

# #TLUBulldogs:

Voices from  
Texas Lutheran

Editors

Steven Vrooman & Beth Barry

TEXAS LUTHERAN  
UNIVERSITY

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This book is dedicated to  
**LINDA ANN HARTON CLARK**  
Lover of books, family, friends, students, learning, and  
TLU



November 13, 1943 – March 23, 2009

Photo by Sally Carroll-Ricks



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## PREFACE

Stuart Dorsey  
President, Texas Lutheran University

Congratulations on your decision to study at TLU! I hope this collection of essays and narratives by our faculty, students and alumni will support your transition to a successful first semester. This collection stands out to me in two important ways.

The first is the amazing breadth of interests and experiences of our faculty. Your professors are not only knowledgeable in their disciplines, but they are genuinely interesting individuals who will teach you in many ways.

Second, all of us at TLU are on a life-long journey of learning—not just students, but faculty, staff, and even presidents. I earned a Ph.D. 37 years ago, but most of what I know about economics I learned after graduate school, and I am humbled about how much more there is to know. As an amateur drummer, I learn more about the instrument every time I sit down to practice, and I love the challenge of trying to master new rhythms and techniques. Even at my age, I feel that I am continually improving. As president of TLU, I am inspired by examples of leadership in business, sports and politics that motivate me to borrow ideas and get better at my job.

Beginning this fall, you will be bringing your own passions and talents to the TLU learning community.

Good luck as you begin creating your own stories, and I look forward to greeting you in August.

## INTRODUCTION

Debbie Cottrell  
Vice President for Academic Affairs,  
Texas Lutheran University

Some things in life happen randomly, by chance, without a lot of planning. You can probably think of a few things in your life, perhaps recently, that have unfolded that way. In my own life, I've been reconnected with friends through chance encounters, quit a job to pursue a passion for historical research, and committed to run a half-marathon on a whim.

Other things happen because of a lot of thought and effort and planning—and maybe even with some prayer and begging thrown in. I imagine for you that there are also a few things in your life that have taken root that way in recent weeks and months. For me, it took a lot of careful thought and consideration to determine three years ago that a move home to Texas—after 20 years working in colleges in other places—was the right thing to do. There's hardly been a day since then that I have not been reminded of just how right that decision was—even though a cross-country move that included uprooting a teenager and leaving behind many close friends—was not without its challenges.

Here at TLU, we are always open to spontaneity and the wonderful things that can unfold in random

ways. No life should be absent the element of surprise! That said, this book definitely falls in the other category—it is a carefully planned endeavor that results from a lot of effort (along with some praying and begging) so that we can provide you with a meaningful way to begin your career at TLU. In putting this book together, we are signaling that we believe in the power of the personal narrative. We are giving you the real stories of faculty, students, and alumni, so that you can see how they have encountered challenges, worked through them, and, even with some setbacks and unexpected twists, landed in a spot where they can work to reach their goals. In a generous and open way, the authors are providing honest, direct, humorous, and sometimes painful personal stories so that you can gain from their experiences. How's that for a warm welcome to college?

This book is a great reminder that lives don't unfold in a linear progression, that being open to the possible while applying some hard work and hard choices can lead to amazing results, and that everyone (everyone!) has to struggle to grow.

Our hope is that you do more than read this book. We hope that you let these stories inspire you and lead you to think about your own story that will soon unfold at TLU. We can hardly wait to see how that turns out—bold, big, quiet, full of the unexpected, rooted in your passion, a happy mix of challenge and reward.

Let the stories begin.....

*CARPE DIEM!*

Or, How One First-Generation College Student  
Lived to Tell Her Story!

Judith Dykes-Hoffmann

The Decision

At age seven, I decided to make my first jump off the high diving board at the local pool. I can still recall that day long ago as I paced back and forth across the diving board trying to decide whether or not to make the jump. But jump I did and oh how I loved the flight down to the cool water. That is how I felt making the decision to attend college. They were both very scary days! I paced up and down the diving board that day long ago trying to decide whether or not to dive into the water; I paced in the same manner as I worked up the courage to finish the paperwork that would hopefully end with my acceptance to a four-year university. You see—it was a *jump* for me in that no one in my family had ever gone to college. In the same way that the girl of seven had no prior experience at jumping into the deep end of swimming pools from a high diving board, no one in my family had experience with higher education. To make matters even tougher, I

was a female and the women in my family became wives and mothers. If we worked outside the home, we were secretaries, and secretaries did not have any use for a college degree.

I was also afraid of what some in my family might think about me wanting to do something they had never done. Would they think less of me or would they be proud of me? The one thing I knew was that I loved learning and college was a place where I could learn what was necessary to change my future. I also had family, friends, and co-workers who told me I was smart, which gave me the confidence to dream of the possibilities of continuing my education. After much thought and apprehension I decided this was something I had to do. I desired the knowledge and freedom that a higher education would bring me. I was about to become what is commonly known as a “first-generation college student,” and I never knew how this experience would make my college career different from others around me.

## The Beginning

The biggest issue for me was I had no idea what to expect about anything. I am sure to a certain extent all first year students feel that way. Since no one in my family had ever gone to college, no one offered me advice, told me what to look out for, warned me what to expect, or described for me the agonies and triumphs of college level work. What I knew of college was what I had seen in the movies or on television. I did not know whether to expect John Belushi in a toga ala *Animal House* or a Sam Kinison type history professor

screaming at me about Vietnam as he did to Rodney Dangerfield in the comedy *Back to School*.<sup>1</sup>

At that time the college I had chosen, Texas Lutheran College, had no formal orientation for first year students and certainly no special session for first timers like me to explain the ins and outs of college. Since I chose to commute to school, I was relieved that I did not have to worry about finding my way around the residential portion of the campus, to wonder about who would be my roommate or where I would find something to eat. I still fretted, though, about the other half I had to negotiate. The only thing I knew about the first day and my first class was the building, room number of the classroom, and the time that class started. Off I went with my heart pounding into the classroom.

I knew right away after I sat down in my chair that this was nothing like high school. I walked into my first class, a history class. Moments later the professor walked into the room and introduced himself as “Dr. Thomas.” I was sent into instant shock. The first few minutes I did not hear another word out of his mouth as I was totally confused! I thought to myself, why do I have a medical doctor for a history teacher? I was afraid that I was in the wrong class or worse yet the teacher had walked into the wrong room. I sat there trying to look *normal* and worked hard to focus in on what he was saying. I finally calmed down, let my worries go, and found that I thoroughly enjoyed listening to what he had to say. I actually walked out excited about the

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<sup>1</sup> These two films are used in this paper as historical context for the author. A more modern film that compares would be *Legally Blond*.

class. It was later that I found the nerve to ask another student about this *doctor* thing. I learned doctor was the proper title used for a faculty member who had earned a PhD in a specific discipline. Of course, at that time I did not even know what a PhD was or what it meant to have one. The student went on to explain to me that our professors not only had a bachelor's degree, but that they had gone on to earn more advanced degrees in graduate school. Naturally when I found out about graduate programs I was clearly amazed that there were more degrees to be earned beyond a bachelor's degree. This world of higher education might as well have been in a foreign country or on another planet, as I did not understand much about it.

### Adjusting to this New World of Mine

Over time I slowly adapted to my world of little-knowns and more unknowns and accepted the fact that my experience was not like others in my classes. As a coping mechanism I often found myself listening in on conversations around me to pick up on those small things I would have known if I were not a first-generation student. One day I heard a student ask another if she had “bought her blue book yet?” I immediately conjured up the images in my mind of all my textbook covers and felt panic when I realized not one had a blue cover! Oh no, I thought, I screwed up and my professor would be angry that I was missing a text. Or worse, I feared I had missed some of my reading assignments. Instead of showing panic on my face I coolly sat there and listened that much harder to the conversation. When I heard the female classmate reply that she'd go by the bookstore after class to make



the purchase, I slyly walked into the bookstore later that day, walked up to the counter, and proudly asked, “Where can I find the blue books?” The clerk pointed to a corner of the store and there, to my relief, were piles of “blue books,” and when I picked one up I quickly realized this was not a book at all but blank pages of paper stapled together with a blue cover on it to be used on exam day. Whew! I was relieved. I guess that I had at least one to two of this type of “oh-no” incidents every day that first semester of my college experience.

When I would go home and tell my family about these experiences or about how I had overcome these obstacles by relying on my wit and courage, they just stared at me and had little to say in response other than “Honey, we are so proud of you that you are in college!” Argh! No one understood and no one could tell me how to avoid these moments—something I desperately wanted to do. From not knowing what a blue book was, to finding my classrooms, to knowing what to call my professors, to obtaining financial aid, to learning about available scholarships and finally to discerning how to fill out a degree plan and filing graduation paperwork—I had to figure all this out mostly on my own. Looking back to those years I now inwardly chuckle when I think about how I was surrounded by thousands of people yet felt totally alone as if I lived on an island. It seemed like I spent much of my first semester constantly confused. I know that my friends who were not first-gens like me had fewer moments of panic setting in.

For you, the reader, if you are a first-generation college student I do not have to explain what it feels like. You are experiencing it firsthand. If you are from a

family of college graduates, you cannot fully appreciate the additional angst and emotions that first-gens go through. There is no doubt that all first year college students experience elevated stress levels upon entering higher education, but first-generation students have an additional layer of stress on top of these other worries. And, unlike you whose parents or grandparents went to college, we first-generation students have no one at home who fully understands. However, for all students it is important to understand what is meant by the term first-generation student, to know there are many to be found across college campuses in the United States, and to realize there are common experiences shared by first-generation college students.

### Just What is a First-Generation Student Anyway?

What defines a first-generation student? In my case I was the first person in my family to ever enroll at a four-year university. There was no doubt about me being a first-generation college student. However, the often cited definition by Fuji A. Adachi, which he first coined in 1982,<sup>2</sup> is broader than my experience. According to Adachi, a first-generation student is one who is the first person in a family to *complete* a college

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<sup>2</sup> There are different definitions for the term *first-generation student*. The U.S. Department of Education uses the Adachi definition; therefore, it is the one used in this paper to define the term.

education and earn either an associate's or bachelor's degree. You can still have a parent or parents with some college experience, but you are the first to finish. There can be some first-gens like me with no family college experience, but also those who might come from families with a bit more knowledge about higher education.<sup>3</sup> Let's look at some data:

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<sup>3</sup> Nnadozie, Emmanuel, et al. "Undergraduate research internships and graduate school success," *Journal of College Student Development*, (March/April: 2001)  
<http://findarticles.com> (accessed July 9, 2010).

**Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning  
postsecondary students according to first-  
generation status, by type of institution**

	First- generation student	Parents have some college	Parents have bachelor's or advanced degree
Total <sup>4</sup>	43.4	22.9	33.7
<i>by institution type:</i>			
Public 4-year	29.5	26.8	43.7
Private, not-for- profit 4-year	25	21.6	53.4
Public 2-year	50.5	21.8	27.8
Private, for profit	66.8	20.9	12.3

As this chart indicates, first-generation students constitute a group significant in number. By the late 1980s it was estimated that 66 percent of the U.S. college population fell into that category (see table above). The numbers were expected to increase over the next several decades and on into the twenty-first

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<sup>4</sup> Students in other less-than-4-year institutions (private, not-for-profit; public, less-than-2-year; and private, not-for-profit less-than-2-year) are included in the total, but not in the detail because the sample sizes were too small. Note that details may not sum to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE for chart data: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS: 90/94), Data Analysis System.

century.<sup>5</sup> In the fall of 2012, 47.6 percent of the freshmen were listed as first-generation students. Since 2002 TLU has averaged just under half of its freshman class to be first-generation students. The highest percentage during this period was in 2008 with 54 percent of the freshman class being first-gens to its lowest in 2009 with 44 percent listed as the same.<sup>6</sup>

## Shared Experiences

There are higher education organizations that have collected information about first-generation students. They have found common or shared characteristics about the group that can help shed light on understanding certain obstacles this group faces upon entering college. One is they tend to come from families who hold traditional working class or blue collar jobs.<sup>7</sup> These are forms of work that often involve manual labor, are paid hourly, and do not require a

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<sup>5</sup> Khalilah A. Payne, "First-Generation College Students: Their Challenges and the Advising Strategies That Can Help," *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*, Penn State's Division of Undergraduate Studies, Jan. 31, 2007, [www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/070131kp.htm](http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/070131kp.htm) (accessed July 7, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Jean Constable, "First-Generation in Fall Freshmen Classes 2002-2009," TLU Institutional Research Report, generated 9 July 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Khalilah A. Payne, "First-Generation College Students: Their Challenges and the Advising Strategies That Can Help" *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*, Penn State's Division of Undergraduate Studies, Jan. 31, 2007, [www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/070131kp.htm](http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/070131kp.htm) (accessed July 7, 2010).

four-year college degree. They also pay less. According to the U.S. Census Bureau the average salary in 2000 for one holding only a high school diploma was \$30,400; whereas, a person with a college diploma from a four-year institution in 2000 earned on average \$52,200.<sup>8</sup>

Incomes also influence home purchases or rental opportunities. Since a family with no college graduates on average will earn less money, this results in that family living in a home or apartment of lower property value. Homes with lower property value influence school taxes. Schools in neighborhoods with a lower tax base have less money to spend on resources needed to educate the neighborhood children. With less money to spend on students the quality of their education could be negatively impacted. This in turn could lead them to be less academically prepared for college level work and in need of remedial classes in writing and math if the student plans to pursue higher education. It can even lead to lower SAT and ACT scores. The above certainly applies to my situation. I grew up in a working class neighborhood that fits the previous description. The homes were small and much less expensive than others in my town. This generated less tax revenue for our local school. Nevertheless, teachers and parents worked very hard to provide us with a solid education. One thing I knew was that lower incomes did not mean less capability to learn or less effort.

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<sup>8</sup> “Average Annual Earnings-Different Levels of Education” U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Surveys 2000. <http://www.earnmydegree.com/online-education/learning-center/education-value.html> (accessed Aug. 4, 2010).

Another common finding for the group concerns the college application process. As a result of not having many—if any—family members who’ve gone through the process, first-generation students often know less about the financial aid applications and the available scholarship opportunities. Because first-generation students tend to come from families who earn less, financial assistance is often a necessity, thus, understanding this process becomes very important. In addition, first-gens often work while attending school to help support their families, or they might have extra family obligations such as watching younger siblings while parents work late or work a night shift. This fact leads to time management issues when balancing work and school responsibilities and again, because there is no one in the family who finished postsecondary education, family members often do not understand these time constraints upon the first-gen student when making requests for extra help around the house. The first-gen student can become torn between giving time to family responsibilities and the responsibilities of getting schoolwork completed. Nevertheless, any student—whether they are a first-generation student or not—would probably find it a challenge to get in extra study time or possibly keep their grades up under these extra pressures.<sup>9</sup> I know I spent many days with almost no free time because after going to work, attending

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<sup>9</sup> Khalilah A. Payne, “First-Generation College Students: Their Challenges and the Advising Strategies That Can Help” *The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal*, Penn State’s Division of Undergraduate Studies, Jan. 31, 2007, [www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/070131kp.htm](http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentor/070131kp.htm) Retrieved July 7, 2010.

classes, reading assignments, working on papers, studying for exams, and helping take care of a house, it was all I could do to get in eight hours of sleep. However, even though my family may not have fully understood the process I was going through, they were as supportive as they could be and helped me get through some difficult days.<sup>10</sup>

While first-generation students may share common traits that society may see as less positive or could prove to be obstacles, these commonalities were a source of strength for me that I leaned on, and they helped in my success. As previously mentioned, I worked while I went to school, had family obligations, but I never struggled with time management. My years of juggling responsibilities sent me to the time management school of hard knocks. I learned the hard way long before I went to college about what would happen if I put things off to the last minute, so I had improved greatly here by the time I arrived at TLC. Because I had to work so much in my younger years, I was not afraid of hard work. I also was not that bad at high school academics. While my family never pushed me to make good grades since all I needed was to get out of high school, it was still important for me to do

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<sup>10</sup> There are other characteristics shared among first-generation students not discussed in this paper. For insight into multiethnic issues for first-generation college students see “Exploring the Experiences of First-Generation, Multiethnic Undergraduate College Students” by Jody Donovan and Lehala Johnson, [http://www.sahe.colostate.edu/Data/Sites/1/documents/journal/Journal\\_2004\\_2005.vol14/Exploring\\_Experiences.pdf](http://www.sahe.colostate.edu/Data/Sites/1/documents/journal/Journal_2004_2005.vol14/Exploring_Experiences.pdf)



my best work. Besides, I was naturally curious and enjoyed learning about new things and ideas. I may not have graduated in the top ten percent, but I was not in the bottom either. Nevertheless, because my family never envisioned college in my future, I was still underprepared academically for college in some areas and had to work harder than others to get myself *up to speed*. I was not prepared for reading fifty to one hundred pages a week and writing papers in almost all my classes. As a result, I was a regular at the Writing Center and Supplemental Instruction (SI) sessions, and I participated in study groups.

While I invested all this extra time and energy, I still came from a family that struggled financially to make ends meet. Since both my parents only had a high school education, they worked hard to pay bills and provide me and my two brothers with the things we needed. It was more important in my family that we all get out of high school and get to work, rather than further our education. The idea of taking on another four more years of education was seen as a luxury, and in my family we did not get that many luxuries growing up.

## The Impact of Being the First

Up until this point you might have the impression that being a first-generation student is a burden and something of a disadvantage. It is true that we have unique challenges, but we also have some wonderful advantages as first-generation students. First and foremost is the potential to break out from a low income earning future. Had I not obtained my diploma I was headed for a career as a secretary, clerk, or maybe

a bank teller, jobs I worked at before attending college. These are all honorable careers and entail hard work; however, they often have a ceiling on income that never gets much beyond minimum wage. This fact helps to explain the lower annual salary previously mentioned. With my college diploma I had the luxury of looking at many more career opportunities and no longer had to be disappointed when the job ad came with the statement “college diploma required”. Another advantage, that some might see at first light being a disadvantage, is that a first-generation student does not know what to expect and there is really no one else’s experience to compare to. While you may not know how to maneuver through the financial aid or registrar’s office, you don’t have any of your uncle or cousin’s horror stories to stand in your way. I remember hearing some students talk about their parents saying things like “I did not like this” or “we got into trouble about that” or “you better avoid class with that professor” or “you can’t live in that dorm.” I quietly smiled and thought to myself how glad that I was that I did not have to deal with all that. Again—paying attention to one’s surroundings can pay off. As a result of not knowing, first-generation students have the whole world before them—so *carpe diem*—or “seize the day!” I took advantage of every opportunity, event, lecture, and so forth that came along because I honestly did not know any better. I am much richer and wiser as a result.

Finally, since I was the first in my family to go to college, I was able to set the standard for others to follow in my footsteps. Again, this could be seen as a disadvantage as it does bring added pressures; however, I saw this as an opportunity. Knowing that I was a first-generation student and how much my degree was going

to open up a new world for me, I wanted to express my experiences in a positive light, hoping I would encourage others in my family to follow my chosen path. I, too, wanted others to break out of a life of limited opportunities. And as to that new world, I had no idea how exciting higher education can be! Since I was never told by a family member about a college education, I had no idea how liberating learning could be. The more I learned the more my desire to know intensified because this was new to me in a way that those coming from a home where college graduates were the norm could not understand.

## Looking Back

As clearly as I remember the day I decided to go to college I also remember graduation day. For all of us graduates it was one of the best days in our lives. We were surrounded by family and friends who cheered us as our names were called. We all walked across the stage with smiles that stretched from one ear to the other. We were happy, relieved, and proud to be called college graduates. My heart pounded as I heard my name announced by the academic dean. I don't recall much after I heard my name, but the photo captured by the official photographer shows TLC's president handing me my diploma, so I know I was there. The one thing I do vividly remember after climbing down the stage stairs and walking back to my seat was seeing the faces of my parents. They positioned themselves to where I would have to walk right past them on the way back to my assigned seat. To my dying day I will never forget those two smiles and the looks on their faces. Parents are proud of their children no matter what, but when I

looked into their eyes I could see all the faces of my ancestors looking back at me and feeling the pride of generations. I had done it! I had not only taken myself to a new level, I had taken my family there as well.

I sometimes wonder how my life might have turned out had I not gone on to earn my college diploma. I am sure that I would still be working at my secretarial job making not much more than minimum wage. I try not to do that exercise very often because I tend to be a forward-looking individual. Instead, I proudly have three post-secondary diplomas. I have a bachelor's, a master's, and a PhD. I am now the doctor meeting first-generation students! The new world shown to me those years ago opened up a world of learning that just does not stop and I love it. Of course, when I told my family I was going to graduate school to continue my education beyond my bachelor's experience, they were so confused. Even though they knew I had graduated and did so with honors,<sup>11</sup> they asked me what was wrong. Upon further inquiry I learned that my family thought that *graduate school* was for those who had not completely graduated from college or who had something wrong with their degree. Since they knew nothing about the college experience, they thought I was being sent to a remedial program whereupon successful completion I would finally be a "graduate" hence their understanding of the term graduate school. When I explained to them that graduate schools were post-baccalaureate schools located within universities where college graduates went to further their studies,

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<sup>11</sup> I am proud to say that I graduated summa cum laude (with highest honors). So much for the idea that first-generation students are low academic performing students!

conduct research, and earn post-baccalaureate degrees such as master's or doctorate of philosophy degrees (PhDs), they were greatly relieved. Instead of being concerned they were thrilled. Oh, there are many wonderful things to discover if you are a first-generation student.

Every first-gen experience is different because we are all individuals. There might also be students who are second- or third-generation students who have similar issues and experiences of first timers like me. And, there might even be first-generation students who will finish school and never encounter the things I have described in this chapter. Every college student's experience is different. Whether you are the first in your family to go to school or you come from a long line of college graduates, you must not lose sight of what higher education can do and what it is all about. You also need to finish and finish strong. Hopefully, as more and more first-gens graduate, there will come a time when there will be fewer first-generation students, which means we are producing more college graduates across the country. In a recent report, the president of the University of Maryland University College, Susan Aldridge, states that in 2010 researchers estimate that "baby-boomer retirements will soon leave our workforce 14-million shy of the number of four-year degree recipients we need." Furthermore, she writes that right now "65 percent of adults in this country do not have a college degree."<sup>12</sup> This information is startling and also tells us that there will be more and

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<sup>12</sup> Susan C. Aldridge, "No adult left behind," *Austin American Statesman*, Monday July 5, 2010, A9.

more first-generation college students for decades to come. If you are the first in your family, you must take advantage of the resources and opportunities available to you to help you finish your degree. Do not be afraid to ask questions. If you are the first in your family, you must persevere, even if the pressures to quit become strong. Do not quit. If you are the first in your family, break free and step into an amazing world. Take courage. However, for all of you reading these words draw upon the strength that got you to where you are and made you who you are right at this moment—a college student at a four-year university! *Carpe Diem!*

## THE BLIND LEADING THE SIGHTED

### What's Right with this Picture

Tiffany Sia

Think of what you know about blindness. Is your knowledge from media depictions or personal acquaintances that are blind? Can you think of more Helen Keller jokes or more Helen Keller quotes? If you are anything like I was, accurate knowledge of the blind isn't predominant. My main experience with a blind person was my grandmother. She went blind after a car wreck in her 70s, but it almost seemed like part of aging. She was also reticent about sharing what the experience was like. She just kept doing what she did.

Now picture you are going blind permanently. How do you feel? How does your life change? How do you react? It may be painful to picture such a thing, but try. Jot down ways your life changes. These ideas will help you start to understand the misconceptions and stereotypes that get in the way of understanding blindness.

I was a freshman when doctors at the University of Washington nailed down what was wrong with my eyes (Stargardt's Macular Degeneration). It had seemed minor. My glasses never quite corrected my vision to 20/20 (close to 20/50, but not quite). I was no more prepared than you are right now to hear from a

University Research Team, “You will go blind; we just don’t know exactly when.” The timeline seemed very important to me. Would I have five years left of vision or 30 years? And truthfully, my initial reaction was thinking of what I had to fit in before “my life was over.” I was naïve, and going blind sounded like The End. I wouldn’t be able to drive. I wouldn’t be able to read. I wouldn’t be able to go to movies or recognize people.

Most, if not all, of my catastrophic thinking was entirely WRONG.

I wanted to share how I went from a sighted freshman to a blind professor at TLU. People need to understand more about blindness. Knowledge can help us feel empowered to approach the challenges that each of us may face. I don’t expect you to go blind. I do, however, know that each of us will encounter challenges in our life that we don’t want, can’t cope with and don’t understand. Learning how to face these crises can be the difference between stagnation and growth. This is my story of facing my crises.

The first time I remember worrying about my vision was in 4th grade, when my 20/20 vision suddenly plummeted (Google what 20/20 vision means). I “knew” having glasses would make me a social pariah, so I spent most of fourth grade walking to the front of the classroom to sharpen my pencil and memorizing the board. The first gift of visual loss was to improve my memory. However, 5<sup>th</sup> grade hit and the pencil sharpener was in the back of the room. All the reasons to go to the front were seen as disruptive, and I got caught. It was just as I feared; I needed glasses. The only weird thing about this was that the eye doctor couldn’t correct my vision to 20/20. He thought it was



due to my being unable to sit still or focus (which my teachers would also attest to). At that point, most thought I was “hyper,” and the focus was on helping me pay attention. Not surprisingly, these interventions did nothing to improve my vision. I have great focus now, though.

Somewhere in junior high (and my Goth phase), the consensus gradually shifted from the “hyper” to “doing it for attention.” My vision still wasn’t correctable. Physical Education was a nightmare. I was continually being hit by baseballs, tetherballs, basketballs, soccer balls, volleyballs, etc. Most teachers/coaches had the attitude that I was doing it on purpose for attention. I tried to wear sunglasses all the time in seventh grade, but it was perceived as “attitude.” Light bothers my eyes, even indoors. The sunglasses helped, but I didn’t understand or articulate the argument well. I also stopped being able to interpret social cues with the same acuity as fully sighted. I was often misperceived as stuck up or hostile. Much the way a dog without a tail can get in fights when the opposing dogs can’t see a tail wagging (yeah, this happens). Since people often reacted poorly to me, I reciprocated in kind. Picture adult Wednesday Adams, and you won’t be far off.

However, I also became obsessed with reading “ALL THE BOOKS.” I read through the five libraries I had access to. When I ran out of books, I started in on encyclopedias and dictionaries as well. I would get sent out to play and sneak up a tree or roof to read. I would get sent horseback riding, and let the horse wander while lying on his back reading. If I had more than 60 seconds to spare, I was reading. I may have been worried about not being able to read in the future, so I was fitting it all in. Gift two of blindness was the

focus on reading, and gift one gave me the memory to retain and access much of the information.

College was wonderful. No PE. Social interactions were odd and stilted for most of the more intellectual students. No one seemed to expect anything different, since now I was perceived as nerd. People seemed unfazed and by the morbid persona I had adopted. Once others were reacting neutrally, I found myself abandoning the attitude (not skulls, I still love skulls). The reading also came in handy. If you are picturing me as a wonderful student, guess again. I was in the front row face down, apparently sleeping. I pulled all-nighters at the beginning of the semester so I could have everything read before class started. Then I only had to memorize anything the professor said that wasn't in the book. I still couldn't see the board clearly, but sat front row to catch glimpses. Light still bothered my eyes, so I usually was face down unless the professor said something novel. I remember one class, when a student asked why I got to sleep. The professor started asking me questions from the next chapter, which I answered without lifting my head or opening my eyes. He then started talking about a study on paranormal activity and I popped up and started frantically writing notes (it wasn't in the book). Then he said, "When you can do that you can sleep in class too." Dr. Gilden was a social psychologist (what I would eventually become). He was talented at seeing what was going on, even if he didn't know why. He also pointed out to the class what I hadn't even recognized. I could be used as a human barometer of what was and wasn't in the book.

Another memory that stands out is the program Linfield College had on not driving drunk. I was active in promoting this basic responsibility. On one weekend

retreat, I realized that I was probably worse than the average drunk driver. I had memorized the eye chart years ago and was using that knowledge to pass the vision test that kept my driver's license. If you have ever gotten new glasses, you know how easy it is to think your vision is fine until it is corrected. My vision didn't correct, but it still felt useable. I felt SAFE to drive. We had gone over common excuses that drunk drivers give:

“I feel fine to drive”

“I am only driving a short ways”

“I drive better than most people drive anyway”

“There is no other way to get home”

I realized I had used versions of all of these to justifying driving, and so I stopped driving. I had also seen a lot of older adults with vision problems who were a danger on the road. I didn't want to be them. I didn't get tickets or a lot of wrecks and no one made me stop. I just KNEW if I kept driving I would kill someone eventually. It may have been the most mature decision of my life. It was, however, a hassle. Most places in town I could walk to if I allotted enough time. I got used to walking several miles a day and still do. I also realized our feeling that we “have” to drive is based on not knowing how to do things differently. I spent a semester in Vienna and never missed driving, because it was so easy to get around on public transport. The reason I remember this is one of my only meltdowns about blindness happened while waiting outside a cafeteria. A student said, “I would die if I couldn't drive.” I almost killed him... verbally, right there. We were never close again either. It wasn't the insensitivity or the hyperbole, it was the “giving up.” I was furious that merely picturing a mild inconvenience had

someone ready to die. The third gift of blindness was persistence (and, perhaps, the ability to verbally eviscerate someone). It isn't that hard to just keep trying, especially when you don't compare every moment to the "if only..."

Heading off to graduate school was a bigger challenge. At this point, I still had 20/70 vision (go find an eye chart on Google). Reading was fairly easy, and the main issues were the board and interpreting facial expressions. I got funded to get my Ph.D. at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. Relocating to Texas (where I knew NO ONE) meant a lot of planning. I had to live walking distance from school, the grocery store, the laundromat, the bank, and doctors. Eventually I hoped to make friends, but I was finishing my Ph.D. whether Texans were friendly or not. They were very friendly, but I still think it is better to be prepared, because even your best friends can't be there all the time. The fourth gift was planning ahead.

I eventually finished my Ph.D and was working as a research scientist at the Institute of Behavioral Research in Fort Worth. I was focused on increasing the motivation of prisoners who were put in substance abuse treatment programs. They were great preparation for working with college students. The mindset is very similar – "What is the bare minimum I can do and not get in trouble?" In both college and treatment, working the program makes it more rewarding and more worthwhile. My vision was still holding out for reading.

Then a strange thing happened. The university put in energy efficient doors in all the buildings. They were slightly smaller than the original doors in my building and so sat about six inches to the left. For almost a year, I kept seeing them in their old positions and

running into the wall. It was the first big clue that most of what I see is made up or filled in from memory and other sources. I also started getting hit by invisible cars. Low contrast gray cars blended into the pavement, and I would see a clear road unless I was listening carefully. I usually got hit in parking lots or streets where a car was just about to go into motion. At this point, I was not legally blind and so didn't qualify to carry a white cane to alert drivers. During this time period I got hit by 8 cars, one bus, two bicyclists and a really angry skateboarder. I apparently looked right at him before stepping in front of his invisible low contrast self.

At this point, you may be wondering what and how I see. Everything looks like a Monet painting (Google Monet painting now). However, 80% of what is in the painting has no relationship to reality (my brain just makes it up). Your brain does this too, on a smaller scale. Try the activity on the next page:

## **Blind Spot Test**

Close your right eye and look at the “x”, while slowly moving the page closer or farther from you. At a certain point the circle will disappear. Or close your left eye and look at the circle, the “x” will disappear.



**X**

The part of my vision that my brain fills in from sound, smells, memory, and opinion is my central vision. Put your hand with fingers closed in front of your eyes with your palm touching your nose. Keep your eyes focused on the hand and fingers. Then look around. Try to walk somewhere. Try to recognize people facial expressions. Or try to recognize your facial expression in the mirror. Or try to read, without shifting your gaze out of the corner of your eyes. It will be tempting to picture this instead of doing it. Your imagination isn't that good; try it. Understanding, rather than picturing, will allow you to be able to use the information. Yet another gift of blindness is that imagining is never as accurate as experiencing. Hands on experience not only is more accurate, but it also changes us more quickly.

One of the struggles with being blind is that people cannot remember I am blind. According to my Mom, I act like I can see too well for people to remember. Or is it that people imagine blindness being so incapacitating that they cannot relate it to an independent person? Perhaps the most pernicious of the misconceptions of the blind are that they are helpless, sad, useless people living in a world of darkness dependent on the kindness of others. If you glance at the life of Helen Keller or Louis Braille, you will see this is far from the truth. People can retain their true selves, even when struggling with difficulties. If you hang out with the blind, you will realize they adapt well. I have seldom met a blind person who matched up to that catastrophic imagining. At this point, if you didn't take the break and wander around with your hand in front of your face trying to use your peripheral vision – DO IT. It is so much harder to forget what you have experienced. You will

need to remember that things are not as bad as we imagine them to be.

I knew the end of my career as a research scientist was nigh when I could no longer reliably detect the magic numbers of  $p < .05$  (Google statistical significance). In my world, it was the magic numbers that meant truth. As my vision deteriorated and much of what I saw was imagined, I became less and less competent. My data entry was full of errors. My ability to data check had more to do with what I wanted to see than what was there. Proofing and editing of stimulus sets for experiments or write ups of results were also full of typos. My colleagues helped, but it meant I was a drag on the research team. When the grant ran out, I was unemployed. It is as close to catastrophe as I have come.

Avoiding the Jabberwock (the thoughts that lead nowhere good) is important when faced with challenges. There are some rabbit holes that are dangerous to go down mentally when that catastrophe strikes. A common thought I had was “Why me?” I am an artist. I love reading. I love traveling. I need my eyes. It was easy to spend a lot of time in all the reasons I shouldn’t go blind. This type of thinking increased my bitterness and kept me trapped in a dark place. Ironically, I spent more time in this dark place while imagining myself blind than when I actually went blind. When I shifted my thinking to who deserves to go blind, it became apparent that I viewed it as an extreme punishment for serial killers, criminals, and politicians. It helped to realize no one deserves to go blind. Most things like this just happen (Google “Just World Hypothesis”).



Another dangerous thought was “What if?.” It was easy to dream of “what ifs” that could take my problems away. What if there was a cure? What if I was rich? These were lovely daydreams, but “what if” daydreams have no utility. I know people who are waiting for a cure to pick up with their lives. I know people who proclaim that their problems will go away once they have enough money. And I am sure we have all gone down the “Ignore it, maybe it will go away?” rabbit hole. The problem for all of these ideas was that it left me in the same headspace without being able to take action to improve my life.

Once I emerged from the rabbit holes of my mind, I realized that one fundamental thing had changed for the better. I finally qualified for legal blindness and was entitled to help. Ironically, the first website I found told me how to cheat on my driver’s test to keep driving blind. The second was the Division of Blind Services. Once I contacted them (and documented that I was blind), they pulled out all the stops to find me employment and keep me functional. I spent six months focused on learning to not get hit by cars (i.e. cross streets), not hurt myself (basic household chores), and professional skills. Getting hit by cars became a thing of the past, as long as I had my white cane in traffic. Kindles and other devices allowed me to resume reading (albeit at a slower pace). Many of the techniques I was being taught were small things that made huge differences.

The real challenge of being blind is interacting with other people. I often end up thinking, “Why can’t people just act normal?” Many people hate being wrong and will proclaim that I am not really blind. I am too independent, so I must be faking it. As far as I can tell

this comes from people's belief that blind people must be sad, helpless and useless (and if they are not, they don't count as blind). It is a fairly strong stereotype that needs to be fought. I am coping with being blind, not faking it.

Once people know I am blind they usually start gradually treating me like a "normal" sighted person. This is disastrous. Sometimes you should not treat people the same. It causes the impossible requests. I have been asked to point out where a car is, describe a student, and even drive on a field trip. I am sure people wave, and point, and do all kind of things that I cannot see to respond to. For many casual encounters this can be misinterpreted as being stuck up, distant or purposely obtuse. It is also easy for people to forget that moving the furniture in a room can be disastrous for me, when I come back in. People also get mad when I call them on their misjudgments. I was at a McDonald's and I asked a friend to read me the menu. A lady immediately, said, "You should be ashamed that you can't read at your age." I exclaimed, "I'm blind." She continued with, "You wouldn't be if you went to a doctor and got glasses." She really did not want to admit she came to the wrong conclusion. Even small, non-hostile conversations can upset people. Often I will ask questions, "What is ...?" people will point and I will say, "I can't read that. I am blind." The most frequent response is that I didn't have to be rude about it and why didn't I tell them first. Usually, I am hungry, I am in a hurry, and I forget that people respond poorly to questions about things that are posted. Working with any person, it is important to find out what their limitations are and then work around them. For some, we have limitations around our kids' schedules. Others

have limitations based a long commute. I can't drive or recognize faces. Keeping it in mind helps interactions go more seamlessly. I had to stop expecting people to know and understand blindness and start educating them.

Eventually, the training turned to the question of what I wanted to do as a career. The only part of my work as a research scientist that was unaffected by the vision was leading two hour motivational interventions with fifty-person groups in the prisons. This led me to believe that, perhaps, teaching was an option.

In a brave or reckless move, TLU hired me as a visiting professor (one year trial). I may have glossed over the fact that my teaching experience had all been as a sighted individual. I believe I also left out that I lacked patience with unmotivated students (pretty much anyone who didn't love research as much as me). I went into teaching with an attitude that is best described as nothing to lose. I didn't know if I could teach, and I certainly wasn't going to be surprised if I couldn't. So I marshaled my social psychology training on manipulating small groups, my motivational training from substance abuse treatment, and what I hoped was my infectious love of research. IT WORKED. I was offered a tenure-track position the next year. It was tempting to back off and be a bit more careful, but that isn't what got me the job. I pledged to keep pushing myself and the students to become better. I truly believe that life can change each of us if we keep pushing ourselves to become better. I don't just mean the good things in life. Tragedy, struggle, and despair are great fuel, if you know how to use them. The sixth gift of blindness is constant striving. Of course, some of the constant striving is to remember where I put the

invisible glasses and if the desks have been moved. The devil is always in the details of any situation. Focusing on the small things, like crossing the street safely and explaining blindness to people, can allow greater things to happen. Each semester I get a few hundred new students to try to impact. I wouldn't have this opportunity if I hadn't focused on small, significant changes. The truth about being blind is that it is an inconvenience, not a tragedy. The degree to which my remaining vision is useable varies day to day. I can do many things as well as the sighted and sometimes forget that I can't see. Keep in mind, the vision I see is 80% made up but feels quite real.

Perhaps the greatest gift of blindness is compassion. Google Helen Keller quotes and Helen Keller jokes. Which ones can make your life better? It is probably better to learn from those who deal with obstacles, rather than ignoring them. (Helen Keller's challenges were far greater than mine, and I expect her contributions to continue to remain greater as well.)

Before going blind I was opinionated and impatient with people who didn't keep up academically, socially and personally. It was very difficult to understand how they could stay mired in mediocrity. It is hard to maintain a know-it-all attitude when you can forget where you are in space and walk into walls, and when most conversations take place with people you can't recognize until rather far in the conversation. Blindness helped me understand that all people face challenges that they CANNOT SEE A WAY TO DEAL WITH. It isn't their actual eyesight that traps them, but not being able to find a vision for themselves that frees them. A favorite Mumford and Sons lyric that I use for

a mantra is, “Give me your eyes I can change how you see.” Is it working?



IN AND OUT OF PLATO'S CAVE<sup>1</sup>  
A Personal Tale

Juan Rodríguez

*Stories of the past are linked to the formation of selves and others in a complex tapestry of textured narratives.... But it is their real effects that concern me. Myth or history, cultural memory or public history, stories of the past track through us and over us as they provide narrative representations that help us to make our way through the world.*

—Richard R. Flores,  
*Remembering the Alamo:  
Memory, Modernity, &  
the Master Symbol*

Innocence  
1949. *Seven Years Old. Las Yescas Elementary  
School. For Mexicans Only.*

For three years every morning of the school year, through tears, I have been begging my mother to let me go to school with my older brothers and sister. Every morning for three years, wailing, I have been chasing

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<sup>1</sup> [You will read Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* in your FREX 134 textbook this fall. See if you can figure out the meaning of the allegory from this chapter. If that doesn't work, you can always read ahead in The TLU Reader or Google it. —Editors]

my older brothers and sister down the pasture path to the place where they would catch the bus. I would run as fast and as far as my little legs would take me. But it was never fast nor far enough. I would sit and cry until I heard my mother calling me home. Without my older siblings, I felt abandoned, left to play alone until they came home. Full of delight, I would run to greet them, pestering them with questions about school, feeling their closeness. The morning grief became afternoon joy.

To my child's imagination school was a new place to play, to make new friends, to learn to write my name. I was so excited, so anxious, the morning I could at long last join my brothers and sister down the pasture path to catch the bus. But Las Yescas Elementary School in the Río Grande Valley of Texas jarred my innocence. I was immediately separated from my siblings and placed in a peculiar world of confusion and dread. Miss Jasper, a white monolingual teacher, did not speak Spanish, my only means of understanding the world. What she could not utter to my understanding, she would emphasize with scorn and deliver with a paddle. For reason or reasons I to this day do not understand, every school day morning of those first weeks of my first semester of school, the good lady would suddenly jerk me by the arm from my desk and dent the back of my legs with a ruler. I did not cry in her presence, but tears would well deep in my eyes.

Something ugly had entered my life, something even my innocence could not forget. I began to cry every morning, begging my mother to let me stay home, please. As I never told any of this to my family, my mother and siblings did not understand my change of heart. Luckily, after only twenty days of attendance, I



was rescued from Miss Jasper's classroom by my family's having to move, as it often did, seeking something to ease the pain in our stomachs.

My vital focus, my intellectual radius, was so narrow then that I did not understand the significance of those initial days of my schooling. Las Yescas Elementary School had introduced me to the figure that would become the most influential in my life, Jim Crow. And there was no way to avoid him. Trapped, I had to figure out ways to negotiate his presence and power in my life until, many years later, I could call him by name.

### Ignorant Bliss

*1950-1951. Jefferson Elementary School. Edinburg, Texas. Experiment in Integration.*

My family's move brought me to an urban "Mexican" school which had much of the same ills the rural Las Yescas had, though I was no longer spanked, as I had learned to withdraw into myself and remain quiet and inconspicuous. After a few months of school, an order came down stating that from each grade two Mexican students would be taken to attend Jefferson Elementary, a new all-white school nearby. From our grade, a cousin of mine and I were chosen for who knows what reasons.

Surrounded by unrestrained hostility and subjected to continual ridicule, we ten Mexicans would seek each other out during recess and sit dejectedly along a low wall on the perimeter of the playground. It would have been suicide to try to play on the new playground equipment. Lunchtime was particularly trying. We, the Mexicans, would be placed on stage in the school

cafeteria that doubled as an auditorium. While they ate their institutional food with forks and spoons, we tried to eat our tacos from a brown bag brought to our mouths in a futile and ridiculous attempt to hide what sustained us. At the time, Mexican food was not accepted in “white” spaces. Both students and teachers would point at us and laugh. After a few days of this, we all stopped bringing our lunch, asking to remain in the classroom during the lunch period, never telling our parents why we no longer wanted to take lunch to school.

In the one long year I attended Jefferson Elementary, I began to accept the reality presented to me. There was no other choice at the time and at my age. I had nothing with which to counter. Ridicule and shame, I concluded, were a part of schooling for us Mexicans. Thus, after a few months, I became numb to Jim Crow injury and simply played dumb when it arrived like an evil stranger. Seeking bliss in my ignorance, I came to accept non-acceptance as natural to my schooling.

Despite duress, at Jefferson I did manage to learn the alphabet, scores of disjointed words in English, and most important of all, I learned to observe from the very margins where I had been placed. Without being conscious of it, I was learning how to survive in a white world. I had to learn to pretend to be unaware, oblivious to all abuse. I learned to cope by diving deep into myself, ignoring the world around me at school and around whites. I sought the refuge of family, the only relief and joy of my days then.

*1951-1953 Ackerly, Texas. On the Migrant Stream.*

The 1950s hit us particularly hard. It was a punishing decade during which Jim Crow tightened his grip on people of color. No longer able to survive in the Valley, my family joined the massive army of Mexican cotton pickers that yearly trekked *al norte* in search of employment, of ways to keep their families fed.

My parents enrolled me in Ackerly Elementary, the only Mexican in my grade. The school was integrated because, as a small rural school, its budget could not fund a separate school for Mexicans, and there were no African Americans in the district. Besides, it was expected that Mexicans would attend school, if at all, only during the short harvest season. My family, however, stayed in Ackerly for two years. By this time, I had become quite an expert in dealing with the white world. Be quiet, be pleasing, be dumb, and smile and bow before Jim Crow. I began to find my way in school with the help of one or two white students who “liked” me and whom I sought to please in return. I was learning to become a pet kangaroo, the exotic animal out of its context. I did not then nor do I today understand fully why my urge to belong was greater than the hurt of humiliation and the loss of self-respect.

False Consciousness

Brown Scholarship Boy Stuck to the Shadows  
on the Wall

*1953-1961. New Home, Texas. Scholarship Boy.*

After Ackerly’s dry land farming bore no harvest during the devastating drought of the 1950s, my family

wandered about once again in search of employment. By chance, it was found in a small, rural town in the heart of irrigated lands and the Bible Belt. I didn't know it at the time, but New Home Elementary and High School would steer me toward a life in academia.

When my siblings and I were initially enrolled in the school, we were taken to an old, red brick gym to join all the other Mexican migrant students on its spacious floor. Though we were segregated, I saw that local, non-migrant Mexican students were attending classes with the white students. I was bewildered. What made those Mexicans special? I did not understand.

After a couple of months of harvest, the army of Mexican cotton pickers deployed elsewhere. We stayed behind because my father had landed a year-round job on a local farm. We were soon integrated into the white school as local Mexicans, thus becoming one of "our Mexicans," as I often heard white teachers refer to us. Oddly, I began to feel a sense of pride in being "special," in the privilege bestowed upon me by whites at school.

For the first time in my schooling and despite the clearly marked social boundaries still remaining for Mexicans [*No dogs, Ni..ers, or Mexicans Allowed* signs polluted the landscape], I began to feel as if I belonged in school. The only problem was that I did not know much English, and Spanish, my native tongue, was prohibited and punished on school grounds. Good fortune and chance, however, placed me in Mrs. Edith Head's fourth grade English class. She was the superintendent's wife and the meanest, most stern teacher I have ever faced. She was merciless and unforgiving in her teaching. But she was fair. She measured all her students, brown or white, with the

same ruler, both literally and figuratively. Whatever English I know, I owe to her. May she rest in peace.

Once I could communicate in English, my sense of belonging in school soared. I became an insatiable reader of all books assigned. Eager to please my teachers and impress my fellow white students, I daily studied and did my homework long into darkness. I became a scholarship boy, the student of color who excels academically and who in almost all cases ceases to identify with his ethnic group. I was promoted from the sixth to the eighth grade at the same time that my best white friend was demoted from the eighth to the seventh grade. As the superintendent's wife, Mrs. Head must have had a hand in my promotion, I am sure. I graduated valedictorian of both my eighth grade and senior classes.

My unprecedented academic success in middle and high school was blinding. It created a reality much like that experienced in Plato's cave, creating a false consciousness in me that was so undeniably real and magnetic. My mind had been colonized. I began to see the world through white eyes. Having been told many times by white teachers and school friends that I "was different than those other Mexicans," despite the obvious fact that among those other Mexicans were my own siblings and parents, I believed them. The sense of exceptionalism was a special privilege bestowed upon me by whites, and it pleased me greatly. I began to deny myself, my parents, my culture and people. I began to idolize whites and their world. I had become a genuine coconut, a Tío Taco, a sell-out. Jim Crow had made his point and won.

First Difficult Move Toward Turning Around  
*1961-1968 Texas Tech University. BA and Masters  
Under Jim Crow*

As valedictorian of my senior class, I was by State law granted a tuition scholarship of \$100.00 to a Texas college or university. Though I dreamed of enrolling at the University of Texas at Austin, my financial situation narrowed my options to Texas Technological College some twenty miles away from New Home. The immediate reality was that I lost all the white privileges I had gained in high school with great difficulty. Jim Crow was alive and imposing on the Tech campus, contributing in part, I am sure, to the fact that only a handful of Mexican American students were enrolled at Tech at the time. Another critical obstacle to Mexican American enrollment was the lack of funding. To my recollection, loan or grant programs for which Mexican Americans could apply were non-existent then. Consequently, I was faced with having to work very long hours to support myself and, after my sophomore year, my family. I worked seventy-two hours a week and carried 12 to 15 credit hours every semester of my undergraduate studies. After earning the BA, I stayed at Texas Tech and earned a master's degree.

Allow me a slight digression. Some fifteen years ago or so, I was contacted by the alumni office at Texas Tech. The editors wanted to run a feature story on me as one of the most successful Tech alums. They sent for my review a draft of the article someone in their office had penned. I read it carefully, critically, and weighed the offer. I rejected it. My experience at Tech was not the paradise described in the piece; it was hellish, and

not one word of that reality was mentioned. I could not sell out again. Tío Taco was dead.

During my stay at Tech, however, the most extraordinary thing happened. The sharp knife of social change began to carve up the nation and the world. In 1964, the force that would stun and put to ground, though—sadly—not kill, the viciousness of Jim Crow was approved by Congress, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. By law now, the colored were free to roam, restless and curious, all public spaces, before the exclusive domain of whites. My personal world exploded. I broke through the circumscribing cocoon I had built for my protection. I organized the first of many protests I would organize in the coming decades. I began to look at my own social and academic reality from the outside. I was at the turning-around point in Plato's Cave. Jim Crow had a name and could be called to account.

A Faint Light Glimmers in the Distance  
The Dawning of a New Understanding of the  
World

*University of Iowa (1969-1972). Doctoral Studies.*

I arrived in Iowa City with a wife and three children in tow and with my intellectual and physical radii largely expanded. Though I excelled in my studies at Iowa, earning a four-point in all my coursework and even passing my comprehensive exams with honors, my attention and focus were in the social world around me. The Chicano and Anti-Vietnam Movements demanded most of the hours of my day and night. I no longer had to worry about financial matters, as I had a more than

generous fellowship to see me through. As my involvement in social protest became more apparent, I learned an important lesson. There was a price to pay for trying to change the world. The various trips to jail for demonstrating did not have an impact on me. What has had a lasting impact on my career are these words from my dissertation director, “As long as I am director of your dissertation, you will not get a degree from this university as long as you keep insisting on using *that* critical approach and as long as you continue to disgrace this department with your ludicrous public acts.” Much to his and my department’s chagrin, I was approaching literary analysis from a socio-historical point of view [examining a text in its socio-historical and cultural context], an approach anathema to a department enamored of formalist critics for whom a text was self-contained, needing no context with which to understand it. I left the University of Iowa an ABD, all but dissertation, a non-official and therefore non-rewarded title. To the same extent that I had been rewarded in the past for accepting the world as presented to me, I was now punished for trying to change the world, for trying to maintain my intellectual integrity.

I took my ABD to my first teaching job at the University of Arizona in sunny Tucson. What an elephant’s grave! Fresh out of doctoral studies and a vibrant social protest environment, I was stranded in a department that shunned any mention of intellectual curiosity or social involvement. When I began to organize protests on and off campus, my chair called me to his office and said, “Here, we believe in evolution not revolution. If you want to stay here, I don’t want to see your picture in the paper anymore.” A few months



later, as luck would have it, I got a call from someone who would become a friend and mentor, Joseph Sommers (RIP). He was offering me a teaching position at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD), the place where my schooling really began, where I began to walk out of Plato's Cave.

What a different intellectual world UCSD was! My colleagues were some of the top intellectuals in their field. They were friendly, unassuming, accepting, engaging, and challenging. There was Herbert Marcuse, Diego Catalán, Fredric Jameson, Carlos Blanco, Humberto Eco, Terry Singleton, Rosaura Sánchez, Sylvia Winters, Shirley Williams, and so many others. They lived and breathed social change. They taught me a method and a conceptual language with which to try to understand the world. They introduced me to books and authors who were never mentioned in all my previous schooling, not even in graduate school. There was a whole other world that had been kept from me. I was angry at all my previous teachers for keeping me tethered to Plato's wall, for I came to realize that all my previous schooling had been a constant feeding of data bits, of information without context, that were to be memorized and then regurgitated on exams. In all my previous years of schooling, I had been rewarded for my ability to memorize and recall. In other words, I was praised and rewarded for knowing a lot but, paradoxically, for understanding little or nothing at all. My schooling had been much like the ten-o'clock news on television are today, lots of information but no context. Truly, I had been taught by the banking method of education that Paulo Freire mentions in his studies of pedagogy. And even when I was socially active, demonstrating for social causes, I was merely an

activist, for I had no ideological framework to understand and guide my protests. In short, I was demonstrating for the sake of “making noise,” as Freire properly defines such protests.

My course of action became clear. I had to return to the texts I had read in all my previous schooling, to re-read them under a new critical light, and at the same time, read the new texts and authors I was discovering with the help of my colleagues. For the very first time in my life, school was purposeful, fun, engaging, exciting, as was my involvement in social causes.

### Critical Consciousness

I became a voracious reader, resentful in the recognition that all my previous years of schooling and sacrifice had taught me little beyond disjointed, disconnected data bits. No one had ever taught me to connect the dots, or even that the dots needed connecting. I realized that there is a politics of education, that the transmission of knowledge is not neutral but involves the power to determine a particular vision of the world. To the extent that those in power in a particular society control the educational process, they impose a consensus view of the world, a view that upholds and celebrates their power. At the same time and in response, those out of power, the marginalized, develop—consciously or subconsciously—a revisionist view of the world that though suppressed and ignored by those in power, appears in subtle and not so subtle ways from time to time. For example, I began, as did other Chicano middle-class individuals, to pronounce place and personal names in Spanish without the hint of English. I even began to place accent marks where

appropriate in the many Spanish surnames that appear in the American-English public record: Martínez, Rodríguez, Hernández, García. These were the subtle signs of trying to *revise* the world. The more obvious sign was our active participation in the Chicano Movement for social change. For my part, I am very proud of my having helped to establish Chicano Studies, particularly the study of Chicano literature, as a legitimate body of knowledge in academia, a feat not easily accomplished and one that is still under attack these days.

More directly related to my personal story, I came to realize, slowly but surely, that Miss Jasper, my first school teacher, was as much a victim as I, for it was not uncommon for white administrators to punish and demote white teachers by assigning them to colored schools. Miss Jasper was merely striking out at us because she must have felt she could not strike at those who had the power to determine much of her life. In time, I came to see that whites, too, were poor and discriminated as a social class, a class they occupy, then and now, in greater numbers than ethnic Americans of color. In fact, in terms of real numbers, the majority of the poor, the hungry, the unemployed, the incarcerated, the uneducated, the dropouts, the drug addicts in the United States are white Americans. These are the invisible victims of marginalization, victims of false consciousness tethered to the wall in Plato's Cave. In short, those that laughed at our tacos were merely blind to their own situation. *Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.* And I have, for I now know that racism is a social disease that dehumanizes both the perpetrator and the victim.

So the acquisition of knowledge, education if you will, was a site of contention. Texts, I learned, were not to be memorized but analyzed. What was most important was not what a text said, but what it meant. Analysis required historical context and a recognition that texts hold different levels of meaning. As Freire implies, there is a difference between a liberal and a liberating education. The former reaffirms and cements the way things are while the latter opens the mind to new ways of seeing the world, to new ways of thinking about the world. Liberal education is generally presented as an ahistorical phenomenon with each bit of information having equal value, inevitably leading to note-taking as the essential component of learning and regurgitation as the principal means of evaluation. The lack of context in liberal education distances the learner/student in time and space from that which is to be learned, thus leading to the notion in the student's mind that most of what she learns is irrelevant. On the other hand, liberating education, Freire argues, leads to empowerment, to immediate relevancy insofar as it is understood as preparation for changing the world, the ultimate purpose of popular education, in his view.

Coming to consciousness has brought both an enormous joy and an expected pain. The joy comes from understanding that knowing is an exciting lifetime endeavor; that there is always a higher level of understanding to be sought; that there are always new texts to read, new ideas to explore, new perspectives to gain; that there is always a brighter fire to face. The pain comes from the fact that coming to consciousness leads to counter-hegemonic views of the world, views that—because they go against the prevailing (and rewarded) consensus view of the world—will make the critically

conscious a persona non-grata among individuals who seek the rewards those in power can grant. But such marginalization is part of the politics of knowledge, part of the process of *problematizing* the world, as Freire points out. I am reminded that the individual who comes to consciousness, who turns around in Plato's Cave, returns to convince the tethered individuals of a new reality, only to face hostility.



## GRIT AT TLU

### How Bulldogs Overcome Challenges

*Editors' note: Before reading this chapter, watch Angela Duckworth's TED Talk on grit. Google it.*

Abigail Taylor:

In her TED Talk, Angela Lee Duckworth defines grit as “living life like it’s a marathon not a sprint.” During my first semester at TLU, I was on the wrong end of this equation. I often felt like I was “sprinting” through my new schedule, as though I was in a constant race against my deadlines. It only took a few weeks to realize that I had underestimated the challenges of tackling my new responsibilities and meeting those petrifying due dates. I was homeschooled my entire life up until coming to college, so things like deadlines, exams, and even grades were bizarre, foreign concepts to me. In fact, before I came to TLU, the PSAT and SAT were the only real tests I’d ever taken. As you can imagine, this made my transition to college very exciting, but also extra challenging. Because I had never had to deal with deadlines and grades before, not to mention the fact that I am a painfully unorganized person, the only way I was able to survive my first semester of college was by living each day at a time, scrambling to finish assignments by their due dates. I only learned later that this day-to-day method is not only risky, as it leaves

little room for error, but it is also exhausting and incredibly stressful.

It really wasn't until my second semester that I realized that living life like a marathon, as Angela Lee Duckworth suggests, is a much more effective strategy for tackling a college load. Thinking in terms of a marathon doesn't mean that the race is longer; it means that the finish line you look toward is more distant than the due date for your next Psych exam. When you're sprinting, all you can focus on is where your feet are hitting the ground. In a marathon, you have time to look up and see where you're headed. You can better anticipate the turns and bumps in the road before you eventually reach the finish line. Similarly, focusing on what's immediately in front of you can distract you from your larger goals, and make you forget about what's ahead. Keeping my larger goals in mind helped me get a firmer grip on my schedule by separating myself from it and seeing the big picture. It was when I was able to slow down and get my legs underneath me that I began to learn the "rhythm" of my coursework. After a while I learned the importance of writing things down. Making lists and putting dates on my calendar helped me not get as stressed about deadlines. Taking a step back and realizing that the most important finish line of my college career is the degree and the start of a promising career helps me find the motivation or "grit" necessary to push through any challenge I have to face or any deadline I have to meet.

Now that my second semester at TLU is drawing to a close, I realize how significantly I've improved since last semester. Although the terrifying finals week is drawing closer, I feel stronger about it than I did my first semester because I'm looking ahead and keeping



track of exactly what I have to do. This is a major improvement from the nightmarish finals week of last semester. This semester, I've been much better at pacing myself to make sure I give every assignment, whether it's due tomorrow or next week, the ample time it needs. The lessons I've learned these first two semesters have helped me tremendously in knowing how to deal with deadlines. The improvements I've seen in myself not only make me proud, but also relieve me of some stress about my future years at TLU. My upperclass friends have warned me that it only gets harder and crazier from here. If you're like me, this concept will probably start to scare you, as you get further into your first semester. I know I was thinking, "No, I'm good, this is definitely hard enough!" But after almost finishing my first year of college, I feel so much more prepared to tackle new challenges. I know that if we stay focused, look ahead, and find our inner grittiness, it can only get better from here!

### Tasha Phillips:

One of my main obstacles that I faced as a peer mentor was establishing leadership in the classroom. Because I was only a sophomore, I knew receiving respect from freshmen was going to be challenging, especially since I was still shaky with teaching lessons and public speaking. For my first lesson, I had my Frex professor critique me, and right off the bat one of the things I needed to work on was not letting students take control over the classroom and get too rowdy. I mean, with a classroom 81% male, rowdy was basically their middle names. Normally for me, after a challenge I persevere

through trial and error until I find success; however, this time was a little different. I pretty much tripped into this success.

Throughout the semester I had one student who would constantly push his boundaries during class using smart-aleck comments to point out what I did or said wrong, and naturally I would get noticeably flustered trying to ignore the comments. (Please, don't be that guy. It's not as cool as you think.) It was about halfway through the semester when my own classes started kicking my butt that preparing for my Frex lessons got put on the back burner. You'd think me being less prepared would've been a better opening for that student to really trip me up, but ironically that wasn't the case. Because I wasn't as prepared as I normally was, my need to have a perfect lesson went out the window. So when that student said something smart-alecky, I'd join in laughter with him; I even learned to laugh at myself for misspelling "independence." Once he saw that it didn't bother me anymore, all his comments either went away or didn't affect me the same as they once had at the beginning of the semester. It was that change in my attitude that got the rest of the class to see that they could relate to me, yet still knew that I had more experience on campus than they did. So how I "tripped" into success from this obstacle was that I stopped trying to be perfect and "went with the flow," and in a roundabout way it showed the students that I was just a student like them that they could relate to and respect at the same time. In the long run, the fact that I was "only" a sophomore actually worked out to benefit me I think, because I was easier to relate to.

In Angela Duckworth's talk from TED talks, she explains the concept of grit as a characteristic of

successful people. To Duckworth, “grit is passion and perseverance for very long term goals.” In the face a challenge, grit is having the ability to persist through it until it is no longer an obstacle. I knew from the beginning I wanted to establish respect in the classroom and wanted to see that through, but by hammering that goal too hard I wasn’t successful. As soon as I calmed down and stopped trying to force the respect, I received it. I used a subtle hint of my grit; that perseverance in me was always there and that was what helped me succeed. I did grow from this experience and learn adaptability, but my grit was there all along. Through this obstacle, I’ve learned that even when you can’t see success, maintain the goal you set for yourself and your grittier instinct will be found to do the rest. Even if you’re using just a hint of grit, it’s an important ingredient to anyone’s success.

### Fernando Rover:

When reflecting on my first year, several words come to mind but only one word sticks: Fear. Fear was the biggest obstacle I had to overcome during my freshman year. Looking back on my experiences as a peer educator, I am amazed at how the very tasks that became a part of my everyday routine were some of the things that terrified me the most; talking in front of an audience, writing and editing for publication, engaging in a discussion that went beyond the academic setting and many more. When I was a freshman I did maybe half of these things. Okay, maybe two of them. Okay, maybe one. Actually, none of them. My thought-process as a freshman never even surpassed becoming a student leader. I was too submerged in fear.

You will encounter many fears during your first year of college. Many of you probably already have. You were all excited to get in the car, get on the road, pull into the parking lot where a “Welcome to TLU” sign was waving; students and faculty alike ready to help you move in; meeting your roommate for the first time; and finally, meeting your peer mentor and FREX class for the first time. A lot of firsts. The first time is always the hardest. Fear is part of the first-year experience. It certainly was for me.

I had a million thoughts running through my head; a million worries wondering who would be my suitemate, who would be my friends, who would be my professors, would they like me, would they be easy...the list can go on. But there was something I didn't have to worry about. I knew my roommate. My roommate and I had known each other for a year and we were both excited to see each other again. I was especially relieved because I knew at least one other person going into college and I wouldn't have to face the other fears alone.

My roommate and I were inseparable. We hung out after orientation, met our neighbors, met our resident assistants, and reunited with some old friends; we were set. I thought everything was going to be okay. But still, I couldn't breathe so easily. I still had some doubt over being in college. Where I came from, none of the men in my family had a college degree and my sister was one of the first to graduate from a four-year institution. She was the only archetype I and my family had to go off of, which meant if I even did something the slightest bit different it was a risk. Often I would ask myself the same questions any first year student would ask: Am I doing this right? Is this normal? Should I do it this way?

What if I do it this way? I didn't know what to do. I thought since I had my roommate everything would be fine. Little did I know there was a different plan in store for me. Little did I know I would find myself entrapped in fear in every which way from family and school.

By October, the fear had begun to take its toll. I was afraid that because of financial situations, stirring from a battle between my parents regarding the future of my education, I might not be returning to TLU. The fear of not coming back paralyzed me. I began to conceal my pain by getting lost in the life of the college student; I began staying up late, going out on the weekends, doing my homework last minute- all with the accompaniment of my roommate. I thought if my roommate could do it, surely I could. Once again, I was blinded by what I thought was acceptable because of the fear of being left out and the fear of not being "normal."

No matter how hard I tried to conceal it, I knew I wasn't myself. I knew I wasn't happy. I knew this wasn't right. I think the reason why I was so successful as a peer mentor this year was because I experienced the same fear they did and I hid behind the same antics: I didn't go to class, I skipped choir practice, I forgot to do the reading for the next day and instead was skimming that day, I was falling asleep in class because of being out late with my roommate and friends; I was not the best student.

Then one day I realized that it wasn't worth it. I remember being in awe when my peer mentor showed me my six week grades. The fear had taken over. I was afraid all along that if I did something different, like stray away from my friends, I was doing something wrong. I was stuck between two fears; the fear of

disappointing my family and the fear of disappointing my friends. I was going by expectations that were low for someone like me; I thought if I did the minimum because it being my first year, I'll have plenty of time to make it up. But one day I couldn't think that way anymore. Or as Angela Duckworth would put it, I began to feel grittier. I picked myself up and began to persevere. I was not going to be yet another member of my family who failed out of college. I knew I was smarter than that.

One of the best ways I was able to regroup was choir. I stopped hanging out with my roommate and friends and started meeting some new people in choir. This time I was in a setting where I could not be afraid anymore. I began to open myself up and allow people to get to know me. I realized I didn't have to withhold myself to make this transition to college easier. If anything, it was making it more difficult.

Things slowly began to get better but I still was in a bitter conflict between family and friends. My parents were still debating about how much the cost was and me feeling impotent to make it better. Another way I was paralyzing myself and was continuing the fear was guilt. I was at my dream school, meeting all these great people, yet there were problems brewing at home. My friends began to view me in a negative light. They received my separation as being better than them and resented me for it, especially my roommate. Until then, he and I rarely had a disagreement to this extent. As I began to bounce back and become successful in academics, he remained heavily incorrigible and defiant. Not only was there guilt coming from home but there was guilt coming from my friends as well. How could I not help? What more could I do? I always thought what

I did wasn't enough and I realized I had put my happiness after other people's. I couldn't do that anymore. I had to do everything for myself and to make myself happy. That's when everything took a transition.

During your freshman year, you will have moments where you are caught between a rock and hard place. There will be many Catch-22's that you will endure such as getting a part-time job, prioritizing friends around academics, and many more. As much as I wanted to focus on my grades, I knew I had to do more if I wanted to stay at TLU. My parents and I had to come to an agreement as to what we were going to do to make this work. How I contributed was I looked for more financial aid and more outside scholarships to apply for. I made sure I knew what my required GPA was in order to keep everything because I knew I would be out of luck if something fell through.

What kept me motivated or "gritty" was that I was at my dream school; I worked hard to get here, I didn't have a 4.0 in high school, I didn't graduate with honors, I wasn't in the honors program, and I wasn't on a full ride. This meant I had to work harder than I ever worked in high school in order to obtain a college degree. This meant giving up was not an option. I also realized as time went on the more I got involved, the more I was able to help out my family. I found a happy balance. I was able to find a job on campus that was willing to work with my schedule and I was able to make enough money to help pay my tuition. By now, many of you are probably worrying about the same problems I worried about my freshman year. That is perfectly normal. How can I get a job? What about helping out my parents? Am I going to be able to help my parents? These are good questions. But the key

ingredient of all of these questions is grit. Once you discover your own grit, problems like these become easier to solve.

Think about how being gritty will enhance your time here at TLU. I learned that grit was the key ingredient in battling both my fear and my guilt. I wish I could say I only dealt with that my freshman year, but I still deal with it from time to time. Today I am in a much better place. I did not allow myself to give up. I found a way to help out my family while maintaining healthy friendships and a good GPA. I found a happy balance. I found my grit.

### Ashley Meadows:

Having been a Peer Mentor for the past three years has given me a variety of experiences with first year students. Each year my FREX class has been a unique challenge, yet they each have been very influential in my life. At the beginning of the year my relationships with the students started out as a mother holding a child's hand. As the fall semester progressed I saw them start to spread their wings and fly. As those students moved into their spring semester our relationship started to become one of peers and close friends. When my students succeeded I rejoiced with them, when they struggled I felt like I struggled alongside them. I was completely invested in my students and cared for all of them. I have had the opportunity of being the Peer Mentor to the Honors FREX class two of my three years working as a Peer Mentor. My biggest challenge as a Peer Mentor came through students who did not seem to care. I dealt with Honors and non-Honors



students who simply gave up when times got tough. They did not possess the “grit” that Angela Duckworth discusses in her TED talk (“The key to success? Grit”).

From the time I was young my mother made it clear that everything I did should be done to the best of my ability. I thought this idea of hard work was a universal mentality. Working with students as a Peer Mentor made me realize that not everyone cares as much as I do. When sitting with students one-on-one giving them their grade checks I was taken aback and saddened when they seemed apathetic about their low grades. Some students even told me they were ok with those grades. I could not believe it. My mother had instilled grit in me. That does not mean that I never had hard times and failures, but it meant that I had the drive to keep going. It was difficult as a Peer Mentor who cared so much for her students to see them settle and give up. I prodded, encouraged, and referred them to SI and tutoring. Some students would buckle down and try to do their best, but there were a handful that still did not seem to care. It pained me to see them do poorly, go on academic probation, and sometimes even drop out.

I do not say this to imply that low grades are the end of the world. It was effort, tenacity, and grit that I was hoping to see in my students. After a rough year, I finally realized that my role as a Peer Mentor is not to make the students succeed, but to simply guide them to success by giving them the resources and being a role model. At the end of the year I had to realize that I was not a failure because these students had failed. I had completed my job to the best of my ability exactly as my mom had taught me. I had trained them up in the way they should go and hoped they wouldn't depart from it (Prov. 22:6). Being a Peer Mentor has taught me

that I am not perfect and neither is anyone else. All we can do is work our hardest and never give up. Be honest with yourself. Are you willing to give your best effort and push through when the times are tough? If yes, then you have nothing to be ashamed of and can be content with the outcome.

As you read this I am probably in class or doing a clinical rotation in physician assistant school. My 4 years at TLU flew by and graduating was bittersweet. I have so many good memories of my time at TLU. Getting to be part of the leadership on campus that organized orientation in the fall was always fun. I loved getting to meet my new FREX students every year. Some of my best memories are the experiences I had being a part of the track and cross country team. I am so glad that I stuck with running, because some of my closest friends are girls I met on the team. We have worked hard, laughed, and cried together. The relationships that I built with my peer mentor and track family, fellow students, and professors provided me a family away from home. I will never forget the atmosphere at TLU. As my final days at TLU come to a close I have taken time to think back on everything that I have been a part of and gone through to get to this point. I am so thankful to God and everyone at TLU, because I know without them it wouldn't have been possible.

## Rachel Latimer:

Being a TLU peer mentor is more than just a job. It is a recognized leadership role that sets you apart from the rest of the campus. As a freshman, I was a student just like you. I was involved in many organizations and activities. I even led a few General Chemistry study groups, but nothing would prepare me for my new role as a peer mentor. As a sophomore peer mentor, I had to be a teacher, planner, partner, and role model. Not only did I have to be a leader and guide for my students, but I also had to be a reliable colleague and employee for my team. I taught and worked alongside the same professor who taught my FREX 134 class and who was the professor for one of my classes at the time. I was expected to help a class transition into campus life, to teach them, and to know all of the answers when I was still discovering some of them myself. At first, it seemed impossible to balance being “student Rachel” and “super peer mentor Rachel.” As “student Rachel,” I had a really hard time waking up for my 8 am Theology class. As “student Rachel,” I was still trying to figure out what time management even meant! But as “Super Peer Mentor Rachel,” I had to be ten minutes early. As “Super Peer Mentor Rachel,” I had to teach my students how to manage *their* time. As “Super Peer Mentor Rachel,” I had to move past being “student Rachel” to being “leader Rachel.”

As Angela Lee Duckworth explains during her TED Talk, if I was to be successful during this transition, I could not let myself get discouraged when I fell short (“The Key to Success? Grit”). Throughout my first semester as a peer mentor, I strived to set myself apart from my students as a leader in the

classroom. I pushed myself to go beyond the basic requirements of the job to guarantee my success, but there were many times when I failed (more often than I would like to admit!). I let my “student Rachel” ways creep up on me and take over. For instance, I thought I was never going to recover from the time that I missed a peer mentor meeting, but I simply took it as a learning experience and an opportunity for growth. Since then, I always strive to be at least ten minutes early, and I have yet to miss a meeting since. Now, I am a new person because of my experience on the Leadership Team. I have truly become “leader Rachel”.

As you read this, I am pushing my way through graduate school, getting my PhD in Public Health at the UT School of Public Health in San Antonio. Even though I graduated TLU with a perfect 4.0, I am accepting the occasional “B” here and there (remember, perfection is not the goal!). Once I graduate, I plan on working in cities to promote health and physical activity. Eventually, I plan on returning to the classroom to teach college students who share my passion. I may even return to TLU to teach my fellow Bulldogs because I know I wouldn’t be where I stand without the love and support from my professors at TLU.

Even if you don’t ever become a Peer Mentor or a member of the Leadership Team, always push yourself to be more than just a student. Be a leader. Be a friend and a mentor. Find your passion and RUN with it! You don’t have to be perfect, but you have to keep pushing when you fall short. Life isn’t and shouldn’t be about the finish line. It’s about the hills and valleys that get you there. And remember, as the familiar saying goes

“even if you fall flat on your face, you’re still moving forward!”



IT AIN'T BRAGGIN' IF IT'S TRUE  
The Improbable Path of Two Liberal Arts  
Majors into the Real and Virtual Worlds

Sarah Loyd & Ryan Loyd

The rush of applying to colleges was dizzying. Hundreds of miles apart, we each wanted different things: Ryan wanted to be far from his home in San Antonio, and Sarah wanted to be closer to her parents in North Texas.

Ryan's first college choices were Baylor and The University of Texas at Austin. On the way home from a visit to Waco, he and his family got a flat tire and were stuck on the side of I-35 for a few hours - which didn't seem to be a good omen. Meanwhile, UT didn't work out because the university required a math credit he'd put off until his senior year of high school.

Sarah, meanwhile, had applied and been accepted to The University of North Texas in Denton. Back in the grunge era, she was most excited about the "alternative" campus, the idea of wearing flannel pajama pants to class and the fact that she would only be an hour or so from home. She agreed, begrudgingly, to visit TLU on her parents' insistence.

Despite our initial misgivings, our visits to Texas Lutheran made us both realize that we would be right at home here. Ryan's experience with the Guide Dogs'

tour around the lush campus made such an impact that he would later join the group to welcome other prospective students and their families during their visits. Sarah visited for the first time during Pacesetter weekend, and realized - even on that cold, drizzly February day - that this small, peaceful campus was the place for her, even though it was 200 miles away from the town in which she'd lived her entire life.

We met at freshman orientation in August of 1998, in Langner 128 - that Star-Trek-looking classroom on the first floor. We had been broken up into small groups to get acquainted, and during one of those ice-breaker games that every introvert hates, Ryan threw the bean bag to Sarah during introductions as we announced our names and our majors. Talk about fate! We discovered that we were both communication majors, had both been band nerds in high school and both had younger siblings. We spent nearly the entire first weekend of college hanging out together and became fast friends.

As wide-eyed freshmen, we navigated our way through living away from home, creating our own rules (and breaking them), and encountering people who were different from the folks we had grown up with. We were both striking out on our own and forging our identities away from the people we'd been surrounded by for our whole lives.

TLU provided all sorts of opportunities for us to grow into the people we would become. Ryan was raised in San Antonio, but in a rural part of town. He had the chance to get involved with campus activities, work as a staff photographer for the Lone Star Lutheran's weekly newspaper and serve two years as a Senator as part of the Student Government



Association. Sarah grew up in a small town north of Dallas and was the only person from her hometown attending TLU, so she met new friends who are now old friends, participated in the TLU Concert Band for four years and joined Xi Tau when it was re-established on campus.

Our class work at TLU was immeasurably helpful in our later careers. While Ryan showed up freshman year knowing exactly what he wanted to do - become a reporter - Sarah hadn't charted out her future. We learned to write well, delved into the communication theories that would back up our later work, and most importantly, discovered a deeper level of critical thinking that proved to be useful in making future decisions. But the best skills that we learned weren't always measured in red ink or printed on transcripts.

Although there was no program designed specifically for broadcasting at TLU, Ryan worked at jobs and internships at radio and TV stations in the area - from Seguin to New Braunfels to San Antonio. His hard work paid off, because before graduation he had landed his first job in TV as a weekend anchor and reporter in Joplin, Missouri. Getting that first job was tough in 2002, less than a year after 9/11. Ryan competed with thousands of others for that first on-air job, some from major journalism institutions - including that big J-school in Missouri.

By Sarah's senior year of college, she still wasn't sure what direction to take with her career but knew that the broadcast industry sounded appealing. While she didn't have Ryan's familiarity with the industry, she did know that being on-air wasn't for her. The willingness to work hard and try new things that she had developed at TLU was definitely instrumental in

landing her first job as a production assistant at Ryan's station in Joplin and quickly moving through the ranks to produce the 5:00 news and eventually a 90-minute morning show.

We've been very lucky, because many people we know who went to journalism schools didn't have the staying power that we have had. We've both enjoyed careers entirely in our fields, which isn't common for people our age.

The tools in our toolbox aren't necessarily knowing about Foucault and what the heck semiotics are. Being able to wrap our heads around communication theory is important in understanding the systems in which we work, and our role in them. But the things that have lasted are our willingness to ask questions, to keep learning, to research things when we don't understand them and to carry ourselves with confidence. That's been the secret of our success. Anyone can go to journalism school and learn how to work a camera. Anyone can learn the mechanics of a newscast. But not everyone can understand how to gather information, analyze it and then produce an interesting, well-considered piece of content.

Ryan spent nearly a decade in TV before he moved to a radio reporting job with Texas Public Radio. After three years of reporting on the city of San Antonio for TPR, Ryan's career pivoted again into a corporate communications job with Security Service Federal Credit Union. As the Senior Media Specialist for SSFCU, Ryan draws on his years of experience in content creation and connecting with an audience in order to better understand how to communicate with both employees and members of the community.

Sarah has spent nearly her entire career behind the scenes at several TV stations. She moved from producing newscasts to producing promotional spots, and now works in a position that didn't even exist in anyone's mind when she graduated from college - the social media director at KSAT in San Antonio. After two years focused entirely on social media in a newsroom, Sarah now works with many media outlets across the country as the Director of Client Strategy for SocialNewsDesk, a social publishing and promotion platform built specifically for newsrooms.

Being a part of TLU helped set us apart from the rest of the pack. The way that our professors challenged us to think in new ways has led our careers in awesome and interesting directions that we couldn't have considered at graduation.

TLU didn't just set us on a successful career path - it led us to each other. We became best friends in college and got married in 2006 at the Chapel of Abiding Presence, near where we shared "chapel snacks" years before. We also met some amazing friends that are still a part of our lives, 15 years after we first set foot on campus for our freshman year.

TLU put us in this unique position to conquer the world - OK, maybe that's a little strong - but we have kicked butt with the foundation we received from TLU. Don't waste a second of your time in college. Shake your professors' hands. Better yet, hang out in their offices and pick their brains. Do your homework - not just to get it done, but because you are discovering your passion and want to learn as much about it as you can. And look around your classroom. Your future business partner, your new best friend or the person you'll spend the rest of your life with may be right there with you.



## LIFELONG LEARNING Or, Will This Be on the Final?

Martha Rinn

The answer to the question in this chapter's title is a resounding, "Yes, what you are learning here at Texas Lutheran University *will* be on The Final." The question deserves a "yes" because what you are learning at TLU will be what *finally* matters to you throughout your life. You may not realize it, but some of those classes about which you have the most doubt right now will turn out to be the most useful and personally rewarding after you graduate. This chapter really focuses on the last *Institutional Goal for Graduates*, which states that "TLU encourages and assists its students in developing a will to pursue cultural, intellectual, and spiritual growth."

I don't expect that you spent hours studying TLU's mission statement before enrolling here. I'd be quite amazed if you did. But I want to point out that the mission statement, which is intended to sum up the university's reason for existence, states that TLU's academic programs are based on "the tradition of the liberal arts." Because this tradition is a systemic part of a TLU education, I will make heavy use of that word "liberal" in this chapter. This word has taken on some political connotations, both negative and positive, over the last century or so. So let's go straight to a reference source to find the more traditional definition that I'm

going to employ. (You'd expect no less from a librarian, would you?) According to *Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language*, some of the more traditional definitions of the words "liberal" or "liberalism" include the following positive meanings: "marked by generosity, bounteousness, openhandedness, ... broadmindedness; openmindedness, ... of, belonging to, or befitting a free man..."<sup>1</sup> Gender-specific terminology aside, I hope you might agree that the traditional meaning of the label "liberal" is one that you could wear proudly, outside of any political agendas that have become attached to the word.

*The Encyclopedia of Education*, a more specialized source, offers a definition of the term "liberal education," which is what we hope you will get here at TLU. The article states that the original purpose of higher education in America was to "provide a liberal education based on the European model of classical education... This model stressed the importance of a broad base of education that encouraged an appreciation of knowledge, an ability to think and solve problems, and a desire to improve society."<sup>2</sup> You can see how the definition of "liberal education" grows out of the original definition of "liberal." Both definitions emphasize an ability to keep an open mind, which can lead to the development of productive curiosity and a

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<sup>1</sup> *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*. Merriam-Webster, Inc. Springfield, MA, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Deusterhaus, Molly Black. "General Education in Higher Education." *Encyclopedia of Education*. Ed. James W. Guthrie. 2nd ed. Vol. 3. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003. 923. Print. 8 vols.

love of learning. Our hope is that all of our graduates will strive to become liberally educated in their time at TLU, and as a result will be able to think for themselves, be open to new and exciting ideas, and find calling and satisfaction in an increasingly complex and confusing world.

If you really embrace your liberal education, you will be poised to play a role in the leadership of our society. That role may be a big, commanding one, such as holding a public office while acting ethically; running a large company in a compassionate manner; or teaching a new generation of students to be open to new ideas. Or your leadership role may be as simple and important as being an informed, active voter; volunteering or working in a paying job that allows you to stand up for those who can't defend themselves; or raising children who have open minds and kind hearts.

## Personal Experiences

The first person to influence my lifelong learning was my own mother. She was born in 1917 and graduated in 1937 from Texas Lutheran College, as TLU was then known. She went on to become a school teacher who taught the children of migrant workers in central Texas at a time when that wasn't exactly a fashionable or well-paid job. Even that many years ago, people who graduated from this school received a liberal education. My mother has told me that her liberal education prepared her for a life where she would have to interact with some pretty high-powered people.

My father grew up on an Iowa farm. He was a Lutheran bishop for 22 years; served on TLC's Board of Regents and occasionally taught a class for the

Theology department; and later served the American Church of Denmark. Dad's was another liberal education success story that I don't have the space to go into here. But because of my father's various roles, my mother was privileged to interact with kings, queens, ambassadors, and people from all over the world. She credits her liberal education with preparing her to successfully navigate in these kinds of settings.

At 97 years of age my mother continues to learn. Last Christmas her grandchildren gave her a book entitled Zealot, by Reza Aslan. This book is a heavily-researched and footnoted biography that provides historical and sociological contexts for the life of Jesus. After briefly demurring that she was too old to read such a complex tome, she proceeded to devour the book in just a few weeks and was recapping its contents for anyone who would listen. She has now passed the book along for me to read so that we can discuss it. My mother continues to be a leader in her church and is not afraid to take a brave stand when it is necessary. She was 92 when her home church, which is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, faced great controversy regarding its *Social Statement on Human Sexuality*. Among other things, this Statement provided avenues for member churches to engage pastors and other church leaders who were in committed, monogamous same-sex relationships. Even if you think a 92-year old ~~she~~ might speak out on such a topic, my mother's actual stand on the issue might surprise you. She believes that all should be accepted no matter what their sexual orientation. During heated discussions at her church, she stood up at a congregational meeting, no doubt leaning on her cane, and opined that the church should get back to the teachings of Jesus. She



summed up these teachings as a combination of the Golden Rule<sup>3</sup> and Jesus' Biblical command to love God, and your neighbor as yourself. This seems to be a pretty "liberal" outlook for a woman who would definitely fall into the elderly category.

My husband also comes to my mind when I think of a liberally educated person. He graduated from Texas Lutheran College in 1974 with a double major in English and Theater. He went on to work for 25 years at USAA, a world-wide insurance company based in San Antonio. You might think that's a pretty good trick for someone holding majors in the humanities. However, when he applied he was told that USAA *much* preferred liberally educated people for the kinds of work he was going to be doing. The rationale was this: my husband had made it through four years of higher education at a liberal arts institution, and he had completed degrees in the humanities. Therefore, his credentials assured USAA that *he knew how to learn*. While at TLU he had learned to read with good comprehension, write clearly, and apply what he had learned to a wide variety of situations. When he went to work for the company, he put those skills to use every single day while settling claims. USAA was not interested in a check-the-box educational approach where a freshly minted graduate would come to them bearing a standard set of workplace skills memorized by rote. Rather, they wanted someone they knew could *learn* USAA's specific approaches and methods, and be able to *apply* logic and clear thinking to solving

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<sup>3</sup> The "Golden Rule" is most often quoted as being, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

problems. In other words, they wanted a liberally educated person.

My own journey has been a bit more convoluted. I came to Texas Lutheran College as a freshman, thinking I was going into a service profession in medical technology. However, it quickly became apparent both to me and to my professors that my desire to help others was not going to find expression in that kind of work. Try as I might, I was not a chemist. But as a TLC student I was required to take a set of core classes that exposed me to a wide variety of disciplines. As I took those classes and others, I quickly realized that I absolutely loved the study of theology, so that's what I chose as a major.

After graduation I had to decide whether to stay in Texas or move up north to attend seminary, since there were no Lutheran seminaries in Texas at that time. While I pondered my next move, I went to work at the local steel mill, where I started out as a clerk but soon worked my way up into the position of Cost Accountant. Anyone who knew me in college would have gotten a giggle out of this progression, because math was never my favorite subject. But the fact that I had taken math classes served me well. As a Cost Accountant I worked with 22 manufacturing plants around the United States. Once again, my liberal education opened doors to me that probably would not have opened if I'd only focused very narrowly on one set of skills, or if I had considered my education to be complete the minute I walked across the stage on graduation night. My superiors saw my aptitudes and gave me chances that might have been denied to someone without a liberal education.

I could easily have continued on the financially lucrative path I was on, in a job that featured plenty of good perks like opportunities to travel and a set of great co-workers. In addition, I was pretty comfortable in the job itself. But I continued to have a growing nagging feeling; I was ignoring that old, original desire to be helpful to others in more tangible, one-on-one ways. I was extremely successful as a cost accountant, so much so that my boss delayed my departure by six months because he kept finding ways to make me put off my exit. But I eventually came to realize that I had to take a chance on a new career that allowed me to use that long-ignored calling to make a difference. After twelve years in accounting I realized that I needed to make a decision, and I decided to change.

I planned this change carefully, and I did plenty of homework, including taking multiple versions of those dreaded career and aptitude tests to figure out exactly what direction I wanted to take. I'll admit that I had my doubts such tests when I was in college. However, I'd encourage you to take advantage of these kinds of tests, which the Career Development Center offers to students for free, and to consider your results carefully and holistically. When I was a kid my own results always seemed pretty dorky to me; my tests always came back with a recommendation to become a forest ranger. But after taking several versions I began to see trends and possibilities that I'd never before considered. I also discussed my thoughts and feelings with close family and friends in order to get their feedback. It's a funny thing—when I told my mother that I wanted to go back to school to become a librarian, she confided in me for the first time ever that she had wanted to be a librarian. However, she was not allowed to do so

because that career choice would have entailed attending a Catholic university, which was a forbidden act for a Lutheran minister's daughter in the mid-1930s.

After much research and soul-searching, I took my chance and I've never looked back. I will say that my years in accounting taught me many useful things that I still use to this day. For example, as a library director a large part of my work has to do with creating, implementing, and maintaining a balanced budget. I've written successful grant proposals, each of which required a well-reasoned and fully justified budget. My largest successful proposal was for \$75,000 worth of networking and computing equipment for TLU. All of this is a mark of a liberally-educated person: the ability to apply the things you learn to new and different experiences, and to continue to stretch and seek out new learning opportunities.

I came out of the master's program at The University of Texas determined that I was going to be a librarian at a public library. I even had a job lined up and waiting for me after I received my Master of Library and Information Science. But the wife of one of my own TLC professors talked me into applying for a librarian's position that was open at TLC. At this university I have found the perfect environment for blending my love of learning and my desire to help others in a personal way. I've found my vocation and calling, and I owe it all to *learning how to learn* and continuing that process to this day. One of my crowning achievements so far, in terms of personal fulfillment, has been becoming a librarian.

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, please remember the following: any employer for whom you would wish to work should place a high value on

the fact that you have learned how to learn. If this trait is not valued by an employer, then that company or institution probably isn't a place you'll want to remain for very long. A place where you are not allowed to continue to grow and learn is soul-killing. The ability to recognize these kinds of organizations and to avoid them or leave them at-will may require some experience and even some financial planning. But if you are liberally educated, you will be better prepared to make the observations and judgments that will allow you to realize when you are in the wrong place. In reality, *any* organization can be a toxic place if it does not value inquisitiveness and intelligence in its members. This could even apply to an organization that seems to have a mission that fits your personal vocational desires.

The company I left actually *did* place a high value on continuing to learn, so I can't attribute my yearning to change on some kind of company-wide lack of support of lifelong learning. Frankly, it requires a lot of courage to make a life change like this. I'll admit that it took me a full twelve years in the workforce to come to my decision to pursue my true vocation. I have often wrestled with the question of why it took me so long to make this decision. I hate to admit that a good part of the long delay was probably due to fear. This realization leads me to urge you to be bold and follow your calling, once you discern what that calling is, and whenever that discernment might come.

## Community Examples

Your own professors and the staff members here at TLU are people who continue to love and treasure learning. I'll relate a few of their stories here, starting with a dear faculty colleague who is no longer with us. This book is dedicated to her.

Linda Clark was a devoted, engaged librarian and teacher. Her love of learning was so great that it almost formed a physical aura around her. Her life was cut short in a car accident as she drove home from work on March 23, 2009. This loss was shocking, coming unexpectedly as such tragedies always do. Making the loss even worse was the fact that Linda had intended to retire soon, and she and her husband had made many wonderful plans for the future. However, as I came to grips with the loss of my friend, it was a great comfort to me to know that Linda never wasted an opportunity to travel and learn about other cultures, and to share that love and knowledge with students, friends, and colleagues. She capitalized daily on these opportunities in many varied ways. You are probably not aware that it can be somewhat unusual for academic librarians to teach semester-long classes. But Linda took teaching assignments frequently. She always had new, exciting, and sometimes challenging ideas of things to do in the library, and was always ready to conduct library instruction even though her title was Technical Services Librarian. The fact that Linda and her husband served in the Peace Corps in Korea during the 1960s continued to inform her teaching. Her interest in international education eventually led her to participate in a Semester at Sea that took her around the world during a sabbatical leave from TLU. Many of the things

Linda learned on that leave found their way into classes that she subsequently taught.

Linda's eager willingness to try new things was apparent in everything she did. It didn't matter if she was engaging in those special one-on-one learning interactions that librarians get to enjoy with students; finding "just the right book" to fit with a specific course or student research interest; teaching Freshman Experience or Global Perspectives classes; or simply goofing around with the highly-amateur Faculty/Staff All-Star Gospel Band. Linda had a beautiful, clear alto voice and the training and ability to read music and sing harmony. Her favorites were old gospel songs and spirituals. Linda continued to learn throughout her life, and she valued her learning experiences right up to the day she died.

If you look around you'll see lots of examples of people who throughout their lives continue to learn and enjoy a wide array of activities that might seem to be unrelated or out-of-the-ordinary. These are people who embrace new experiences and challenges rather than avoiding them.

The variety of your professors' activities might surprise you; the situation reminds me a bit of an old Calvin & Hobbes cartoon. You may know that Calvin is a precocious 6-year-old boy with a vivid imagination. This particular cartoon is set in the summertime, when Calvin is off from school. Calvin's long-suffering Mom is unloading groceries in the kitchen as Calvin watches. Mom tells Calvin that she saw his teacher, Miss Wormwood, at the supermarket, and that she said to tell Calvin hi. Calvin, with a stunned look on his face, asks his Mom if Miss Wormwood *really* shops in a supermarket. Mom says, "Well certainly. What did you

think?” In the last panel, Calvin, who is scratching his head in a puzzled fashion, delivers the following soliloquy: “I dunno ... I kinda figured teachers slept in coffins all summer.”<sup>4</sup>

Trust me, TLU professors and staff members do NOT hide in coffins like vampires when they are not in the classroom or on campus. TLU faculty and staff excel at being extraordinary learners. Dr. Robin Bisha teaches communications but she is also an accomplished yoga instructor who speaks and reads Russian. Dr. John Sieben is a mathematician and computer scientist, but he also engages in sailing and scuba diving. Prof. Steve Boehm is a sociologist who plays a *killer* Dobro. Dr. Bob Jonas is a biologist and also a brewer of fine beers. Prof. Mark Dibble is a librarian and an extreme basketball player. Prof. Rodrick Shao is an instructional technologist but he also raises funds to help children orphaned by AIDS in Tanzania. You’ll see Craig Hunt gardening or mowing around campus, but you’ll also see him singing or playing an instrument in the Faculty/Staff All-Star Gospel Band.

Don’t ever short-change your professors or staff members by thinking that they are narrowly focused individuals who never leave their offices or labs, or stay within the strict confines of their chosen disciplines. Many of them came to TLU precisely because they *didn’t* want to get pigeonholed into a narrow slot at a large institution. They want to be someplace where they

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<sup>4</sup> Watterson, Bill. "Calvin and Hobbes." Cartoon. *Homicidal Psycho Jungle Cat*. By Bill Watterson. Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1994. 150. Print.



are able to experience the stunning cross-pollination that can occur where collegiality is natural and interdisciplinary efforts are encouraged and maybe even required. TLU professors and staff are very, very intelligent people who continue to learn and grow in sometimes amazing ways.

## In the Know

Do you remember when you first learned that a parent, an older sibling, or some other childhood idol didn't have all the answers? That fact may have disillusioned you a little bit at first. But I hope that you have since figured out that the strongest, most confident people are the ones who willingly admit that they don't know everything and don't have all the answers. If they are also lifelong learners, these same people will make that admission and then take the next vital step. They will go on to *find out* information about the question or issue at hand. Sometimes they will even use this new knowledge to forge creative and unique works, discoveries, and inventions.

As a librarian, my credo is that I don't know all the answers but I *do* know how to go about informing myself. Of all the things I've learned in my life, this ability is the most golden. I'll admit that it can also be terrifying and exhilarating at the same time—I would imagine that a physical analogy might be bungee jumping. My own ability to make this kind of jump was severely tested several years ago when I was asked to fill in for a colleague who unexpectedly was unable to teach two sections of ISYS133, Applications Software. Ordinarily I would welcome a request to teach; in fact, I had even expressed a desire to teach ISYS133.

However, this specific request came to me a mere three weeks before the semester began, and I had never taught the class before or even set eyes on the textbook. I really had only one choice if this was going to work. I was honest with my students, informed them of the reasons why I was teaching the classes, and told them that we would all be embarking on a major learning adventure together. I believe that everyone, including me, learned many things that semester. I was living out that credo I mentioned before, as I experienced firsthand that nobody can know everything. I also learned that while this is a really great philosophy, it can still be a difficult admission for a college professor. But once again I was surprised. In the end my student course evaluations for those two classes were some of the highest I'd received in years. I suppose I shouldn't have been so amazed. Once again my liberal education had given me the tools I needed to delve into an unfamiliar subject and learn new things, even under extreme pressure.

## Dealing with Conflicting Ideas

Another key to being informed is to try to hear many voices and perspectives. To do this you must be willing to consider facts, opinions, and thoughts that might conflict with beliefs you hold. When you are considering complex, important issues, I would encourage you to use that *liberal* approach I described in the opening paragraph of this chapter. Very few of the important questions in your life will have clear-cut answers. At the very least, listen to others with an open mind and with civility. Screaming and vitriol are most often used to intimidate and to obscure true meanings

and agendas. These actions can also be a sign of a weak argument that won't hold up to facts or to courteous, informed discourse. Holocaust deniers provide just one example of a loudly expressed, but egregiously erroneous, belief.

Read, view, or listen to a variety of sources with differing viewpoints in order to gather as many facts about issues as you can, and then take care to determine whether someone is stating facts or simply opining. This kind of analysis can be time-consuming and very frustrating. But after careful scrutiny, you can then use all the information you've considered to synthesize your own viewpoint and stance. Understanding your opponent's point of view and then refuting it can be one of the most convincing methods of arguing a thesis. A life-long learner constantly conducts similar internal arguments as he or she weighs information, forges knowledge, and gains understanding.

## Following Paths

This chapter opened with the following affirmation: the things you learn while undertaking a liberal education prepare you for all of the *Final Exams* you'll have to undergo in life. Most importantly, this kind of learning also prepares you to capitalize on unexpected opportunities that will come your way.

Let's revisit my friend Linda one more time. One particular image of Linda stands out in my mind as I think about taking hold of opportunities. The image is a photograph that her family had on display when we all went to Linda's home after her memorial service in San Antonio. In the photograph Linda is walking down a wooded path. Under one arm she is toting the Korean

daughter she and her husband had adopted; in the picture this child is a toddler. It's an undeniably wonderful picture of a mother and daughter. To me, it's even more endearing due to the fact that Linda was quite short in stature, and in the picture her young daughter's legs dangle about halfway to the ground. But one of the most striking things about that photograph is the fact that it embodies the richness Linda was able to enjoy due to her open approach to life and learning. Without her love of learning and her openness to other cultures and new ideas, the life represented by this beautiful little tableau probably never would have happened. One of the most precious relationships in Linda's life—this chosen daughter who has grown into a wonderful, successful, and independent young adult—might never have existed.

So I encourage you to embrace life-long learning like Linda did. Treasure your liberal education and use it as a key to leading a life that is open to all that the world has to offer. In the end, you will have an impact in ways you'd never begin to imagine, both on your own life and on the lives of others.

## #AFTERWORD

Steven Vrooman & Beth Barry

You might think that using #TLUBulldogs in the title of this book is kind of sad. “Look,” you might say, “at those college profs trying their best to be cool and relevant. Do they even know what a hashtag is?”

Well, yes, we do.

The title of this book is a reminder for you. It is also a challenge. #TLUBulldogs is about telling the story of TLU and its students one tweet at a time. Whatever your social network, we’d like you to share your insights and accomplishments, the great variety of experiences that make up a rich college life, this summer, and as you embark on your first year at school.

You already know the world is watching, but here’s something else:

Next summer’s soon-to-be first-year students will read a chapter in the next edition of this book that selects some of the Class of 2019’s tweets, Facebook status updates and Instagram posts for inclusion. Lessons learned? Life-changing experiences? Really excellent chicken-fried steak at Hein Dining Hall? #TLUBulldogs, please.



## AUTHORS

Beth Barry teaches *Frex 134* each fall and currently serves as the Director of the Summer Scholars Academy. In our composition program, she continues to develop “Write to Serve,” which gives students opportunities to use their writing skills in partnership within the surrounding community. She lives in New Braunfels with her husband, Bill, and their teenagers. In her spare time, she enjoys cheering for the Mighty Unicorns, raising money for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and participating in the faith life of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church. She loves to laugh, out loud and as often as possible. She is proud to have had a part in the creation of this book.

Debbie Cottrell began her career in higher education after teaching middle school, working to save old buildings, and writing a biography of the first woman in Texas elected to statewide office. She taught history and held administrative positions in colleges in Missouri, Massachusetts, and North Carolina, before returning home to Texas in 2012 to become Vice President for Academic Affairs at TLU. She’s happy to be back in the land where summer tops all seasons, where nobody says she talks funny, and where the sky is really bigger than anyplace else in the world.

Stuart Dorsey is TLU’s 15<sup>th</sup> president, the first TLU president to play pickup basketball with the faculty and staff. In addition to his many years of service as a college administrator and professor, he worked as an applied economist in the federal government early in his career. His research has been supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Center for Economic Development at West Virginia University, and the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. He is co-author of *Pensions and Productivity* (with Christopher Cornwell and David

*Macpherson). You will not hear him soloing on his drum kit in the president's house on campus because he tries not to play during the study hours of his Centennial Hall neighbors.*

*Judith Dykes-Hoffmann is an associate professor of geography and has taught at TLU since 1997. She continues to dive headfirst into life! When not teaching geography she can often be found dreaming about or planning her next global travel adventure—carpe diem! Her favorite travel memory is the time she put her hand into the Indus River, high in the Himalayas while traveling through Kashmir, India. Her love and passion for learning about the world was a gift given to her by her father who taught her to listen to and be curious about the great outdoors. She spends as much time as she can outside hiking, bird watching, and listening to what nature has to say.*

*Rachel Latimer is a graduate of TLU's class of 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology and a minor in Theology. While at TLU, she was a peer mentor and a member of the TLU Honors Program. She participated in the TLU Choirs and served as president of the Kinesiology Club. She also presented her Honors Senior Capstone Seminar research on obesity at a Texas ACSM Conference. She is currently working towards getting her PhD in Public Health at the UT School of Public Health in San Antonio. In her free time, she loves to sing and play guitar or drums, crochet blankets for her twin nieces, and go hiking with her husband. She cherishes life and all of its wonders and is proud to be a bulldog!*

*Ryan Loyd is a 2002 TLU communication studies graduate. He has worked for more than a decade as an award-winning reporter for radio and television, and is currently a reporter with Texas Public Radio in San Antonio, TX. Ryan is also a regular contributor to NPR. He has covered the Democratic*



*National Convention, numerous political races and the San Antonio city beat. He is a craft beer enthusiast and also enjoys a good Old-Fashioned while out with friends. He and his wife Sarah, also a TLU grad, live in San Antonio with their son Luke.*

*Sarah Loyd is a 2002 TLU graduate with a major in communication studies. She has spent her career working in television news and promotions, public relations, and social media. She is a native Texan and lifelong Lutheran, which made Texas Lutheran a great fit. Sarah and her husband, Ryan, met during freshman orientation at TLU and are proud parents of one son and one dog. Sarah enjoys brewing beer, drinking beer, making people laugh and/or think, and watching the news as a form of entertainment.*

*Ashley Meadows is a TLU alumnus class of 2014. She graduated summa cum laude with a B.A in Chemistry and B.S. in Molecular Biology. While at TLU she served 3 years as a Peer Mentor which was one of the highlights of her TLU experience. She was a member of the TLU cross country and track and field team and contributed to 4 track and field conference championships. Besides holding leadership roles in various honors organizations, Ashley also was an officer in the Pi Rho chemistry club and FCA. In her free time she enjoys spending time with her family and friends, running, baking, and doing arts and crafts. She is passionate about service and helping others and is going to channel that into her future career. After TLU she is attending the physician assistant program at the University of North Texas.*

*Tasha Bryanna Phillips is the daughter of loving parents, Robert and Leah Phillips, and the little sister of Chelsea Phillips. Entering her third academic year in the fall of 2014, Tasha is*

*attending Harlaxton College in England with TLU's Study Abroad program. When on campus, she enjoys being a part of as many organizations as she can to fully embrace the TLU culture and diversify her circle of friends. Tasha is majoring in Business Administration with a specialization in Accountancy. After 5 years with TLU, Tasha dreams of working with one of "the Big Four" local accounting firms. When she's not shoulder-deep in debits and credits, Tasha enjoys getting lost for hours in movie marathons with loved ones.*

*Martha Rinn made a life-changing decision in 1987 to attend graduate school and become a librarian after working in accounting for twelve years. This decision, while driven at first by a keen enjoyment of reading, blossomed into a full-blown love of research and the overall life of information. As she has written in her essay, she feels she made the right decision. In the summer of 2010 she celebrated twenty years of service to TLU. Before becoming the director of the library in 2002 she held positions as readers' services librarian and library system administrator, and also served for a year as an interim associate dean. Over the years she has found many ways to enjoy the fruits of an excellent liberal arts undergraduate education. She and her husband enjoy camping, and on many of their excursions they have been known to play highly-unprofessional bluegrass music with a group of their extended family members.*

*Juan Rodríguez retired as associate professor in the department of English & communication studies. He directed the Center for Mexican American Studies whose mission is, among other things, to teach and promote the history and culture of Mexican Americans as part of a greater effort to better prepare our students for a multicultural world. He enjoys reading, writing, and research. An avid observer of both physical and human nature, he*

*especially enjoys fishing and visiting with his children and grandchildren.*

*Fernando Rover has loved writing since childhood. Growing up in San Antonio, Texas, he learned early that his big head and ears and his ability to observe other people's experiences could be useful. Initially suffering from a speech impediment and reading below average, Fernando hated reading and writing, which is ironic considering his majors are history and English. Around TLU, he works as a Peer Mentor, Writing Tutor, Library Assistant, and Student Worker for both the Department of History and Center for African American Studies. When he is not doing homework or working (which is hardly ever), he can be found singing with the TLU Choirs, representing the TLU student body as a member of the Black & Gold President's Council, writing and publishing articles for the LSL student newspaper, spending time with friends and family, and watching 90's sitcom reruns. A self-proclaimed "renaissance man," Fernando embraces every trial and triumph and tries to live by the golden rule of "anything is possible." He hopes that his part in originating the student-led chapter in this volume epitomizes that.*

*Tiffany Sia is an associate professor in the department of psychology. She is also known as the Princess of Darkness because she is both legally blind and has an interest in some of the darker areas of psychology (prejudice, aggression, and substance abuse treatment). She is usually lurking in her Langner office between teaching classes in social psychology, developmental psychology (birth to death), human sexuality (yeah, there is a class) and psychology & life. She did her dissertation on prejudice and worked on improving substance abuse treatment in the criminal justice system before coming to TLU. She is glad to announce that college students are much better behaved than the criminal population. Her goals include enabling student to use*

*psychology in a positive way to change their own and other people's lives. Favorite hobbies include knitting, Greek mythology, homebrewing, traveling, and creating experiments. Although she is well aware that everyone is a cognitive miser, she would still like people to reduce this tendency.*

*Abigail Taylor was homeschooled until coming to TLU in 2013. Shortly after explaining that being homeschooled gave her a genuine passion for learning, she feels the need to add that she is also an avid Potterhead, a believer in evolution, and a supporter of same-sex marriage, just to break some of the stereotypes associated with homeschooling. She is both extremely excited and proud to be published in the TLU reader as a freshman. One day she hopes to be able to write for a living. Her other great loves include her family, reading, and music. Abigail is an English major, and a member of the TLU choirs and TLU Honors program.*

*Steven Vrooman is a professor of communication studies. He has taught courses on everything from the apocalypse to zombies. Students have long claimed that he ruins their lives by destroying their childhoods in his pop culture classes. They also claim that he makes it impossible for them to look at Power Point ever again after his public speaking classes. In his new book, The Zombie Guide to Public Speaking, he finally unites these super powers into one fiendish device with which to rule the world. He has supplemented this reign of terror by recently achieving his childhood dream of appearing in a Star Wars movie, albeit as a talking head, in the documentary The People Versus George Lucas.*

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