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Editor's Introduction

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

By Jerry Stinnett

In the following pages you'll find wonderful examples of many different kinds of writing: argumentative essays, literary and cultural analyses, and studies of problems facing our world today. While their topics and aims differ, they are alike in their excellence. These eight essays were produced by students in Duquesne University's First-Year Writing program and the Honors Program, and they won top honors in our annual competition. Of the many essays submitted to this competition, these were the finest—and they truly are excellent examples of what motivated, talented, hard-working students can produce.

The faculty and graduate students of the English department teach the first-year writing classes ("Thinking and Writing Across the Curriculum" and "Imaginative Literature and Critical Writing"), but the students in the classes come from across the university. This year the prizewinners represent three of the University's nine undergraduate schools — Nursing, Liberal Arts, and Health Sciences — as well as the Honors Program. Our goal for the first-year writing classes is to provide a space where Duquesne's diverse students come together and have a common intellectual experience. The students here examined everything from what novels like *The Black Eyed* and Claudia Rankine's poem/art piece *Citizen* have to show us about oppression and resistance, to the ethical problems of cultural-political appropriation, to the creation of "tiny" villages as a means of empowerment for the homeless, to rapper Eminem's rhetorical construction of his identity, and a range of other important and interesting topics. Our students are engaging with the world, with creative texts, and with the conditions of their own lives. They are doing what students in a first-year writing class are supposed to do, and doing it impressively.

Although excellent, these essays are not *perfect*; I have declined to line-edit them because I want the Duquesne community to see what its first-year writers are actually doing—and to show our incoming freshmen what they can realistically aspire to produce. These essays show minds struggling with complicated issues; they are a snapshot of a *process* of thinking.

I'd like to thank all of the graduate students and faculty who undertook the task of judging these essays. This year, our judges were Rochel Gasson, Rebecca May, Emad Mirmotahari, Maureen Gallagher, Stuart Kurland, and myself. Thanks to all of the judges for their hard work, and particular thanks to Shannon Small and Shawntaye Sledge for their admirable administrative work. As ever, I'd also like to thank the Office of the Provost, whose support keeps this contest and journal going; Michelle Boehm and the staff of the Public Affairs office, who design and produce this journal; and of course all of the magnificent instructors and students in Duquesne University's First-Year Writing program.