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Portfolio Cover Letter
English 101
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Brenton Boyd

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In addition to the fundamental literary, analytical, and critical thinking skills that the elementary English courses establish, this section of English 101 enriches its students with a working knowledge of various historical and contemporary issues regarding race and gender. It connects these topics to the idea of language and its perpetuation of violence. From Franz Fanon to Beyoncé, and Jamaica Kincaid to Morgan Freeman, students have received an eclectic yet interconnected group of informants to help accomplish the goals stated above. Through weekly lectures and discussions, as well as assigned readings and viewings, I have been exposed to a variety of themes including colonialism, blackness, feminism, and American immigration. Moreover, I have been able to consider how these topics are present in my personal life or how I may see them in the communities surrounding me. In English 101, I have furthered my system of values, especially regarding issues of race and gender, and I have been able to elaborate on such beliefs through various assignments, including weekly discussion posts and papers.

Professor Boyd assigns texts that give me a working knowledge of both historical and contemporary systems and cultural identities. First, students are provided with information about the different philosophies at play in the events that transpired during the Age of Discovery. Our reading of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians* (1547) provides insight as to why the European colonizers felt that their actions were rational: "The man rules over the woman, the adult over the child, the father over his children. That is to say, the

most powerful and most perfect rule over the weakest and most imperfect.”¹ (Sepúlveda, 1) This text is valuable because it allows students to juxtapose the various perspectives of those involved in these occurrences, and it facilitates generalizations about European and Indigenous identities. Because of this foundation, I have been able to draw direct connections between these events and the composition of modern societies. When we studied the modern Caribbean identity, I better understood the deep-set historical roots that inform the present. I first read Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* during my senior year of high school. Upon returning to this text in this course after reading Sepúlveda’s work, among others’, I gained a better understanding of the historical and social contexts that are crucial for a thorough analysis of the book. Although I initially had impressions after my first read about what Kincaid asks of her readers—to consider one’s role as a tourist, first and foremost—I saw that she had much more to say upon this second read. I further considered the looming role that Britain has over its former colonies, and this reestablished the sentiment that the effects of global colonization are ever so present, despite many individuals in power ignoring these issues and the violence they perpetuated.

To share my opinions about our texts and associated social and ethical beliefs, I have primarily taken to the weekly discussion posts on Canvas. I wrote about personal anecdotes and analyses of texts, alike. I have contemplated aspects of my identity—I am a white, bilingual Spanish and English speaker with a blended family—and how they relate to our readings and in-class conversations. Our viewing of Netflix’s “Living Undocumented” (2019) profoundly affected me, reinforcing my belief that no human is illegal, nor should any immigrant have to live in constant fear and danger because of their status. After witnessing the devastation caused

¹ de Sepúlveda, Juan Ginés. *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians (1547)*. pnhs.psd202.org/documents/khill/1567600261.pdf.

by the unethical separation of families in America, I became eager to put my thoughts into words. In my discussion post, I stated, “Throughout my life, I’ve been able to experience firsthand the utter goodness of the people in these marginalized communities, and it deeply pains me that others don’t see the same, and thus, they are treated substantially worse than me by those we have chosen to lead our nation and others in our local communities, alike.”

Despite my overall success in these weekly posts and readings, I have been most proud of my diagnostic essay thus far. For this assignment, I completed a visual analysis of *Amistad* (1997) and related it to the themes of race, language, and violence that the course aims to deconstruct. Throughout the essay, I worked to prove the following claims: “In *Amistad*, the adoption of anglicized versions of language and religion—English and Christianity, respectively—is necessary for Cinque and his African counterparts to obtain their physical and spiritual freedom. Yet in accepting them, they compromise their own native cultures, an inevitable effect of colonialism.” Although more complex than most other essays I have written, I adopted a similar process of reviewing my notes and using them to form opinions, writing a detailed outline, and filling it in, connecting everything to the thesis statement above. Since I allowed myself a lot of time, I never felt stressed, and I was able to complete a thorough editing process as well. Upon receiving my grade of an A, I realized that I had accomplished a piece of which I could be proud. After hearing very often in previous English courses that I struggled to make my ideas clear and concise, I emphasized a review at the sentence level to confirm that each statement was comprehensible and relevant in proving the claims. Not that the grade was my sole motivation, but it was certainly reassuring to get such glowing feedback, as it restored my confidence in my writing abilities. Since I am heavily considering pursuing a career in the legal

field, it is comforting to know that I possess the capabilities to write an effective paper and exceeds expectations.

After receiving this praise, I felt more confident in approaching the writing process for my final paper. Perhaps the most daunting part was simply the page requirement—although I have written longer works, it had never been explicitly asked of me. Nevertheless, I've found that to not be an issue. I attribute this in part to the outline that I created for the paper before its composition. This strategy provided me with the ability to map out my ideas and confirm that they were all connected and important. Regarding the theme, I used the notion mentioned above about the juxtaposition of historical and contemporary perspectives as a baseline, and the texts that I chose are Sepúlveda's aforementioned text, as well as two Spanish language films called *Eréndira la indomable* (2006) and *También la lluvia* (2010). As a Spanish and Linguistics intended major, I have an interest in the analysis of language and its social connotations, on par with the course objectives. This background has, again, rendered me successful in the production of my final assignment.

Throughout the semester, my consideration and deconstruction of themes related to language and violence have allowed me to meet the course goals and expectations. This mindset has driven me to produce two lengthy works on the subject matter, both of which I consider to be successful and insightful. The skills that I have developed in English 101 will not only ease my writing process in many other college courses, but it will also help me work to establish personal values, specifically concerning matters of race and gender. In sum, I expect to continue to develop my analytical eye and writing skills through college and beyond, and I wish to live by my morals that this course has reaffirmed.

