an

important foundational subject. The ability to read and analyze texts requires critical thinking skills that every student should be thoroughly versed in, and so the English discipline becomes not only one of the most important subjects to be taught in grade school and college, but it is also a major that is not ignored by employers.

Having spent most of my college career genuinely enjoying my education, I had never honestly considered what anthropology, English, creative writing, or any of the disciplines meant outside of the university. My experience with the “Two Cultures” had, up until that point, been very interdisciplinary. I had enjoyed the cultural aspects of both anthropology and English, and was able to use my writing skills for both. However, just like many of my peers in similar majors, I was very unsure of how applicable any of these subjects would be towards a full-time job. I would still get the question from people—if you’re not going to teach, what do you plan to do with an English degree? And I still wasn’t sure, but I also wasn’t done yet.

When I returned from England, I had one final year before graduation. I still had a few anthropology classes to complete, as well as one last creative writing class, and I had also arranged to complete research hours with an astronomy professor I had come to know. So, my last semester schedule included, among other courses: Anthropological Theory, Fiction Workshop, and Research in Earth Science. For my Fiction Workshop I would write stories about topics we covered in my anthropology classes, or about anything to do with astronomy. I tried to incorporate what I was learning and experiencing into my writing in an authentic way that would connect with readers. The consilience of natural science, social science, and the humanities, for me occurred in



writing, and the purpose of this writing was the same as what Snow claimed to be the first aim of the scientific method: to understand the natural world. In keeping with this purpose, in my last year as an undergraduate student, I continued to foster my love of both science and English. What that would mean for me as I entered the “real world,” I wasn’t sure, but I was happy with my “progress” as a student, and was ready to find out.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE “REAL” WORLD

When I heard the recorded voicemail message, I hung up the phone. It was always a relief when a client didn't answer. I was sitting at my desk, staring at the website I had built. After filling out the copy and basic formatting, the sites were sent to the company's graphic design center in India to be completed. Then, it was our job to convince the client to set their site live so that the company could start getting paid. Unfortunately, there were always two major roadblocks; first, the artists in India didn't always select the most appropriate images for the business, and second, clients usually had opinions. The site I had been sent to work on was for an auto shop in Pennsylvania, and the stock image across the header was of a bright red sports car surrounded by palm trees. I messaged my co-worker, “Wanna go for a walk? I gotta get out of here.”

In my last semester at UNI, the spring semester of 2011, I had to choose between two classes I wanted to take that were scheduled at the same time. One was Applied Writing: Technical Communications, and the other was Cosmology of Ancient Peoples. The professional writing course advertised a real-world assignment that would provide students with valuable hands-on experience. The Cosmology class was a co-taught lecture-based class on the history of astrological beliefs. It was co-taught by a religions professor and an astronomy professor who I knew and had recently worked with. On one hand, I considered, the writing experience would look great on my resume, and was likely to help me land a writing job. On the other hand, the cosmology class was the perfect union of my interests in archaeology, astronomy, and culture.

After seeking advice from a number of family and friends I decided to at least try to be practical and showed up to the first day of the Applied Writing class. Taking literature-based classes had provided me with plenty of writing experience, and anthropology classes also tend to be writing-intensive, as the analyses you make need to be defended with well-written, salient arguments. Taking a class specifically for learning to write, then, seemed unnecessary to me. However, on the first day the instructor described the many different forms of professional writing—from instructional manuals to marketing campaigns to newsletters. It wasn't so much that we would be learning to write as much as we would be learning to adapt to different forms of communication, and to address the needs of clients. I could see how this class would be useful, and why professional writing classes, in general, seemed to be on the rise.

When I enrolled at UNI in 2006, there were only two professional writing courses offered: Introduction to Professional Writing, and Professional Editing. This fall, 2015, there will be four: Introduction to Professional Writing, Applied Writing: Technical Communication, Professional Writing Practicum: Workplace Communication, and Professional Writing Practicum: Editing a Literary Journal (North American Review). Additionally, students now have the option to add a Professional Writing minor. It makes sense that students who are paying more for their education than any generation before them would be drawn to classes designed specifically to prepare them for their working career. And, again, an emphasis on the return on investment would have many seeking a clearly defined classroom-to-real-world application of skills learned. This wasn't what I was seeking, however. My college career up to that point had been about taking classes

that excited me; classes that allowed me to think critically about subjects that I wouldn't otherwise be exposed to. And in any case, it is difficult to prioritize learning applicable job skills when you aren't living in the "real world," or even know what that is like yet. College really is a haven of sorts—a space where rates and fines accrue in a mysterious online location while you are busy playing dodgeball with friends, or staying up late to study for a chemistry exam. It's an incubation process that succeeds in graduating well-rounded critical thinkers every day who are then reminded that they have to pay for that. In any case, I was more aware of the precious short time I had left to exist in this isolated bliss, and so after the first day I dropped the Applied Writing class and added Cosmology of Ancient Peoples.

The first job I got out of college was as a production assistant with KCRG-TV9 news. I was a new recruit on the mobile local events live crew. We mostly filmed local sports, so that fans of the Kennedy Cougars baseball team could see them play live on TV. Each person working the event had a specific job assignment. Cameramen, replay machine, director, graphics, etc. There was minimal training, and when an event started, you had to know what you were doing or there would be a lot of frantic yelling. They put me on the graphics machine most of the time, so when anyone was being interviewed it was my job to pull up the pre-made name tag that would show at the bottom of the screen. Most of the time I did okay with this, but when an interviewee was changed last minute, revisions would have to be made that I was in no way trained to handle. I figured out after a while that this was the type of job that you only get good at by making many mistakes and sticking with it for many years. My bachelor's degree had helped get me the

position. A minimum of an associate's degree was required, but something in those two extra years of liberal arts education must have made me a more capable candidate—or, at least, appear that way. The type of degree didn't matter, as it didn't really with many of the jobs I would apply for. Employers wanted to know you were educated—in what, they were less concerned.

After a full summer of these stressful events, I saw a Now Hiring sign in the window of my favorite book store. If my English degree would be appreciated anywhere, I thought, it would be here. Sure enough, I got the job and started right away. It was full time work, with benefits. I had only ever been a student full time, so this was a new experience to me. The work was active enough; I ran the cash register, shelved books, took phone calls, and, as this was a used bookstore, even purchased books from customers for the store. But, just as I had experienced at Maid-Rite, the work was repetitive and numbing. Some of my coworkers would comment on the fact that at least we didn't have to take our work home with us. "Once you're off the clock," they'd say, "you're really off the clock." But I was bothered by the thought that anyone would want to work full time doing something that they were eager to forget about at the end of the day. This seemed to be one of the harsh realities of the "real world" that I had been afraid of. After a long day at work I would be too tired for much else besides TV or some light reading.

I did find some joy in observing customers—they were the human test subjects of my own personal field study of used bookstore customers in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. C.P. Snow, in addition to scientists and literary scholars, also mentions a third group of people

whom he calls the “non-scientists of strong down-to-earth interests” (9). For the most part, these were our customers. Many were regulars of the science section, and many others were regulars of fiction. There was crossover between the two, and sections like science fiction naturally involved both, but unlike the “cultures” of Snow’s academic world, these customers were, as he described, exploring their interests. They might have just finished a full eight or more hour shift at work, and were wanting something enjoyable to read, something that maybe reminded them of an interesting class they had taken in college. And this is a different culture from the two Snow describes. Within academia, disciplines may find themselves in competition for funds or relevance, or their ideologies may simply clash. In the professional realm, scientists utilize their ever-changing field—control their understanding of the natural world—to better humanity, as writers express their humanity through their art. However, it is in the realm of leisure that we often see more consilience, and this consilience is very similar to what I had experienced as a student. As an undergraduate, I had ignored the pressures of the job market, and found myself enjoying an interdisciplinary education. For many, however, that is simply not a realistic option.

Three of my coworkers at the bookstore had their master’s degree in Library Science. I had been researching this very same degree, because as much as I missed being in school, I felt I needed to consider practicality for once in my life, and try to find a program with a high rate of placement. My coworkers certainly seemed to have ignored the pressures of the job market as well, though, because in my research about these graduate programs I had learned that, while library jobs do exist, they exist in Middle of

Nowhere, USA. Even for Iowa, these jobs were in small towns with libraries the size of a garage. What's more, *Forbes* had recently rated the Library and Information Science degree the "Worst Master's Degree for Jobs" based on low median pay and a low projected employment increase at 8% (Smith).

I worked at the bookstore for over a year as I continued to contemplate graduate programs. I made good friends and decent money, and I could see how easily such a life would be comfortable for many. But I was still restless. I wanted to get back to school, and I recognized, after my failed attempt to justify getting a Library and Information Science degree that I was making the same mistake I made when I first started at UNI. I was trying to use a degree in higher education solely for a practical purpose. But that was not my relationship with higher education. I wanted the conversations, the introspection, the analysis that I personally felt made a difference, not just for me and how I view the world, but for my friends, family, and future students with whom I would one day have the opportunity to share my love of learning. I had researched several different English M.A. programs, and applied to a few, but my application to UNI's program felt the most right. Maybe it was my familiarity with the professors and the department, but it was also respect for the education I had received there. Like my grandma before me, I had benefited from an institution whose priority of teacher education resulted in a thorough grounding in the liberal arts.

After applying to the program, I still had a full nine months before the semester would start. Not wanting to be stuck in customer service for that long, I began looking for other, better opportunities that would allow me to make a bit more money, pay down my

loans, and gain some true out-of-school work experience before I went back into academic seclusion. When I graduated in May 2011, I had optimistically believed that having both of my majors—English and Anthropology, and to a lesser extent my Creative Writing and Film Studies minors—would put me ahead of my competition. I wasn't exactly sure who my competition was, though, because I wasn't exactly sure what jobs I would be applying for. I moved back into my parents' house—my life was a stereotype—and quickly sent out to anything local, hoping to get something started while I prepared for grad school.

Soon enough I received a response from a local communication company. The job advertisement was for a “Web Content Specialist.” It was an entry-level position, but they were looking for people with a writing background. When I pulled into the parking lot for my job interview, I thought that I must have accidentally ended up at a Rockwell Collins building, the largest employer in the area, because there were security gates, multiple warehouse-sized buildings, and hundreds of cars. After a brief, casual interview with two of the managers, they took me into a small computer lab to complete a writing sample. I was given information about a small business that sells pools and pool equipment, and then asked to write headline and copy for the business' hypothetical website. As I sat staring at the screen I couldn't help but wonder if I should have taken that Applied Writing class. But after rereading the information a few times, I thought about what I might see on a similar website and began to write. “Ready for summer?” I rolled my eyes, but kept going. “Beat the heat in your own backyard with one of (Pool



Company)'s affordable above ground pools!" I was offered the job the next day, and started the following week.

My desk was one of hundreds covering the vast floor space, but I had my very own computer, phone, and chair. It was exciting at first, but soon I found the days dragging on. Despite not having taken the Applied Writing class, I was able to successfully write copy for many sites. But my use of writing skills was more akin to the use of the scientific method by scientists. We had an equation, and I filled in the words in order to build a marketing strategy for my client. I was "controlling" the words. It was dissatisfying, both as an artist and as an amateur anthropologist. I began to treasure the weekends and dread Mondays. I had never wanted to become one of "those people." 9-5ers were so boring.

To escape the drudgery, my coworker and I would take many walks around the pond just outside of the office building. We had both just graduated and were both getting used to this new full time work thing. Earlier that day our entire department had received an email from the big boss with the subject line "BEWARE THE GEESE." Apparently the goslings had recently hatched and so the geese surrounding the pond were acting more aggressive than usual. Attached to the email was an aerial photograph of the pond area with bright red circles around goose danger zones. "So I'm going back to grad school," I told my coworker, as we eyed a pack of geese we were coming up to. "Cool. Then are you going to come right back here?" Once again, just as it was at Half Price Books, several of our coworkers had graduate degrees. One had his master's in History, and another in Philosophy. Both of them agreed it was not worth the money, but both also

jumped at any opportunity to talk about the subjects they were so passionate about. As we came closer to the geese gang, one of the males started to hiss at us. I waved my arms like you're supposed to do when you see a bear, but the goose fluffed out its wings and took a step forward. We backed up and ran back inside. "Maybe," I said, "but that's a risk I'm willing to take!"

During the two-year interim that I was out of school, UNI had been in the midst of a financial crisis. As part of the solution, the decision to cut 22 undergraduate majors, 20 minors, and 16 graduate programs was made, and several faculty members in those programs would also be let go. There was such disagreement from many faculty members that the American Association of University Professors conducted an investigation. But this wasn't the first time the administration and the faculty have had their differences at UNI. In 1950, Dr. Elmer T. Peterson, Dean of the College of Education, threatened new President James William Maucker not to seek to offer graduate curriculum at the ISTC (Lang 1: 178). Maucker couldn't make that promise, and by the end of his presidency, the ISTC would become the University of Northern Iowa, offering graduate degrees in Education. In both situations the administration and the faculty were at odds with one another on the subject of purpose. To Dr. Peterson, the ISTC was an undergraduate institution focused on teacher education and teacher education alone. To Maucker, the natural evolution of the college, as the student editorial in the *College Eye* predicted, was to become so much more than that.

In the late sixties, Maucker made the decision to include graduate education at his institution, stating that, "What the nation needs is a scholarly MA degree in its own

right...not a transition between the BA and the Ph.D....nor as a warm up for the Ph.D.” (Lang 2: 228). His intentions, then, were for the degree to serve a purpose for the good of the nation. It is interesting to consider M.A. degrees being useful degrees today, when so many M.A. graduates heaped in debt would say otherwise. I was certainly aware of the potential financial danger I was putting myself in returning to school. His intention, though, reflects the liberal arts ideal of thoughtful, educated people that had drawn me back to UNI. The sixties in the United States were a time of social upheaval, and perhaps in response to such a tumultuous time, Maucker believed that more cultural awareness was what the university needed. He believed that “by a concerted effort of students and Faculty, a great deal could be done to develop better understanding of the culture of other people” (Lang 2: 194). Towards this end, the university took advantage of a unique opportunity and purchased the *North American Review* magazine from Cornell College. Some members of the faculty said that the purchase was a huge waste of money—that its day had come and gone. But Maucker believed in its ability to strengthen the reputation of his school. He stated that “The principal value of the purchase of the publication is intangible: [it] lies in the intellectual field and cannot be specifically measured” (Lang 2: 354). I find this sentiment to be a useful description of the value of liberal arts education. However, what Maucker might not have predicted is that the NAR also provides hands-on experience for students wishing to go into the field of editing or publishing. The purpose of the magazine, and the university as a whole, is two-fold.

In part, the animosity surrounding the 2013 program cuts were affected by the ever-evolving purpose of UNI. As across the nation more online courses are offered, and

more for-profit colleges and universities are emerging, UNI is no different than other universities needing to keep themselves relevant and competitive. President Bill Ruud, who succeeded Ben Allen after his resignation in 2011, proposed a solution towards that end, which would increase UNI's communication with local community colleges, and increasing online education opportunities. Recently, Ruud has pushed for the addition of a Bachelor of Applied Science degree. Such a degree was actually one of the very first offered at the Iowa State Normal School, but the modern incarnation would look very different. In a Faculty Senate meeting on March 9, 2015, Ruud described his proposal:

A BAS degree program could serve the needs of working Iowans, address educational needs for place-bound Iowans in both rural and urban communities, enhance community college partnerships, provide for a better workforce (including advanced manufacturing), and strengthens [*sic*] skills available to business and industry within Iowa. In addition, the university could pursue programming and funding partnerships with business and industry in Iowa by engaging in such a degree program. (University of Northern Iowa)

These benefits of the BAS degree emphasize the workforce, business, and industry.

Following the cuts of several liberal arts programs, such a proposal seems to be at odds with the university's mission statement (see Appendix). Particularly the very first emphasis: "General or liberal arts education as the most essential ingredient for the undergraduate student," as well as the statement that "in the area of teacher preparation, the university must remain at the forefront of developments." In fact, the mission statement explicitly states that the university will offer no major programs in agriculture, engineering, administration, or a number of other fields that resemble "business and industry" far more than they resemble liberal arts or teacher education. Of course, the mission statement does allow room for change: "UNI should be more than merely

responsive to changing needs and interests of its students and society. It must provide leadership in educational innovations, programs, and research.” A changing need for more direct class-to-work programs might ultimately be at odds with an emphasis in educational innovation. But that all depends on the type of education being promoted.

Business and industry-oriented schools and programs have historically had an uncertain relationship with traditional academic institutions and their purpose. Historian Burton Bledstein writes about the way early American university presidents like Daniel Coit Gilman and Henry R. Tappan developed the public’s trust on reliance of universities’ authority. Their purpose was to ensure that “the American university would serve to enhance the public’s image of a unified professional authority in society” (325). Towards that end, university leaders, such as William Rainey Harper, established business schools and programs to provide the public with more practical education. He predicted in his article “The Trend of University and College Education in the United States” that in the future Americans will see “the lifting up of professional education and a closer identification of the professional schools with the universities” (459). Harper’s prediction not only reflects a trend in higher education at the time, but also the development of an internal dispute that would have faculty driving their universities in two different directions—closer to professionalism or away from it. This divide would have a detrimental effect on disciplinary relationships, including the “Two Cultures.” Departments needing to make themselves more competitive, professionally, end up promoting their majors’ applicability in a *Hunger Games*-like battle for retention.

Retention and the changing purpose of higher education in America was part of a more public dialogue that I became aware of during my time in the “real world.” I would see commercials on TV for online education programs that offer credit for life experience. Colorado Technical Institute, for example, offers a program they call Fast Track, which allows students the opportunity to “earn college credit for what you already know and earn your degree faster” (“Fast Track”). Similarly, a commercial for DeVry University titled “Different On Purpose,” advertises that they are looking for students “who have already found themselves, who are going to college to get a better job” (2015). These advertisements suggested to me that perhaps the liberal arts education that I had received was really not worth the cost anymore in the eyes of many Americans. In March 2015, women’s liberal arts college Sweet Briar College, founded in 1901, declared that it was closing. Several factors were cited in the decision to close, including “lack of interest from female high school students in attending a women’s college like Sweet Briar, declining interest in liberal arts colleges generally, and eroding interest in attending colleges in rural areas” (Jaschik). The story of Sweet Briar’s closing made national headlines, perhaps because private institutions just like it have been iconic as a pinnacle of higher education standards for as long as this country has existed. But standards and practices are changing, and even our most beloved universities are no exception to the harsh realities of the current economic crisis of higher education.

What these changes meant for me as I headed back to UNI, I couldn’t say at the time. I knew the value of my education—which had nothing to do with money. And, applicable or not, my majors had successfully helped me land a decent entry level job in

the “real world.” My determined avoidance of everything “professional” or “applied” during my years as an undergraduate allowed me to take classes from a variety of disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary classes on subjects like ancient cosmology. The “Two Cultures” for me, up to that point, had been far more convivial than Snow’s essay depicted. Still, when I heard E.O. Wilson’s interview that summer, I immediately acknowledged the truth in his words, that bringing the sciences and the humanities together was an “unexplored field,” and something that both sides avoided. It could be that I was projecting my own innate desire to see the two joined, but more than that, as I embarked on my journey through graduate school, fresh with a new perspective on education and life, I would discover that what I perceived as the “Two Cultures” problem had more to do with the “real world” than I would have expected. Snow was a public figure and made his writings accessible to all, believing that professional scientists and artists working together could solve the major ills of the world. But where better to foster those relationships than where the “professionalization” begins? Whether the purpose of education is to allow students to explore different fields and “understand the natural world,” or whether it is to prepare them for a career in live TV, or bookstores, or a web marketing company, the association students will have with science and the arts will be formed first and foremost by their education.

## CHAPTER 5

### GRADUATE SCHOOL

It was my second week as a writing tutor at the Writing Center, part of the Academic Learning Center at UNI. Each appointment I had was nerve wracking. You never knew exactly what challenges you'd be met with. Students came to the Writing Center for help with anything from honors thesis revisions to basic grammar instruction. I met my appointment for that day in the reception area and led her back to a study room. The student was a freshman who had recently declared an anthropology major. She had long red hair, an eyebrow ring, some tattoos, and she carried a backpack painted with a galaxy of stars. That day she needed help with essays for her Culture, Nature and Society class. I had taken this same class, which was not only a requirement for the anthropology major, but also counted towards the Liberal Arts Core—under the Social Science category, Group A: Sociocultural and Historical Perspectives. It was as though I were looking at a version of my younger self (minus the self-decorating), and I knew that this session would not be a problem. I had plenty of writing experience, but prior to becoming a tutor I did not have very much experience working with students. When I filled out the “previous experience” section of the Writing Center’s job application, I had remembered one position I had as a lab assistant for a semester of my senior year.

After taking an Intro to Astronomy class for my LAC Physical Science requirement, I was invited to be a lab assistant for one of the Intro to Astronomy sections the following semester. The LAC requires students to take a science class with a laboratory component, and astronomy is one of the more popular lab courses. My job as



an assistant was to support the professor during the lab hours. Each week the students would have a different assignment. I would receive the assignment with the answers, just before class, and the professor would go over them with me, making sure that I had at least a basic understanding of the reasoning. If students had questions about the assignment, I was there to help them work through it. However, I was specifically told not to simply give students the answers, the theory being that it's more valuable for them to work the problem out for themselves. Unfortunately, the students were highly resistant to working anything out for themselves, lest they actually learn something. As the astronomy professor drew a wobbly stick figure on the board to illustrate the terms "zenith" and "nadir," a group of three would be in the corner giggling, several students would be blatantly on their phones, and one might even have her head down on the desk. In large part, this resistance was merely a result of age—just out of high school, it typically seems to take a year or two for students to feel that graduating might actually be more important than looking cool to their peers. But beyond adolescence, the resistance was part of a larger complaint against the requirement of the Liberal Arts Core itself.

The University of Northern Iowa, as an institution historically focused on teacher-education, is not a traditional liberal arts college as we know them today. Coe College in Cedar Rapids, on the other hand, which I'd briefly considered attending back in 2006, is a self-proclaimed liberal arts college, and matches the cursory description given by Victor E. Ferrall in *Liberal Arts on the Brink*: "Today, most liberal arts colleges are small, residential, often located in a rural setting, and devoted primarily to educating undergraduates" (13). Whether or not education programs belong in liberal arts colleges

has often been the subject of debate, but a consideration of the reverse is just as crucial; how important are the liberal arts to teacher education (Kimball 171 ff.)? In 1858, the Normal Department of the State University of Iowa was required to teach “the theory and practice of teaching, and everything which enters into it as an art, including all the most approved methods and processes now in use in all the varieties of teaching” (Allen 64). Institutions of educational training have maintained this perspective that teaching is a liberal art, and should be treated as such.

The University of Northern Iowa, which since its origins as a state normal school has retained its standing as an exceptional institution for teacher education, has also maintained a liberal arts philosophy, embodied in its Liberal Arts Core requirements. The purpose of the LAC, according to the LAC website reads:

To actively engage students to become self-aware participants in their own personal development through thoughtful and informed decision making, promotion of life-long learning, enlarging the scope of their world to global issues and diverse cultures, and increasing their strategies for solving complex problems they will encounter in the future. (“Purposes and Goals”)

The statement emphasizes “active engagement,” and “life-long learning” as valuable qualities to have in becoming a problem-solving member of society. This is a different, loftier education goal than the online and professional programs advertise. And, towards that end, the LAC requires students to take classes from six different categories: (1) Core Competencies, including writing, speaking, basic mathematics, and physical education; (2) Civilizations and Cultures, including history surveys and non-western culture classes; (3) Fine Arts, Literature, Philosophy and Religion; (4) Natural Science and Technology; (5) Social Science; (6) Capstone Experience (“Liberal Arts Core”). Instead of Snow’s

“Two Cultures,” UNI’s LAC encompasses six. Snow recognized that the number two is “a very dangerous number,” and rather considered science and the arts two opposite poles of a range of disciplines (9). Still, both ends of the range are necessary for developing well-rounded, life-long learners.

But this is not necessarily a priority for all students. Aside from being distracted youth, students might also be uninterested in taking subjects that they feel will not be useful or practical for them. To these students, the credit-for-life-experience formula that Colorado Technical Institute and other similar schools have been developing are more appealing. And what’s more, they provide a backdrop against which students taking LAC courses can decry the LAC program. I personally enjoyed taking these classes as an undergraduate. I enjoyed the diverse subjects I was exposed to, and the teasing way in which the introductory classes provided a mere glimpse of their fields’ depth. In graduate school, however, I would be challenged with teaching an LAC course of my own, and instructing students whose majors, professional goals, and personalities varied just as much as the LAC categories themselves.

In the fall semester of my second year I was granted the opportunity to teach a section of College Writing and Research for my assistantship assignment. Although the College Writing and Research class is an LAC requirement for UNI students of *all* majors—under the Core Competencies category—it is nevertheless taught by instructors from English. Other fields, as I knew from my anthropology classes, could be just as demanding in regard to composition standards. And the linguistic portion of English Languages and Literatures—the title of UNI’s English Department before it became the

Department of Languages and Literatures in Fall 2012—was only half of the equation. What sets the English discipline apart more than linguistics or composition is literary criticism. Analyzing narratives is a unique approach to studying the humanities. However, when teaching College Writing and Research, instructors who have been trained to do so must focus instead on composition and its applicability to all walks of life. The specialized knowledge that, in conjunction with other areas of specialized knowledge, made the LAC what it is, then breaks down to more general skill-based learning.

As I put my syllabus together, I looked beyond my specialized knowledge in English in an attempt to connect with more students. As soon as registration for classes was complete, I was able to view my class roster, which included each students' year and major. In my class I had seven business majors, five education majors, two construction management majors, one theater major, one psychology major, one computer science major, and one deciding. I knew right away that a literature-heavy syllabus was not going to be very appealing to this group. Instead, I designed my course to establish a rhetorical groundwork that my students would then be able to apply to any of their other coursework. Initiating the process of developing critical thinking skills in students was one important step in their LAC journey towards increasing “strategies for solving complex problems.” Of course, accomplishing this is easier said than done. That thought didn't make me any more confident as I got ready for my first day at the front of the room.

I arrived 15 minutes early on the first day of class, and waited anxiously up front as students gradually trickled in. I tried to guess who was who as they entered. Four of my students were Chinese exchange students, and just like most of the Chinese exchange students I had known, they were business majors. I smiled back at some girls walking—they looked so young. Just as it was time to start class, a few stragglers shuffled in. I sat on the table, trying to look casual, and took attendance. After a brief introduction to the class it was time for the ice breaker. I needed it as much as they did not want it—get them to talk for a bit. I had each student tell me something they were currently obsessed with. They started talking *Game of Thrones*, cats, pop tarts. I had a good group, I knew right away. Despite their diverse majors and backgrounds, they were all there because they had to take this class. They were there because, for whatever reason, they chose to attend a liberal arts-focused university, and my class was on their toll-way to success.

It was a strange feeling standing at the front of the room instead of sitting at the back, trying not to be noticed. For the longest time I had dreaded presentations, like most students do. But now I had agreed to give presentations three days a week. With Snow's "Two Cultures" essay fresh on my mind as I began work on my thesis, I was aware of the positive impact I could potentially have on these students and their relationship with disciplines that might seem contradictory to their own. I did not have any hard science majors nor any English majors, so no representatives of Snow's extreme poles, but I was concerned at the outset of the class that the construction management and business majors would be most likely to find the class a waste of their time.

One of the construction management majors was a non-traditional student. He was a bit older than the other students, and on the days he was absent everyone referred to him as “the military dude,” because of his demeanor—it’s unclear if he was ever actually in the military. I knew once I saw him that he would be my challenge. He didn’t want to be here. He would hate my class and I would have to put up with his apathy. Once a month the James & Meryl Hearst Center for the Arts hosts a “Final Thursday Reading” event at which they host an open mic reading, and also bring in authors and poets to read. I offered my class extra credit to attend, in hopes of expanding their horizons, and encouraging interdisciplinary interests. At the first “Final Thursday” event of the semester, as the open mic was finishing up, I looked back towards the door and sure enough “Military Dude” was walking in. I smiled and waved. “Hey! Glad you could make it.” He looked around, a bit unsure. “Well, you know, you gotta try new things.” I was shocked, not as much at his appearance as at my own cynicism. My students that semester all pleasantly surprised me with their diverse interests and their youthful malleability in defining what college meant to them. The “Two Cultures” debate relies on well-defined disciplines. Science is X, English is Y. But just as these definitions had bled together for me when I was an undergraduate, so too did the disciplines for my students. And perhaps it wasn’t just for lack of specialized knowledge. It could just be that the younger you are the more in tune with a common purpose you are.

I often thought about what that purpose was when I was working with students one on one in the Writing Center. It was rare to meet with a student who was genuinely interested in what they were writing about. Mostly, students wanted to get in and get out.

It seemed to me that our sessions were a metaphor for the students' entire academic career. What was I doing in graduate school, I thought, if the purpose is to be done with school as soon as possible? But for me that was never the purpose. Like my grandma before me, I believe very strongly in the liberal arts purpose of creating "life-long learners." While I continued to attempt to defend the practicality of graduate school to my parents, the truth is that I had never really believed in practically. And considering the competitiveness generated between the sciences and the humanities under the banner of such a word, I found myself bitterly against the notion.

But this was not a problem for me as I worked with the anthropology student who reminded me so much of my younger self. She had brought in a take-home essay exam that was already past due. I felt I had more in common with her the more we spoke. "I just can't focus if I don't schedule time to sit down and do the work." Many students used the Writing Center in this way, and so these sessions became largely a brainstorming and outline work session. She had taken copious notes in class, and had completed all of the readings, but for "whatever reason," she said, she just could not focus on these essays. I flipped through her textbooks with her, helping her search for some examples of religious ceremonies that she needed—and a little bit indulging in my own curiosity—when she began talking about her anthropology major in general. "It's not really something you can do without a master's degree," she said. I agreed, and told her she should get her master's degree. She laughed, saying her grades weren't good enough, but exclaimed that she thought anthropology was fascinating. I agreed. She mentioned that one of her family members worked in the music industry, and maybe she would work for him when she

graduated. Music was interesting, too. I thought about sitting behind my desk writing web content, I thought about shelving books, I thought about efficiency apartments and ramen and that look on my parents' faces. And I said, "Do you know what ethnomusicology is?" Her face lit up.



## CONCLUSION

On graduation day in May 2015, my parents, brother, and grandma all came up to Cedar Falls for the ceremony. We walked around campus beforehand, allowing grandma to see all of the changes to campus that had been made in recent years. Walking from the Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center towards campus, she remarked on the noticeably missing Baker Hall. “It was a new dorm when I started,” she told me as we paused by the new decorative entryway that exists in its place. We then wandered over to the Campanile, and circled its base. “Iowa State!” My mom exclaimed—a proud Cyclone. “Iowa State Teacher’s College,” I finished, reading the words etched into its base.

When I initially decided to revisit Snow’s “Two Cultures” for my thesis, I was certain that even within UNI there was still conflict between the two. My work, then, would be to determine in what ways the conflict expresses itself today, on UNI’s campus. After examining my experiences as an undergraduate student, full-time worker, and graduate student, however, what I discovered was that the “Two Cultures” as described by Snow were in more agreement than I had expected. However, Snow had inadvertently predicted what the “Two Cultures” would become. The two-fold purpose of the scientific method, according to Snow is: “to understand the natural world,” and “to control it.” This description is not only accurate for the sciences, however. Humanities disciplines, despite being primarily interested in art and expression, are in essence still interested in understanding the natural world. Social sciences, such as anthropology, are also very interested in understanding humans and their place in the natural world. But neither of

these areas, when practiced under the umbrella of a university, have much interest in control. It is only when real world practicality becomes a priority that control is emphasized.

Built in 1926, the Campanile has witnessed many changes to its campus, both physical and philosophical. UNI has always been a unique Iowa university. The University of Iowa, the oldest university in the state, is a public research university that has offered a wide range of programs from the very beginning. Iowa State University, on the other hand, was the first land grant university, focusing on agriculture and technology courses, and other more technical fields. The Iowa State Normal School, established in 1876 as a teacher education school, has since expanded its purpose to be grounded in a liberal arts ideology that promotes active learning and the development of life-long learners. The LAC courses I took, including Human Origins and Intro to Astronomy, inspired a life-long interest in these disciplines for me, even as the discipline I most associate with is English. My grandma, while receiving her art teaching degree, also obtained minors in English and history, and continues to be a life-long learner of all three.

We walked past the Campanile to Lawther Hall, where my grandma and I had both lived. I remembered sitting on the steps nine years ago, abandoned, and considered how far I'd come. Entering UNI with a practical plan soon turned into an interdisciplinary exploration of the sciences and the arts. Throughout my classes I held onto what originally interested me in Japanese class in high school: a desire to study different cultures in order to better understand the world around us. The continued

relevance of the “Two Cultures” debate today, and why I was personally drawn to the issue, is because the scientific method, at one pole, and artistic expression and criticism at the other, are two of the most compelling methods we have for coming to this understanding. Snow, Leavis, Gould, and Wilson—though they may disagree on how science and the humanities should interact, and to what end—can all at least agree that we need both. If by naming them the “Two Cultures,” Snow agitated an otherwise working relationship, he did so at a time when agitation was needed. Today, as we begin to see more programs like Colorado Technical Institute’s Fast Track established, and more liberal arts colleges like Sweet Briar College struggling to stay open because of a declining interest in the liberal arts ideology, we may very well see a further divide between Snow’s “Two Cultures”—a divide that is a detriment to universities as they strive to produce active, life-long learners—as well as a new “Two Cultures” that has developed between “understanding” and “control.”

My years as an undergraduate student at UNI prepared me for the practicalities of the real world in spite of insisting on LAC courses, and my own preference for interdisciplinary courses. While my experiences are my own, the history of Snow’s “Two Cultures,” the history of UNI, and the trends I have witness since have led me to believe that when met at the base of understanding the natural world, there is no reason for disciplines to be in conflict. As our institutions of higher education continue to evolve, we cannot deny our most basic human trait: curiosity, about the world and our place in it.



Figure 3. Shirley Pfeifer and I on the steps of Lawther Hall, 2015

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## APPENDIX

### STATEMENT OF UNIVERSITY MISSION

The University of Northern Iowa at Cedar Falls is recognized as having a mission of sufficient scope to enable it to be a distinguished arts and sciences university with outstanding professional programs in education and business. It provides leadership in the development of programs for the preservice and in-service preparation of teachers and other educational personnel for schools, colleges, and universities. The institution offers undergraduate and graduate programs and degrees in the liberal arts and sciences, including selected areas of technology. It offers preprofessional programs and conducts research and community outreach programs to strengthen the educational, social, cultural, and economic development of Iowa and the larger community.

It is imperative that the quality of the university's instruction be maintained and enhanced though increasingly strong emphasis on:

- (1) General or liberal arts education as the most essential ingredient for the undergraduate student;
- (2) The central importance and complementary relationship of teaching and research;
- (3) Enrichment of instruction through extensive clinical, laboratory and field experiences and through experiential learning, community engagement, and independent study; and
- (4) Development of the life of the university community itself as an effective educational force.

In order to serve students of all ages and to be responsive to their needs and preferences and to the needs of society, it is imperative that the university offer a variety of programs in such areas as liberal arts, education, business, social work, and technology. It will offer no major programs in agriculture, architecture, dentistry, engineering, forestry, hospital administration, law, pharmacy, medicine, or veterinary medicine.

In the area of teacher preparation, the university must remain at the forefront of developments in the field of education and be prepared to offer instruction in new areas required by society. Furthermore, UNI should be more than merely responsive to changing needs and interests of its students and society. It must provide leadership in educational innovations, programs, and research.

Future programs will be determined by the continuing study of existing programs and of developing needs. Programs will be curtailed or eliminated when the assessment of need and resources indicates that resources could better be devoted to other programs. The university approaches the addition of new programs with considerable caution. Generally, new programs are fashioned out of existing programs in response to developing needs.

However, if the university is to remain vital, it must consider at the appropriate time the development of some new programs that fall within its general mission and meet the new needs of students and of society.

Office of University Counsel, approved September 17, 2014

President's Cabinet, approved October 6, 2014

President and Executive Management Team, approved October 13, 2014