



Beyond Graduation Project

Noble High School, Berwick, Maine

Mrs. Gardoqui's AP Language and Composition Class
June 2009

June 19, 2009

To the Noble High School Community,

As our final exercise in writing, the students of Mrs. Gardoqui's AP Language and Composition class were asked to answer the question "How does Noble High School affect the paths that its students travel in the world **beyond graduation**?" As you might expect, this was a much larger and more intricate question than any of the multiple choice questions on the AP Language exam. It was something bigger than the individual experiences each student added to our class discussions, but despite the complexity, these Noble students, always a community of learners, have developed a variety of meaningful recommendations that follow this letter.

Our adventure began with research. We were asked to perform in-depth explorations into some topic related to education on a national level, ranging from heterogeneous grouping to parental influence to school start times. Students were expected to identify 4-5 articles related to their topic and develop a research outline with a clearly supported thesis. Then we presented our findings to our classmates, sharing some surprising revelations.

With copies available of every student's outline, the interviewing began. We were allowed to profile a single person or place or we could choose a larger issue to explore, all with the ultimate goal of writing a compelling piece of creative nonfiction. Many students interviewed alumni, some observed nearby locations, and others conducted multiple interviews to develop an opinion on a topic of concern. In class, we had read pieces of profile journalism to understand what kinds of questions we would need to ask and what kinds of notes we would need to take during our interviews. We also looked over articles from the Beyond Graduation Projects of former classes to understand what we were aiming for. Once we had completed rough drafts, both AP Language classes combined for an Authors Workshop Luncheon, with the support of Mr. Findlay (in the form of a great lunch!). In groups of three or four, we each met with one of the twelve authors to consult on our writing and gather suggestions for improvement.

All of our final drafts were compiled together and once everyone had read all of the articles, we met for three separate class discussions. We were looking for trends and patterns in the interviews, similar comments made by multiple people, in order to lead us to a comprehensive list of suggestions for Noble's improvement. These discussions were conducted with enthusiasm and spirit by everyone in both classes. Concern for Noble's future filled the room and we took our responsibility seriously.

We bring these proposals to you today for consideration, with some sample articles attached. Thank you for all you have done for Noble High School, and all you will continue to do.

Sincerely,

The Students of the 2009 Noble High School AP English Language
Classes

2009 AP English Language Class Recommendations:

1. It would be very beneficial for many students at Noble to have some kind of advisory program. Ideally, students would be able to be matched with teachers who have some interest, expertise or experience in a field of work or study that the student is considering, and they would stay with their advisors for 4 years. MANY of the alumni we interviewed talked about being pushed to be “college-ready” without a clear vision of how they will use college or where would be the wisest place for them to go. Many of our interviews indicated that the students really could have used more regular discussions about their dreams and how they could use their time in high school. There just is not enough time for the guidance counselors to meet with all students as frequently as they need to discuss their future. We think that an advisory program would truly help many students.

a. We could link students with advisors by asking all Noble staff to list their areas of interest, expertise or experience, and creating a menu of these areas for students. Students could then choose a first, second & third choice, and be linked with a faculty member who shares one of those interests.

b. Students could spend ½ days with their advisors and do their Roundtables, Gateways, Jr. Projects and Sr. Projects with them.

b. One option that we discussed would be to create an advisory program that works within SSR. Students would be in multi-grade SSR groups with other students and teachers with similar interests. (There would need to be two staff in each SSR room.) The time would still be used for silent reading, but the faculty members would take turns pulling out students for one-on-one check-ins about course selection, progress, setbacks, future planning, college applications, or other appropriate advisory topics. Students would get to check in with their advisor every two weeks or so, so the time that each student spent reading would be almost the same.

c. Because of the need for mentoring of students at NHS, we support the Excel mentor program and the freshman study-skills classes proposed for next year. We think it is a good idea for National Honor Society student volunteers to help in the study skills classes.

2. We learn best from teachers who are passionate and excited about teaching and about their subject matter. Some of our subjects spoke about that one teacher whose passion had made a difference for them; other subjects spoke about how hard it was to have teachers who seemed uninspired. To help teachers be inspired and to reinvigorate them with conviction and belief in the work they do, we propose that instead of a “motivational speaker” or a comedian at Fall Forum, that we create a way for students to be able to speak directly to teachers, to tell them what they need, to describe the ways in which teachers have reached them and changed their lives, or to thank teachers who have inspired them.

a. This could be done by inviting students to speak onstage to the assembled teachers, through the creation of a video, or through a workshop.

3. Grading must be more consistent within the school, and more understandable to students, parents, and colleges. Because grades and transcripts are primarily a method of communication

with people outside the school – like colleges or employers - the grading system must be designed to communicate clearly and accurately a students' level of achievement.

a. Workload must be also be consistent across teams. Teachers do not have to teach all the same things, but students should know that they will learn and practice the same skills and areas of knowledge no matter what team they are on.

4. Noble policies, as related in the student handbook and the district policy manual, are sometimes outdated or not enforced. The school needs to make smart, effective policies and follow them consistently.

5. To help students get ideas about their future and talk with professionals from the fields that they are interested in, the school should host a career fair with representatives from as many career paths as possible. This would help students make practical plans for their time in high school and for post-high school. More books about careers and career choice should be available in Guidance.

6. Check the school profile. The school profile that is available online has not been recently updated. If there is a more recent one, it should replace the one that is online. If there is not a more recent one, this one should be updated.

The following stories are some samples of the pieces of journalism that we wrote as we investigated our central question. Some students wrote profiles of one graduate, and others wrote more investigative pieces.

A Mixed Person in a Mixed World

Jasmine Ryan

You're running, running as fast you can, past a crowd that's seated next to the bumpy track. Your lungs are already burning and it has only been 6 seconds since you started sprinting. All of your energy that you've been saving since you got off the bus is dedicated to this race. You are so focused that you don't know if the crowd is cheering for you or cheering for the person who is running next to you. But you don't care. All you want to do is to finish the last straight away of the track and hopefully, come in first. You've been training at Bryant University on an intense Division I track schedule since you arrived at college in August, and it's now spring. Not only are you on a strict schedule, but you are also trying to maintain a reasonable grade point average at a college where less than half of the applicants are admitted. But what doesn't kill can only make you stronger and at the end of the school year, everything that you've been doing is worth it.

You might think that this is just a story, that there is no possible way that you can handle such an intense sport and keep a good grade point average. But this kind of scenario isn't just a story; it's a reality for Katie Pelletier. Katie, a tall, thin, athletic girl with thick brown hair and brown freckles that remind you of Pippi Longstocking, has had many accomplishments during her years at Noble High School. She was Magna Cum Laude for her Junior and Senior Year, a member of the National Honor Society along with Student Council, and received Varsity Letters in both Indoor and Outdoor track, along with winning the Coach's award and the Noble Award for track. With all of her accomplishments and awards, you can easily see her as a dedicated person for her sport and her academics. After graduating in the top ten for the class of 2008, she has continued her achievements and is now a hard working student-athlete, where she has continued her love for track.

Her first semester started with a struggle, she admits, but she turned that around with hard work and determination. She was even selected for the Dean's list for her first semester. "First semester as a college student went excellent. Yeah the adjustment was needed but nothing major. Straight A's first semester grades, and got on the dean's list. Second semester, it's easier to start slacking off, harder to concentrate, but I'm trying to pick it back up [and] hopefully get all A's and B's or else the mamma's gonna come running" she says with a laugh. Her bright smile is genuine and the first time you see her, you can easily see her as a hardworking student-athlete, and someone who is "honest, loyal, nice, trustworthy, and funny of course!" she adds. As she is mixed in with a bunch of high achieving college freshman, education for her was completely different in High School.

Noble High School, located at 388 Somersworth Road in North Berwick, Maine in a small town where the trees easily outnumber the population, can be described as different from all the other surrounding high schools in York County. Noble High School is set up completely different than the way that your parents' high school would have looked. Noble is organized into 4 different academies or teams and when asked how it's set up, many students reply and explain, "It's like Hogwarts". All the students are grouped onto one of the four academies and stay with their team for all four years of high school. Each academy is assigned a section, or "pod", within the building where all of the classes for that team are located. These pods have classrooms and an area where students can study or just hang out with friends. This high school is quite big considering that it educates three towns that are located "in the middle of nowhere".

But how does the school select who is on what team? The selection process is completely random and doesn't group students by their academic level; Noble instead mixes everyone's educational background by integrating those who are in Excel classes with average students and with those who might need extra help. Therefore, Noble High School is a heterogeneous school where they "value small, heterogeneous communities, which encourage innovation and honor the voices of all." This philosophy of teaching is controversial throughout the educational system. Some parents believe that students should be separated by their academic standards rather than grouping everyone together.

As I ask Katie how she feels about the heterogeneous communities she answers it as if she has memorized what she is going to say. "Being grouped with all levels of... I don't wanna say intelligence... but thinking helped to create a real-life scenario. The game of life isn't going to assign you to a group according to your specific "needs" necessarily. So this kind of grouping helps prepare all for the working environment seeing how the world is full of these different kinds of "thinking levels", there's no need for the school to misguide us in thinking we will be placed with those just like us and no one different". Katie also says with a bright smile that being grouped in a heterogeneous community "was an endless supply of entertainment". "It helped me because I learned to work with a number of different people. Plus like I said it always kept it interesting". She continues and tells me a story of when she was in her Advanced Placement Language and Composition class. The classroom was located in Academy 4, an academy that specializes in helping students who have trouble with school and need some extra attention. The story was sometimes hard to understand because of her laughter when telling it to me. "Sometimes there would be this random screech and everyone would just look around with the same "did anyone else just hear that" look on their face...ha ha...that was the best." Being able to keep working while ignoring every distracting thing that is going on in the room is a good life skill. Katie obviously believes so, and feels that she is ahead of everyone when it comes to tuning distractions out and accepting people's differences.

She says that although being grouped in a heterogeneous community was sometimes a struggle, it has helped her ability to work with people from different educational backgrounds. She says, "being in college, with people from all over the nation and the world, you see a mixture of people with different education styles. Being grouped heterogeneously helped me understand people from all different types of backgrounds. The school should keep the heterogeneous community." Now as her first year in college is dying down she is slowly aiming for a bachelor's degree in International Business. In order for someone to work with different people internationally, you need to be able to work with different people.

It's now been 12 seconds since you started and you're almost at the finish line. You're neck and neck with another girl and the race is close. Your lungs are telling you to slow down, but your mind is telling you to keep up. You're just a few feet away from the finish line and both you and the girl next to you lunge forward. You finally finish, and now you just wait for the rest of the racers to catch up to you. The girl that you raced against comes over and says breathlessly, "good job." You can't say anything because your lungs hurt too much so you just nod your head in acknowledgement. Everyone is waiting for the final results, and to your disappointment you came in second. But that's okay because tomorrow, you'll just train harder and run faster.

The Road Less Traveled

Maryanne Nicolo

Ready to begin her interview, she runs her purple-polished fingers through her hair, sweetly bats her

electric blue-lined eyes, and chirps, “Ask away!” Sitting down with 23-year-old Cyndle Plaisted-Rials, several things are immediately very clear about her personality. The first is apparent when one notices her short, black dress, ears pierced from lobe to cartilage, bright makeup, and comfortable stance. She is confident in who she is. The second, her warm presence and relaxed point of view, is felt when she smiles coolly and laughs a little as she speaks. Finally, and most importantly, is her number one priority. Her family. While holding her four-month-old baby, Sage Rials, playing with his hair as he coos adorably, and joking lightly with her mother, Cynthia Plaisted, anyone could see that that is the situation in which she is happiest.

Her new baby, Sage, was born in February 2009. He was unexpected, but a pleasant surprise for Cyndle and her now-husband, Tom Rials. They got married on October 19, 2008, and Cyndle has never been happier, she says. Tom is also a Noble alumnus, having met his wife at a wrestling match when he was in high school.

Obviously attending Noble High School was an enjoyable experience for Cyndle, who graduated in 2003, because she is now working at the school as a yearbook advisor and substitute teacher. However, Cyndle’s high school experience wasn’t a typical one. In her words, “The teachers that I enjoyed most were the- and this may sound selfish, but- were the people that really let me be who I was. Let me be able to explore things maybe differently than the rest of the class was just so that it was a challenge and learning experience that worked for me.” The same would apply to her students if she were to become a teacher, one of the many career paths that she has considered.

“I’ve wanted to have a restaurant, I’ve wanted to have an event planning company, I used to want to do interior design, and I still have kind of elements of all of those things in what I like to be able to do now,” Cyndle says of her current job status as a mother/teacher/aspiring poet/designer. “I’m taking care of my son, and advising for the yearbook and occasionally subbing when teachers don’t mind having a baby in the classroom... and since I finished my masters I’m working on trying to get poetry published and I am also working on my online website where I sell accessories.” It is made very clear by her willingness to try it all that she isn’t easily intimidated, “it’s really more about personal enrichment than money.”

Self-discovery is a major aspect of who she is. She strongly states, drawing from personal experience, that “Finding out who you are on your own is like the most important thing you can do, and if you can do that earlier then you’re going to spend a lot less time on things that are not going to matter to you in ten years.” That kind of maturity has always been one of Cyndle’s main characteristics, even in high school, which is not where most people’s maturity peaks. “Having time to do what I really wanted to do was always most important to me.” And what kind of things are those? Mainly, spending time with her very close-knit family. In fact, Cyndle contributes her early maturity to her upbringing, saying, “I feel like everything else that I learned I really learned from my parents more than anything as far as what contributed to me being a decent person.”

Cyndle’s interestingly-paced life has brought her to a good place, she says, adding that, “Getting pregnant was kind of a surprise but I definitely wanted to have kids, so it was just a matter of when... I have a person in my life who is somebody that I want to be with for the rest of it, and it’s nice to be there already... and I’m happy with my work situation at the moment.”

Her “work situation” is as original as she is, because, she explains, “I’ve obviously had so many jobs that

are, like, regular hours, you go somewhere for eight hours and that's it, but I don't like that as much because I feel like I have so many more ideas and things that I want to put into practice when I work somewhere." As a very creative and thoughtful person, this is a major selling point in any job. At the moment what she seems most concerned with is being happy. Enjoying time with her family, her new husband, and her baby. That kind of thinking has paid off for her in the long run, "I try to really make the most of every moment. I know that's hard to do." Her carefree-yet-cautious thinking has appeared to pay off as she bounces a beautiful, drooling baby on her lap and smiles. "I think that every experience contributes to who you are," she says.

Unpacked...

By Emma Hanzl

I walk into Guy Taylor's maternal home and am immediately pummeled by two gangly and energetic dogs. Guy's wife Anita working in the kitchen, attempting to follow a pie crust recipe that doesn't call for butter. "Guy is just putting the baby down for a nap." I pull a stool up to the counter overlooking the kitchen stove and workspace and settle in to wait. From my perch I see evidence of Guy's two young sons. Empty sippy cups rest in the dish rack next to the sink and a full one is ready on the counter in front of me. To my left, a booster seat is attached to the counter so its occupant can look at his parents or grandparents working in the kitchen. Lastly, I observe a few toys lying on the ground.

Guy walks in, gives his eyes a quick rub, and adjusts the camouflage Red Sox cap on his head. He's wearing a leather jacket, glasses, and a thick black stubble. "I'm sorry, I fell asleep with the baby." He walks over to Anita, gives her a light kiss, and asks for a cup of coffee. He then makes his way over to his mother's fridge and rummages through looking for something sweet. Unsuccessful in his search he comes over to the counter and evaluates the seating options. I was on one stool, a baby seat was clipped to the counter on my left, and there was an empty seat next to that. He sits in the latter and, angling his head so he can see me past the highchair, proceeds to tell me his story...

...Guy Taylor, 32 years old, Noble alum, poetry major at Clark University, senior international editor at the World Politics Review, husband, father, filmmaker, and of course, as he says, "Once a Journalist, always a Journalist".

F in Spanish, refused to be on the school paper, member of Poetry Excel, and wanted to be "a writer, not a Journalist". This was Guy Taylor in high school; he believed that "the only true works are those which are done creatively". He attended Clark University where he received a Bachelor of Arts in American Literature. He still disapproved of Journalism and only wrote for the college paper during his last two years to get a few by-lines under his belt. From here he began writing freelance for the Northwest Current, a print-only Washington D.C. area newspaper. He continued freelancing and after some time received an entry-level position at the Washington Times. Five years later he was a foreign correspondent traveling all over the world for stories. He has visited Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Guantanamo Bay, the United Kingdom, and South America; twenty-five countries in all. During this time in his life he would always have a suitcase packed, ready to leave at a moments notice for any destination and for any length of time. This was exciting, but the need to tell stories rather than simply report continued to press on his mind. Soon, he began to do less work with the Times and more freelance.

Because he wasn't tied down to a particular newspaper he was able to travel more and pursue grants. One such grant, from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, sent him to Venezuela to cover Hugo Chavez and the 2006 election. While there he interviewed Chavez and followed him along the

campaign trail. He interviewed a wide range of Venezuelan citizens, from dignitaries to twelve-year-old boys by the roadside, to get a complete picture of how Chavez was viewed by the public. Guy then analyzed these interviews to reason out why they felt this way toward him. Finally, he took the interviews, his own observations, and a story Chavez told about his first car and tied it all together into a piece that made foreign politics and issues easy to understand and relate to for an American audience. It is this ability to take straight politics and make it understandable and relatable to the general public that helps him to be successful in his new medium... film.

Filmmaking is Guy's latest career. He has started a production company entitled A.S Films International with his cousin Dan Bolyn. Their goal is to "write, direct, and produce fictional movies to tell stories visually from a journalism career". The cousins, who are more like brothers (their mothers are identical twins), are inspired by their life experiences both in travel and media. They are also influenced by Guy's two little boys and "the joy, sadness, and constant state of creation that is being a parent". When asked about A.S and what it stands for Guy returns to the house on "Adams Street" where he, his sister, Dan and their twin mothers lived for a time. He talks about a porch on the house, the kind of place where people would gather to hear or tell a story. Dan and Guy wanted to tell some stories of their own and so their production company gives tribute to the place where it all started, Adams Street. They have currently completed and released four short films, A Free Radical, Classified, Moment of Silence, and Clam Pie. Guy and Dan have won numerous awards, the most recent of which was the Audience Choice Award for Best Short Film at the 2009 Cape Cod Filmmaker Takeover.

Today Guy Defines himself as a Filmmaker. He still believes that "the only true works are those which are done creatively" and one can easily see it in his writing and films. He has unpacked the suitcase and settled down, as much as a former foreign correspondent can settle down. He still loves to travel and (based upon the term 'International' being incorporated into his film company name) I believe he will continue to bring us stories from all corners of the world. However, having a wife and two boys has made him more responsible and trips, like the one to Turkey for the production of a new film, are now being planned a year in advance. He may be a bit sleep deprived (he now takes naps with the baby) but this Filmmaker, Journalist, and NOBLE Graduate has made something of his life. He now tells high school students everywhere that "your career should be about you, you need to make it happen, and you need to be willing to pursue something you love and believe in, not profit and big checks." That is what he did, and so far it seems to be working.

Rodney Brown

By: Andrew Clark

Rodney Brown Jr. is a co-teaching special education and soccer, indoor & outdoor track coach alumni from Noble High School 2001 Class. He helps students learn in other ways than just the classical notes and classroom work but by experiential learning. During His Free time at the school he is still helping kids with their work from homework to their senior projects.

Since Rod has been about 14 years old in his freshman year at the high school, he has been coming into the school and starting class at 7:40. He walks in and his first two blocks are without his kids, but the rest of the day he works with kids on their math and science with Mrs. Chadbourne on Team Four. A big part of Team Four is experiential learning, which means they do a lot of service learning. May that be

from doing some outside games to helping out the community and the schools. There recent project was the how they made a nature trail at the North Berwick Community Center. During those first two blocks and his first two blocks rod doesn't just relax and play some Guitar Hero, he helps out kids helping give extra credit and helping them from home work to their senior project.

When it comes to his high school rod said "High school was awesome!" He was very active in school in sports, he played soccer and ran track, which are two sports that he now coaches. All the sports kept him really involved and helped him make all his friends, they all so motivated him to keep his grades up so he could keep playing. He was constantly on the honor roll throughout his high school years. He also liked all his classes; the only class he really remembered that he loved was project adventure, which is a climbing course class.

Rod went to college at St. Joes in Standish, Maine; St. Joes is a small school. The fact that is was a small school is what he hated. "Everyone knew your business." And this created a lot of drama. All throughout his life his parents, Anita and Rodney Brown Sr., who both work at the school, helped him out a lot throughout his life. ". If I ever had any problem they were there to give me advice and let me know straight up about things even if I didn't want to hear it. I appreciate everything they have done for me. It has made me a better person."

After Rod went to college for business he ended up subbing at Noble High School. While subbing he started to coach, ". I then realized with that with this and coaching I enjoy working with teenagers on many perspectives." And he said he will eventually go back to school and take some online courses to get his full teaching certification. The thing he loves about his job is working with all the kids in the school, from his students to the kids on the field, and the one thing he hates about his job is that there is never enough time to with everyone he wants to in one day's time.

Rod has been a big contribution to the school. He is one of those teachers you watch in the movies, a great person, teacher, and a teacher you can have a more than a teacher relationship. When the track program was going to be cut he saved it and created a new program for indoor which has had someone got to New England's for the past four years. Even though Rod is a co-teacher he still influences the kids just as much as a regular teacher. Even though he had what he wanted in front of him all those years he left, realized what he had right under his nose, and eventually went back.