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### Analytical Narrative Essay

The humanities as a field covers broad strokes of the human experience. As one with an interdisciplinary academic background, the completion of the MA in Humanities program has allowed my scholarship to reach new heights, while at the same time igniting the spark of desire to seek more. To demonstrate an engagement with program objectives, I am creating a portfolio containing five items from five different courses from the program. These include a multimedia presentation on a mythological character, an essay about television in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, an essay analyzing time travel rules in pop culture, an essay analyzing a popular television character's development, and an essay discussing the creativity during the Renaissance period. This portfolio will demonstrate my engagement with the human experience by applying classical logic, historical awareness, and scientific methods to examine how individuals contributed to the world in which they lived.

This essay will discuss the artifacts provided in the portfolio including how these items meet program objectives. The program objectives will be provided in an appendix. Throughout the essay they will be referred to by number. For example, in discussing one artifact, I might refer to "Objective 3" in the discussion. The objective itself can be referenced using the table in the appendix.

## **Clytemnestra in Art**

The first item included in the portfolio is a multimedia presentation on Clytemnestra. This item was created for HUMN 520 Antiquity and the Medieval World. This presentation specifically focuses on Clytemnestra's role in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and how she is depicted in art. Despite being a work of the ancient world, *Agamemnon* survives today and is still being performed. Clytemnestra's appearance in the play, as well as her appearance in art, has changed over time. Discussion of Clytemnestra's change in appearance demonstrates Objective 4. For example, in the presentation I note, "Clytemnestra has been said from her first appearance in surviving written works to reflect badly on all women" (Brent, "Clytemnestra in Art"). Her appearance as the murderer of her husband in both text and art has allowed creators to engage with the emotions associated with such evil acts and portray those emotions in different media.

In addition to discussing the use of emotion in the art, creators have been able to display Clytemnestra as an individual of her circumstances. Despite being a queen, she is not without flaws. Discussion of her character aligns with Objective 5. As noted in the presentation, "Clytemnestra here was clearly a victim of societal expectations, and I think each of these depictions does a pretty good job of showing her as not only the victim, but also as the murderer" (Brent, "Clytemnestra in Art"). Even as a mythological character she provides a connection to others who may face similar situations. Aeschylus' work in his play, and the many artists and creators who have adapted his work into new media, allow viewers and scholars to continue to learn from the human experience with regard to society and culture.

## The Creativity of the Renaissance

The second item included in the portfolio is an essay written for HUMN 530 The Renaissance. This essay engages with the works of multiple artists and authors. It provides an overview of Renaissance creativity, while demonstrating how different creators envisioned their respective works on similar subjects in various ways. Furthermore, the essay discusses how control over the artistic creation shifted from patron-led to creator-led. As creators excelled, they no longer had to subject themselves to the whimsy of their patrons. With creative control, artists could thrive. Understanding such concepts demonstrates Objective 2. Artists were able to think independently, and contemporary scholars can continue to review these creative decisions. In the essay I discuss the character of David, and I note that “In choosing to show David as an adult, Michelangelo exercised his creative impulse, and in doing so, created a work of art that all can identify with. As adults we can aspire to be heroic like David” (Brent, “The Creativity of the Renaissance”, 6). Michelangelo, therefore, has allowed viewers to find awe in his works for centuries.

Michelangelo was but one creator to highlight during such an artistically driven period. Others who were painters, sculptors, poets, and playwrights, made equally powerful works. The creativity of these individuals resulted in growing fame and popularity. Such discussion highlights Objective 5 once more. I note that “As artists during the Renaissance grew in skill and attracted more patrons, their influence over their own art grew, while the patron’s influence lessened” (Brent, “The Creativity of the Renaissance”, 2). These individual creators were developing their own power over their craft, and they had the authority to make their own decisions over their work, whereas they were not able to do the same in other areas of politics and society.

## **A Comparative Analysis of Time Travel Rules in Select Works of Popular Fiction**

The third item included comes from HUMN 550 Evolution of Earth and Universe. This essay examines time travel in multiple fictional works including books, television, movies, and video games. It compares the fictional rules of time travel in the various works discussed and applies real-world scientific theory to the validity of those rules. The essay demonstrates the application of three program objectives.

Time travel is an element that allows characters to engage with different periods of human history. In doing so, however, these characters have the ability to potentially change the past and future. An awareness of this power to change historical and contemporary outcomes is evident throughout popular fiction, and an analysis of a character's decisions helps to demonstrate the application of Objective 3. For example, I noted that "The Grandmother Paradox is also explored in some of the works. Doc Brown warns Mary McFly about interfering in the past, and when he unintentionally does, his siblings, depicted in a photo, start to fade from existence" (Brent, "A Comparative Analysis of Time Travel Rules in Select Works of Popular Fiction", 17). The examination of characters' decision-making and actions in the essay helps to demonstrate the application of logic to their respective circumstances. Furthermore, the tropes that appear in such works go on to affect the knowledge of the consumers of such fiction.

While most Americans are not experts in quantum physics, many do have a basic understanding of scientific principles due to their consuming of popular media. Though not all of this knowledge is accurate, it demonstrates how popular works can serve to educate the general public. The essay describes such education, stating in my abstract that "The use of time travel as a storytelling device engages the audience in the narrative, and while not serving as an accurate scientific model, does allow to the audience to develop a basic understanding of the science

related to time travel” (Brent, “A Comparative Analysis of Time Travel Rules in Select Works of Popular Fiction”, 2). The essay’s engagement with the rules of time travel and the application of real theory demonstrates its application of Objective 6. Individuals have gained knowledge of science through popular media.

### ***Xena: Warrior Princess and Darwinian Analysis***

This next item continues an examination of popular media, though it focuses on one television show rather than multiple works. Written for HUMN 551 Evolution of Life and Intelligence, the essay analyzes the character of Xena from the 90s television fantasy show *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Over the course of the show viewers see Xena undergo a transformation from a brutal warlord to a champion of justice. Through the application of Darwinian theory, one can examine these changes and the factors that caused them.

Darwin’s work involved a study of environmental effects on development. Xena’s environment certainly affected her own changes, and analysis of such demonstrates Objective 3. For example, I note that “As the titular character, Xena, along with her companions, undergo radical changes, often as a means to survive the world in which they live” (Brent, “*Xena: Warrior Princess and Darwinian Analysis*,” 1). Despite being well-trained and full of knowledge, Xena continually adapts throughout the show. Different challenges in various parts of the world require her to think critically and adjust strategies. Examining these changes within her throughout the show highlights the 3<sup>rd</sup> Objective.

The examination of such a character allows for a study of humanity as well. While Xena is adapting to her environment, reviewing her journey allows the viewer to understand their own journeys. The discussion of Xena’s character growth demonstrates Objective 4. In discussing

Xena's journey from warlord to hero, I note that "This change of heart leads Xena down a path of redemption that is the focus of her own show. Though her development is often shown through flashbacks, present-day dialogue also provides viewers with the necessary knowledge to understand Xena's behaviors" (Brent, "*Xena: Warrior Princess* and Darwinian Analysis," 1). One can see the human experience, including parallels to their own, through this character's struggles.

### **Pushback on TV: How Television Challenged a Conservative Revival**

The fifth and final item included in the portfolio also focuses on popular media. This essay was written for HIST 557 History and Popular Culture. In this research essay, I review the politics of the conservative revival of the 1980s and examine how television shows challenged the messaging of this revival. The essay incorporates storylines from popular shows like *The Golden Girls*, *Designing Women*, and *Roseanne*, as well as children's shows like *Captain Planet*. I reviewed scripts for numerous episodes and examined speeches from political leaders of the era. Doing so demonstrates Objective 1. The writers of the shows, often intentionally, sought to provide new perspectives. As noted in the essay, "Through doing so, these shows turned entertainment into education, carefully, and sometimes blatantly, introducing thought-provoking content to family audiences" (Brent, "Pushback on TV," 4). Much like ancient philosophers or Enlightenment thinkers, these writers challenged social norms while encouraging conversation.

Examining these shows also allowed for the analysis of social systems of the period. For example, I discuss *Designing Women* where I note that "Making the women business owners who employed a male greatly contrasted with the societal expectations of the era" (Brent, "Pushback on TV," 5). The show's character placement gave power to a group that had not traditionally held it, serving as an example for viewers. Discussion of these power dynamics

within the essay demonstrates its application of Objective 5. Characters in the shows were also able to push for their own individualism, despite contemporary real-world desires of those in power.

## **Conclusion**

Through the course of the MA in Humanities program, I have completed numerous activities tied to the program's objectives. The five selected items described in this essay demonstrate the application of those objectives. Though each item does not necessarily meet all six program objectives, they address individual objectives that collectively show progress towards mastery of the six objectives. The items also cover a range of topics and represent five different courses in the program. Their inclusion in the portfolio represents my engagement with the humanities, and it demonstrates my connection to the study of the human experience through literature, history, science, and more.

Works Cited

Brent, Matt. "Clytemnestra in Art." 3 March 2024.

Brent, Matt. "A Comparative Analysis of Time Travel Rules in Select Works of Popular Fiction."  
21 December 2025.

Brent, Matt. "The Creativity of the Renaissance." 29 June 2025.

Brent, Matt. "Pushback on TV: How Television Challenged a Conservative Revival." 24 January  
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Brent, Matt. "*Xena: Warrior Princess* and Darwinian Analysis." 12 October 2025.

## Appendix

### American Public University

#### Master of Arts in Humanities – Program Objectives

Objective 1 - Critically analyze literary works for their contribution to the body of human knowledge.

Objective 2 - Articulate written positions on ideas that stem from the great works of human thought.

Objective 3 - Apply classical logic to historical and contemporary issues of human behavior, society, and civilization.

Objective 4 - Examine the human experience from multidimensional perspectives from antiquity to modern times through examination of the leading authors and works of each age.

Objective 5 - Analyze the origins and implications of the concept of individualism as it applies in concepts of tradition, power, society, and culture.

Objective 6 - Use advanced science and social science knowledge, methods, and logic to inform and influence scientific and/or social processes and structures.