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BECOMING GIANTS THEMSELVES

ADVOCATING FOR GREATER INCLUSION OF STUDENTS'
SCHOLARLY IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES IN ACADEMIA

A Thesis Presented

by

Richard Parlato

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education
Specializing in Interdisciplinary Studies

May, 2020

Defense Date: March 19, 2020
Thesis Examination Committee:

Robert Nash, Ed.D., Advisor
Katharine Shepherd, Ed.D., Chairperson
LTC Jeremy Pitaniello
Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

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May 2020

Abstract

Introduction and Purpose

Institutions of higher learning have been a bulwark against regression for centuries and have safeguarded the knowledge of our past so that we may learn from it, and are not doomed to repeat it. These remarkable establishments at once serve to broaden our scope of worldly perception, as well as specializing us so that we may find our particular niches in an ever *complexifying* society.

Attending a college or university has often become expected. An undergraduate degree is increasingly being seen as an essential ingredient in the mixture needed for success. This is due to many factors. To the realm of business, a college degree is just another statistic that companies can use to further insulate themselves from risk. Our culture's perpetual desire for status may be another factor; *if everyone else seems to be attaining this new plateau, how can I allow myself to be left out?* Humans want to expand the way they see the world. It is this notion of going to the academy to learn how to think, rather than simply to imbibe new information, that is imperiled. Within institutions of higher learning, there is a reverence placed upon the great minds of the past. It is Isaac Newton who said, "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." It is for this reason students are encouraged to look backward and reflect before they set their eyes on the path ahead. The question we must ask is, *have we gone too far?*

Overview and Mechanics of the Current Academic Paradigm

What does it mean to go 'too far'? Many would argue: *How can we overstate the importance that these remarkable people and ideas have had on education?* The problem is not that we encourage students to reflect upon the past before moving forward, but that the academy as a whole stifles the creativity and unique expression of those students by indirectly telling them they can never hope to measure up to that gilded past. This stifling is all too easy to miss. The issue arises when an institution dogmatically requires students to *rely* on the knowledge and great thinkers of the past, as opposed to *leveraging* them.

Impact of the Current Academic Paradigm

Were these moments interspersed sparingly throughout an academic career, there would be no issue. But because of the constant inundation of these messages, an undercurrent forms. *You're not good enough on your own. Your ideas don't matter. You'll never be as accomplished as those who came before you.* This is the message we are sending to our students when we force them to constantly rely on and *prioritize* the works of those who have come before them. We are telling them that they are not enough by themselves, and that their own ideas, even if they may be influenced by reflecting on the past's great minds, are still vastly inferior by default. In doing so, we are failing our young knowledge seekers.

Proposed Changes

We must shift the current paradigm of the academy to place the focus on the ideas and thoughts of the students themselves. The classroom must move towards experiential learning, and further from an almost absolute focus on the past. This will give students essential confidence in their own ideas and minds. We have to remember to tell students that they one day can become giants themselves.

Research Methodology

The research for this thesis consisted of: interviews with various members of the academy, and my observations as a facilitator of a discussion group among students, faculty, and staff. I examined these experiences to determine: if this phenomenon presents itself, what shapes it takes, its impacts on the academy, and what can be done to mediate those impacts. This forms the body of my research.

Audience

The audience for this thesis is the current professoriate of the academy.

Acknowledgements

To my mother, who has always understood my brain, and has time and time again leapt through fire in order to make sure I always had room to grow and the challenges to get me there. She never dismisses an idea, instead giving it what it needs to blossom; this nurturing environment is what gave me the courage to take a thought, no matter how unpopular or unformed it might be, and turn it into something unique.

~

To my godfather, who never tires of being a sounding board for all of my thoughts and ramblings. His sincere love of dialoguing with me has led to the fruition of more ideas than I can count; without this contribution, my thesis would surely not exist.

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Methodology

Overview

Throughout this essay, an observant reader will undoubtedly notice something, or more specifically, notice something that is not there to be noted. The expected plethora of literature references that traditionally accompanies this type of academic endeavor has been tweaked so as to fall more in line with the ethos of the piece itself. If the crux of this entire work is to argue that the modern academy enforces too dedicated a focus on the written works of the past, then it would be gallingly hypocritical for that paradigm to be reflected here. Instead, this thesis will be strengthened by a diverse portfolio of reference materials, ranging from traditional literature, to in-person interviews, to personal experience. The diversity of the source materials will serve two functions simultaneously. First, having a wide variety of types of supporting material will bring an otherwise absent depth of field to the work; having multiple perspectives conveyed through different lenses, spanning numerous decades, will lead to a much greater understanding of the topics being covered. Second, this essay will serve as a template to prove that solid, quality, and rigorous academic work is indeed possible when conducted outside the paradigm being advocated against.

In order to showcase that possibility, I will be utilizing Scholarly Personal Narrative (or SPN) Writing. Developed by Robert Nash, SPN Writing is a form of academic writing that seeks to combine the traditional analysis of other works of scholarship with the telling of personal stories. These two elements are combined within a narrative framework that allows the writer's own experiences and individual voice to seamlessly intermingle with the more traditional elements of writing typically seen in the academy. For example, SPN Writing permits, and even encourages, the use of 'I' within the body of text. I can speak to you, the reader, directly rather than always maintaining a cold distance.

SPN Writing is essential to probing the topics investigated in this thesis because it allows for the personal experiences and expertise of the current generation of scholars to come together alongside that of

the past's. Being able to fairly examine both sources of information in a setting where each are given an equal opportunity to be freely expressed will be the only way to truly understand the current situation.

Interviews

Interviews make up the informational foundation of this thesis. They were chosen for this central role because they provide one of the best possible glimpses into the current state of the academy from the perspective of the group who are responsible for shepherding the paradigms being discussed: the professoriate. Rather than plucking excerpts from the carefully curated books and essays published by such individuals, which would result in an (intentionally) narrow perspective, these interviews capture the real-time, day to day thoughts of professors who are currently on the front lines of education. Such candid responses evoke a much more genuine picture of college life and rigor, and that is what we need in order to uncover the truth of whether or not the current state of things is indeed harmful.

To this end, three individuals have been selected for the interviews. For the purposes of gaining as much insight as possible, they have been chosen from distinctly different stages of professorship. Doctor Robert Nash has had over half a century of experience as a professor, teaching at multiple universities, and has even pioneered an entirely new form of scholarly writing (which incidentally, this paper is using). Doctor Charles (Chuck) Bashaw, while still an accomplished professor in his own right, falls more toward the average experience of professors at the undergraduate level. His perspective is our middle marker. Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Pitaniello diverges from our other two interviewees, in that teaching at the collegiate level is something new for him. As the current Professor of Military Science at the University of Vermont, he has put his career in Military Intelligence on hold to serve his country a bit differently in preparing the next generation of would-be officers to take on the challenges of leading soldiers in the Army, as well as life after college. Since this is his first foray into the professoriate, his views will represent a rare glimpse into the mind of one who, while steeped in the academy, lacks the prolonged exposure to an environment that can lead to homogeneous thought.

Dr. Robert Nash

Robert (who vastly prefers his first name) has been teaching in higher education for 52 years. This is no small feat, as he informed me that less than five percent of professors make it to their half century milestone. This lengthy tenure in the academy has earned him six degrees, each serving as another lens through which to understand his many years of experience. He is also the inventor of the Scholarly Personal Narrative Writing style, which blends the intimacy and personality of storytelling with the traditional rigor and straightforwardness of classic academic writing. Throughout his years, Robert has taught mainly humanities courses where he has helped his students discover meaning as well as new knowledge. He is adamant that meaning making is essential to a holistic education.

Robert was chosen to be an interviewee because his experiences place him in a category all his own. Between creating a new style of academic writing and spending over a century in the academy, his perspectives will undoubtedly serve as a foundation for the work to come.

Dr. Charles Bashaw

Chuck (who also prefers an unconventional form of address) Bashaw is a lover of written record. He began his academic journey at Hampshire College, where he earned what is essentially a Bachelor's in Comparative Literature—essentially, because Hampshire allows its students to build their own programs from the ground up, leaving them without official names. This let Chuck dedicatedly follow his passions and gain a more concrete understanding of what he wanted his next step to be. After discussing various options with his professors, he moved on to complete a Master's in History at U Mass Amherst, followed up by a PhD with dual concentrations in History and History & Science at Wisconsin Maddison University. With his degrees in hand, Chuck turned to become a member of the professoriate, and has been teaching for over 15 years.

Chuck was chosen for this project because he represents, in many ways, the professorial everyman; he isn't just starting his career, nor is he a semi-centurion. His views—the views of someone

who has spent a considerable time in the academy without becoming an outlier, are essential to understand in order to explore this topic to the degree it deserves. Chuck is also a student of history, giving him a very relevant perspective on the importance of the works of the past, and their place within higher education.

Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Pitaniello

Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Pitaniello is the outlier in our trio of interviewees, as his primary background is not that of higher education. While he has a staunch history in higher education as a student with a Bachelor's in Business Administration from Castleton University and a Master's from Central Michigan in Administration, his primary professional and educational focus is in the military. LTC Pitaniello has been serving in the United States Army for over 20 years. As a commissioned officer in Military Intelligence, he has spent many long years honing his critical thinking and data analysis skills, much as a professor would, but through a different process. More recently, LTC Pitaniello has taken up the position of Professor of Military Science at the University of Vermont's ROTC program, where he is charged with shaping young cadets (typically undergraduate students) into the future leaders the Army will need. One of his primary duties within this role is to serve as the professor for the classes senior ROTC students must take. These classes involve introductions to the roles and responsibilities of junior officers, as well as more dynamic subjects such as how to apply the concepts of duty, intelligence, morality, and history to one's role as a military officer.

LTC Pitaniello's inclusion in my research is important for two reasons, the first being that he rounds out the trinity of experience levels among the interviewed professors: he is new to the academy as a professor, and therefore his opinions on the relevant subjects will be drawn from a different perspective than his more storied counterparts. The second reason is that he brings with him an entirely new lens through which to understand the concepts being wrestled with. Being able to lend his professional and military experience to a problem that is very much an academy-specific issue (though still present in the military in its own form) will undoubtedly yield new avenues of inspection that would otherwise be left undiscovered.

Personal Experiences

I am lucky enough that I have had the opportunity to spend a good deal of time in the academy; I earned a Bachelor's degree in Communications with specializations in Information Technology, Marketing, and Public Relations, and am currently pursuing a Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in Education. Throughout all of this time in the academy, I have been a firsthand witness to the phenomenon described throughout this text—I have been confronted with the expectation to analyze and reflect on the works and thinkers of the past, without being given the freedom to take their ideas and use them as the foundation to create my own. I have also seen students receive praise for their usage of the words of others, as opposed to their counterparts who elected to use their own. These experiences were what originally led me to discover the issues that I'll be exploring throughout this thesis, and they will serve as a relevant data point; they will specifically possess a greater degree of depth than could be produced by second or third-hand research, as all the details of the situations are available to me without compromise.

In addition to my traditional experiences as a student of the academy, I have also had the privilege to dabble in a much more experimental form of discourse within the same environment. During my time as an undergraduate student, I co-founded something called Roundtable, with the help of a professor, which I now co-facilitate. Roundtable is an in person discussion forum for students, faculty, and staff alike to sit down together and discuss absolutely anything. The goal of the project was to get these groups of individuals interacting outside the classroom setting, so that more free flowing discussions could take place, with the hopes that the different factions of the college would grow closer together. By and large, Roundtable was successful in its endeavors; members from all three groups attended and engaged in conversations covering a breadth of topics that dwarfed the subjects covered in the classroom. Everything ranging from current events, the sciences, philosophy, theology, history, popular and counterculture, and more were discussed in new and exciting ways. People would leave each weekly installment of Roundtable with new knowledge, and often new interests they would continue to pursue.

Roundtable is an excellent microcosm of what can occur when students are given the freedom to place their own ideas and thoughts central to the work at hand, while allowing the thoughts and works of others to take on a supporting role, rather than the inverse.

Literature

While there may currently be an over-emphasis and over-reliance on the works and thinkers of the past, this does not change the fact that they are indispensably potent and insightful resources. Finding grounding in the works of others is often the springboard from which great ideas are born; those same works can also help to shore up an already well developed concept. It is for these reasons that in addition to interviews and personal experiences, the following books will also show their influence throughout the course of this thesis.

Man's Search For Meaning

Victor Frankl is a man whose life defies proper description. As a survivor of the Nazi death camps during the Holocaust, there are no words in the English language possessing sufficient weight to paint a picture of the time he spent in hell on earth. His book, however, is probably as close an approximation as we will ever have. Frankl walks us through the horrible events he endured, and what they drove him to do. A psychologist before his ordeal, Frankl's exposure to the terror of the Nazis gave birth to his greatest creation: Logotherapy. Logotherapy is centered around the belief that in order for an individual to thrive, they must have meaning in their lives, and must understand that meaning. It is grounded in existential analysis and self-understanding.

Frankl's contribution to psychology finds relevance in this thesis because psychological health and academic investment share a key requirement: meaning. A student will be much more inclined to delve into and care about material that means something to them on a personal level, as opposed to a curriculum that is cold and distant. We will be exploring the connections between making meaning through education, and students having the freedom to pursue their own ideas.

One Key: SEE, One Key: DO, Accessing Your Brain's Creative Abilities

Cinse Bonino is an expert in creativity and conceptual development. She received a Bachelor's in Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and a Master's also in Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Afterwards, she spent four years teaching primary and middle school before eventually moving on to teach at the academy. She devoted 15 years as a professor teaching creativity and other critical thinking-centric subjects, and 12 years running the Center for Instructional Practice at Champlain College, which focused on helping other professors to better reach their students and find more successful teaching methods. She has since gone on to publish three books, with the abovementioned being her most recent title.

Bonino's work on creativity speaks to what it takes to cultivate creativity, something many mistakenly believe to be an innate trait. Ensuring young students learn how to access their creative potential gives them a crucial tool in their intellectual arsenal, and how the professoriate decide to structure their students' interface with class materials will have a sizable impact on the success or failure of that pursuit. Bonino's book also plays a role in tandem with Frankl's work on meaning through Logotherapy. Having the freedom to chase ideas born from one's own creativity brings the personal motivations to the forefront. This in turn allows for the students' personal meaning to shine.

Influential Works

In addition to the literature listed above, there have been many other pieces whose contents have influenced the writing of this thesis. While not directly present in the form of citations, references, or quotes, the marks left on this work are significant enough that they bear naming. The central themes in many of these books aided in solidifying the eventual form of the underlying currents of this essay. All of these titles will be present in the bibliography section near the end.

Statements of Principles and Themes

The current state of the academy possesses within itself a fatal flaw. This flaw manifests itself in how the professoriate and student body interact both with the material they are presented within the context of the classroom, as well as with each other. Since their inception, institutions of higher learning have built their foundations upon the great thinkers, researchers, and creators present amongst the ranks of their ancestors. The works produced by these giants have served as a light to show the way forward, as a compass to determine the best path, and as inspiration for the students of the present to draw from, hopefully one day becoming giants themselves.

Somewhere along this road, a warping of that ideology began to take shape. No longer were the great minds of the past seen mainly as the primary foundation for the academy to build upon to continue the quest for knowledge—this all important function was still certainly being carried out, but a new perspective began to form. Rather than holding the belief that the greats of generations past should serve as the springboard by which the aspiring young minds of today could reach loftier heights, that school of thought began to be replaced with a dogma extolling the prowess of the past at the expense of the present. Students began to receive the message from their professors (sometimes explicitly, at others implicitly) that they could never hope to measure up to the level of work on show by the past's great minds. This is the flaw that persists within the academy, and it is this we will be exploring in depth. We will be examining: if it presents itself, what shapes it takes, and what impacts it has on different groups within the academy.

Does it Present Itself?

Before we begin to analyze the phenomenon of students being disadvantaged by the academy's dogmatic insistence regarding the over-use and hyper focus on the materials and minds of the past, or what we'll call *past-perfect prejudice*, we must first ascertain whether or not that phenomenon actually exists. In order to do this, two distinct approaches will be taken. In the first method, I will tap the well of my own experiences as an undergraduate student to determine if I have ever personally encountered this behavior. I will review my time across the years spent earning my Bachelor's degree to find examples of the

professoriate requiring me to participate in giving preferential treatment to the ideas and works of the past over my own creations. The second method will involve drawing from the other side of the equation: the professors themselves. I have interviewed three different professors at three distinctly separate stages of their academic careers. Their experiences will further illuminate for us if such a thing is occurring. Between these two methods, a clear picture should present itself as to whether or not *past-perfect prejudice* does indeed exist.

Personal Experience

During my time as an undergraduate student, I pursued a Bachelor's degree in Communications, with specializations in Information Technology, Marketing, and Public Relations. I chose this path because I have always been fascinated by how people work; I want to understand the *why* behind why people do what they do, and think the way they think. Further, I wanted to be able to take that skillset, once sufficiently honed, and turn it into a career which I could be truly passionate about. All of this landed me in the field of communications, a very general and open-ended area of education, to say the least. Because of this, and my general unsurety as to what exactly I wanted to do with my life moving forward, I took a very scattershot approach to my courses, culminating in my very diverse specializations. The other thing afforded to me by my inability to pick a single area of study, was to be given a view into a multitude of teaching styles and schools of thought within the academy as a whole; professors who had spent their entire career in marketing or advertising had a markedly different ethos when compared to someone whose professional world revolved around computer science. My required humanities education provided yet another set of distinct and new ideologies for me to add to my quickly growing repertoire. By the time I walked across the stage with my degree in hand, I had been exposed to a considerably wide gamut of opinions, styles, and teaching frameworks. This allows me a fairly unique perspective by which to assess whether or not our phenomenon in question exists.

The question remains: was I exposed to professors requiring that I give preferential emphasis to the words and ideas of the past's great minds over my own? Was I forced to over-rely on the experience of others, as opposed to being allowed to utilize my own freely? In short, the answer is yes. I experienced this

phenomenon across all of the various disciplines I pursued during my time as an undergraduate student. Specifically, four distinct forms of *past-perfect prejudice* were evident to me.

The first manifestation I encountered was also perhaps the most common, occurring throughout all of the areas of study I engaged in: source requirements in academic papers. Source requirements are not in and of themselves a negative aspect to writing within the academy. Having an outside validation of one's work is at times useful or even essential to the solidity of the paper in question. Once again, as is becoming a theme throughout this thesis, the following is a case of something which has a logical home in the academy being taken to an illogical extreme. When presented with source requirements, I was almost always given a hard number that I was required to satisfy. In order for a paper to be eligible for a certain letter grade, it *had to* contain at least X many sources, and regardless of other factors or merits, attaining that letter grade was impossible without the required number of outside sources. This over-simplistic approach to encouraging students to imbue their papers with outside sources sends the message that those sources are more important (because of an undeniably more concrete impact) to the success of the paper than the actual quality of the student's writing or the merit of their arguments.

The second form of *past-perfect prejudice* I encountered is a bit more subtle. Oftentimes, students would be expected to share their papers aloud in class once everyone had completed their work independently. It was at this time that the professor and the student's peers could discuss the themes of the paper, as well as the quality of the writing itself. Constructive suggestions would be offered as to the craftsmanship in writing, and general discussions would swirl around the main ideas presented. Throughout these sessions, a trend emerged, regardless of the subject of the class: students who presented their central themes by quoting the giants of the past were led to understand that they demonstrated greater writing and academic acumen than their peers who has chosen to express their main ideas with their own words. Once again, this communicates to the students that their own words are defaultly inferior to those who have come before them.

Another situation I found myself in conformed to the same pattern, becoming our third example. Students were asked to write a paper researching the history and present state of one of their passions in life. In order to ensure the validity of the information being presented, students were required to include testimony from a specific number of experts on the subject. While this situation does share certain attributes in common with example number one, it differs in that the primary issue in this instance is not the hard number of experts required, but the nature of what exactly constitutes an ‘expert’. Regardless of the amount of knowledge they had, or the degree to which they were credentialed, students writing the paper in question were completely forbidden from acting as an ‘expert’ for the purposes of satisfying the source requirement. Even a student with over 15 years of martial arts experience was not permitted to use their own experiences as ‘expert’ information. This decision by the professor conveyed to the students that their own experiences and credentials will never make them experts in their own right—instead they must always lean on the experience of others.

The final instance of *past-perfect prejudice* that comes from my own experiences is a much more general and far reaching one than our previous two. Throughout my entire time as an undergraduate student, the overwhelming majority of papers students wrote conformed to a very specific formula: the student would be asked to read a text, analyze it, and then write a paper talking about the text and what they managed to glean from it. Within this formula, there is something missing. Not once in the progression described above was the student asked what their own thoughts were about the text, or what ideas the text inspired them to think about beyond its own scope. When the central focus of an assignment is simply rote analysis of an existing text with no expectation for the student to incorporate their own ideas or thoughts, the student writing the paper hears loud and clear that their own ideas take a backseat to how well they could unravel the existing ideas of another.

Interviews

I have interviewed three professors at three very different stages of their careers and of their level of interaction with the academy as a whole. This wide variance of experience levels, as well as their divergent backgrounds, allows for a more diverse sampling than would otherwise be possible. In order for the existence of *past-perfect prejudice* to be verified, my own experiences cannot be the only datapoint presented; otherwise the entire phenomenon could simply be one student's skewed perception of the academy, or their outlier experiences in it. To combat this, the experiences of the three abovementioned professors will serve as corroboration, cementing the notion that *past-perfect prejudice* exists within the academy as a whole.

Robert Nash, the most senior of the three interviewed professors, has spent 52 years teaching in higher education. The long life of his career has allowed him to see the academy in a way few ever will; being present in an environment for such a long time, one is able to sift through the ebb and flow that occurs, accurately separating the passing fashions from true institutional change. It is just such a perspective that makes Robert so valuable in the context of detecting *past-perfect prejudice* and determining its nature. Is *past-perfect prejudice* merely something I personally encountered due to a localized or momentary trend in the professoriate, or is it something with more longevity? To get to the bottom of this quandary, I asked Robert just this question. He spoke to me about how the creative arts, also often known as the liberal arts or the humanities, were once the most popular parts of a university, attracting considerably more students than their business-focused counterparts. Nowadays, this is no longer the case; the norm at most colleges and universities is that the more career-centric courses occupy the role as the driving force to attract and retain students. In discussing why this change came to pass, I asked Robert if one of the reasons for that shift was due to the humanities as a whole changing from being a place where students were constantly encouraged to look inwards and analyze themselves, to a much more formulaic, two-dimensional inspection of the texts and thinkers of the past. His response, "Very much so." (Nash, 2019)

Our professorial middle-man, Charles (Chuck) Bashaw, weighed in next to address the question of whether or not *past-perfect prejudice* exists within the academy at large. When asked this question, Chuck spoke about teaching methodology, explaining that there is a divide amongst the professoriate as to whether the focus of teaching should be, “document driven, or question driven.” (Bashaw, 2019) meaning that a professor can choose to teach one of two ways: they can place the primary focus on the documents themselves, or they can emphasize the questions that those same documents inspire their students to ask. As to which style Chuck personally favors, he falls on the side of *question driven*, saying simply, “The materials themselves aren't the point.” (Bashaw, 2019) He then goes on further to expand the topic to include the modus operandi of one of the past’s most prominent thinkers, telling us, “Aristotle give us the basic formula: ‘What’s the problem? What have my predecessors thought? What do I think?’” (Bashaw, 2019)

This establishes the dichotomy between *document driven* and *question driven* of one being a complete encapsulation of Aristotle’s basic formula, while the other falls short of the last step of *what do I think?* By showing us this, Chuck gives up a map which outlines various teaching styles within the academy in such a way that it becomes undeniable that *past-perfect prejudice* is a factor in higher education.

Our last interviewee is Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Pitaniello. LTC Pitaniello is the least academically experienced out of our three interviewees, but has an additional wealth of experiences in another arena. As a commissioned officer in Military Intelligence, LTC Pitaniello has had a career every bit as rigorous and intellectually exacting as his dedicatedly professorial counterparts. Because his professional experience is primarily outside of the collegiate hemisphere, his insights will be from an almost entirely different point of view, making his inclusion into our trio of interviewees invaluable. When asked about the phenomenon of *past-perfect prejudice*, LTC Pitaniello initially refuted that it existed—he was adamant that not only was leaning on the giants of the past essential when engaging in academia, but that the current balance between the emphasis on the works of the past and current students’ ideas was proper. It was beginning to look as though the first dissenting opinion was going to present itself.

Further discussion on the topics at hand would see a change in how LTC Pitaniello's earlier words were understood. When relating his own experiences as an undergraduate student, he noted that his, "... professors did give us plenty of leeway to write how we saw fit. I'm not sure the grades always reflected if we only used our own experiences." (Pitaniello, 2019) This begins to mirror the shape of something in my own personal experiences: source requirements that had a potentially undue influence on the final assessment of a paper. To delve deeper, I then asked LTC Pitaniello about a familiar topic from the earlier interview with Chuck Bashaw: Aristotle's basic formula of academic analysis. I presented the colonel with two different models: the first being where the endeavor stops at step two, *what have my predecessors thought?*, and the second model, where the formula is carried to completion. Interestingly, LTC Pitaniello expressed shock and disbelief that any professor in higher education would ever leave out step three: *what do I think?*, remarking, "I can't imagine an instructor or professor saying, [someone] said this ten years ago; what do you guys think about that?" (Pitaniello 2019) He then went on to say that it makes much more sense when, "...you pose the question, and you let them think about it, you let them simmer on it, let them do a little bit of reading, and then they come back with a more informed answer... I agree with that." (Pitaniello, 2019)

What we have in the case of LTC Pitaniello is someone who was never exposed to *past-perfect prejudice* to any meaningful degree. This produced two relevant reactions in him: he did not believe that *past-perfect prejudice* is present to the extent it has been observed in other areas of academia, and also that the individual behaviors of professors associated with *past-perfect prejudice* did not exist. This type of perspective can produce a blindspot, which will be essential to be mindful of when moving forward in this thesis.

It is now clear that the phenomenon of *past-perfect prejudice* exists within the academy. As this has been verified, we can now progress to the next step: discovering what specific shapes it takes within higher education.

What Shapes Does it Take?

Now that *past-perfect prejudice* has been sufficiently illuminated, the next step is to identify specifically how it manifests within the academy. Doing so will allow us to further our understanding of *past-perfect prejudice* as a whole, as well as to refine our ability to recognize it, and eventually prepare measures to correct it. Overall, I have discovered that there are four main pillars of *past-perfect prejudice*: over-reliance on the giants of the past, the stifling of new ideas generated by today's students, communicating to students that they are inherently inferior to the giants of the past, and the stagnation of ideation in academic culture. Moving forward, we will explore these four pillars and where they make their individual homes within the academy.

Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past

Perhaps the most central of the four pillars, over-reliance on the giants of the past is at the heart of *past-perfect prejudice* (PPP). Without this one simple yet far reaching error, the other aspects of PPP would all but cease to exist. What exactly constitutes this over-reliance, though, is hard to pin down. This is because, as has been mentioned many times up to this point, the giants of the past *absolutely* have a home in higher education, and their inclusion benefits everyone involved. To begin searching for over-reliance, we turn to the areas of academia where the creative genesis of the student and interaction with the materials of the past meet. Areas fitting this description include: source material for academic papers, writing prompts, readings assigned for the purposes of discussion, and more. Every example within this category is something that has a place in academia; finding ways to seamlessly include the wealth of knowledge offered by our past into the modern classroom is an integral component of a successful environment of higher learning. The line between sensible inclusion and undue emphasis is a very situational thing—not every paper written will have the exact same sourcing requirements, and different types of discussions will call for varying levels of foundational reading, as they should. Because of this, the way to identify and understand this pillar of PPP is to approach it contextually. The other three pillars of *past-perfect prejudice* are all built upon and around the over-reliance of the giants of the past, so to detect them is to discover their foundation. This is important, as our foundational pillar can often be more difficult to spot than the others.

Stifling New Ideas Generated by Today's Students

When the ideas put forward by the great minds of the past are given disproportionate weight as opposed to the ideas being generated and espoused by the current students, the way those students interact with academic mediums changes. By shifting the focus of their work away from their own ideas, two things happen at once. First, students are indirectly discouraged from engaging with their own creative process, and are instead guided towards rote analysis of already existing materials to serve as the core of their academic endeavors. This, given sufficient time and repetition, puts the students in question at risk of becoming divorced from their sense of creativity and self-ideation. Secondly, the student's interaction with their studies, as well as with the professoriate, becomes almost entirely outwardly-focused. Within this trend lies the potential for crucial self-development opportunities to be missed.

Examples of this pillar often come in very subtle forms. When students are writing a paper, and the individuals who choose to use quotations for their key sentences (rather than their own words) are congratulated far more than others, our second pillar is present. When classroom discussions require arguments brought forth by students to be grounded in the logic of a notable thinker on the subject, rather than born from their own mind, our second pillar is present. When looking for the second pillar, recognizing its evanescent quality is essential to detecting it with repeated success.

Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past

Whenever students' own ideas are stifled (whether intentionally or unintentionally) for the purpose of tipping the balance further in favor of the creations of the great minds of the past, our third pillar will often emerge. As is human nature, when someone (or a group of individuals) is repeatedly steered away from doing something, while others are actively praised for doing exactly the opposite, they will begin to understand that their actions are deemed to be inferior to their counterparts.

Our third pillar manifests itself in a multitude of ways, both direct and indirect.

When the third pillar reveals itself in more direct ways, it is usually done through the more formal aspects of scholarship. An anecdote from my own past mentioned in *Does it Present Itself?* is a good example of a more direct showing of the third pillar: source requirements—when numerical sourcing requirements act as a hard barrier to a higher letter grade and personal academic prowess is a far more nebulous stipulation, the student is given the message that their own performance is secondary to whether or not they interacted with outside materials to a supposedly sufficient degree.

Much more often, the third pillar will come in a distinctly less direct flavor. Subtle instances of the third pillar are generally tied less to formal structures such as rubrics and grades, and more to ephemeral elements of academia, such as classroom culture, and peer to peer interaction. An example of the third pillar acting in a less direct way is when the ideas of the giants of the past are extolled to a disproportionate degree when compared to the students' own creations. All great thinkers and academics began their path as students. To demi-deify their work posthumously ignores this fact, and sends students the message that they can never hope to measure up to such an unrealistic benchmark. Another example of the third pillar working subtly is when students are gently, but consistently, guided away from using their own original ideas and words in favor of opting for a quotation, or already existing thought. While there will undoubtedly be times when a student could benefit from the incorporation of outside ideas into their work, when this recommendation becomes a pattern it once again sends the message that the student's original creations are defaultly inferior.

When searching for the third pillar, the most important clue to look for are patterns of behavior. Common amongst all of the examples provided above is the fact that each, as a single instance, would produce no issue. The problem only occurs when such events are repeated to a great enough extent that they come together to form a consistent message. When these types of messages ink themselves into the undercurrent of a student's daily academic life, they can be very hard to shake—both the message conveyed to the student, and the pattern to the professor and the institution.

The Stagnation of Ideation in Academic Culture

When the other three pillars are left unchecked, our fourth and final pillar may begin to show itself. If students are directed away from their own ideas dedicatedly enough, and for a long enough period of time, an ideational stagnation can occur. This is likely to play out in two stages: one in the shorter term, and the other in the much further future. In the short term, the fourth pillar takes the form of an academic setting in which little to none of the students routinely express their own ideas as central to their work. This results in a decidedly negative sense of predictability settling over discourse and scholarship—since everybody is already largely familiar with the ideas and concepts being wrestled with, epiphanies are rare and new ideas become further discouraged. The second, decidedly longer term impact of the fourth pillar occurs when it has been present for a considerable amount of time, long enough that a significant period of time has passed during which little to no new ideas have been penned. What will follow is a famine of new material from which to draw upon, leading to an academic quagmire that would undoubtedly prove a challenge to reemerge from.

In attempting to identify the fourth pillar, asking veteran professors about the patterns of students' work will prove fruitful. Much like the third pillar, the fourth will show itself in patterns; unlike the third, where the pattern *is* the problem, the problem is *because* of the pattern. When students' work becomes formulaic from one iteration to the next, the fourth pillar is likely present.

What Impacts Does it Have on Members of the Academy?

Now that we have outlined the main shapes *past-perfect prejudice* takes, the next step is to ask, *what are the impacts of PPP on the various groups within the academy?* Specifically, what impacts do *past-perfect prejudice* have on the student body, and the professoriate, respectively? Answering this question will take us one step closer to understanding the exact nature of *PPP*, and what we can do to help correct it.

When speaking of the impacts of *past-perfect prejudice*, there are two general categories under which all impact will occur: the students and the professoriate. The different manifestations of *PPP* will have varying effects on both groups in question, and as such they must be explored separately. Doing so will ensure a proper analysis on the impact of each group as a standalone entity. Afterwards, we will unpack how the academy as a whole is affected.

Impact on Students

The student body of institutions of higher learning are the group that will be most affected by the presence of *past-perfect prejudice*. Since they are coming to the academy to learn as largely a blank slate on matters pertaining to scholarship, they are the most vulnerable to being influenced by new paradigms and opinions. When they are unduly influenced by *PPP*, three things specifically are likely to occur.

The first, and perhaps hardest effect to undo, pertains to students forming their initial opinions and perceptions of academia, and of the academy as a whole. When students begin their first year of their undergraduate program, the vast majority of them are having their first encounter with higher education. This means that aside from what they have seen portrayed in multimedia or heard from others, they have zero information about what the academy is really like. This initial foray into that world is akin to a first impression when meeting another person: whether for good or for ill, it will likely stick with them. When this all important first impression is of an academy contaminated with *past-perfect prejudice*, they likely won't see it as an issue at all. Rather, the students will simply believe *that's the way college is*.

This type of mindset cementing itself early on in one's educational journey can have problematic effects moving forward. If a student possesses an entrenched belief that *past-perfect prejudice* is in fact the norm (or even how things *ought* to be), they will be likely to continue down that path, even resisting efforts to help them deviate from it. This is how toxic cultures perpetuate themselves, and it is likely a large part of how *PPP* remains so prevalent across the academy.

Another aspect to the impacts of *past-perfect prejudice* on students relates to those students seeking the approval of their professors, and other authority or mentor figures. Especially as a young newcomer to an environment, it will be natural for most people in that position to seek out the approval of the authority figures they respect, or perceive as pivotal to their success. However, if the only way to gain that approval is to eschew one's own ideas in favor of substituting them with the fruits of others' efforts, that approval will feel tainted, or unearned.

Speaking from personal experience, I can attest to this phenomenon. When I would submit a paper for review, full of my own ideas and creations, only to be told that I needed to replace my own brainchild with the work done by another, my confidence dropped. Once I begrudgingly performed the requested revisions, I would resubmit my work to much greater praise. Being the recipient of that congratulation after removing my own work to replace it with another's created conflicting feelings within me. I was, of course, happy to be receiving praise for the work I had done, but at the same time I felt saddened because that praise had come at the expense of discarding some of my own ideas.

Because the praise and approval resulting from these circumstances will often feel unnatural, it is likely to produce a self-perpetuating loop: the student will receive praise, but since it feels unearned, it will leave them feeling hollow and wanting a more complete sense of closure on the matter. This will lead to them seeking out more praise, only to become entrapped by the same exact situation.

The third and final impact we will be highlighting is the logical conclusion of the previous two. Between our hypothetical student initially being exposed to *past-perfect prejudice* as the norm within the academy, and then only being praised when they present work focused around the ideas of others, they are bound to give up on focusing on their own creations. This is the worst possible outcome, because it means that the academy has failed them. Instead of creating a nurturing environment that encourages critical thinking and self-analysis bolstered by thought provoking works of the giants of scholarship, our student was instead exposed to a bleak academic experience focused primarily (or even solely) on regurgitative analysis of existing works.

Impact on Professors

While the most significant impacts of *past-perfect prejudice* undoubtedly fall upon the students, the professoriate does not escape unmarred. The main effect *PPP* has on the professors of the academy is very similar to the pattern seen in the first two abovementioned effects on students. If professors make it clear to students that they are expecting work that is in line with the tenets of *past-perfect prejudice*, then that is what they will largely receive. Repeated exposure to such material, coupled with the Pavlovian ritual of giving conforming products higher marks, will reinforce the paradigm of *PPP* as correct. This creates a feedback loop much like the one experienced by our hypothetical student, but potentially more severe. Because the professor is the one in a position of authority, it is unlikely that they will have the chance to be influenced by a vast number of superiors in the same way an undergraduate student would, hopping from professor to professor. This will result in a much more rigid cementing of opinions and structures, which will then be passed on to future students, thus perpetuating the cycle.

Impact on the Academy as a Whole

The common factor between how the students of the academy and the professoriate alike are affected by *past-perfect prejudice* is that both result in a self-perpetuating system. *PPP* is an entity that feeds itself, and if left unchecked, will only grow more all-encompassing, and harder to remove. The academy itself becomes compromised at an institutional level, with the various expectations inherent in *past-perfect prejudice* becoming a part of the codified structures and assessments inherent in the system. Once in place, **those same constructs originally meant to challenge students and spur growth become constraints that restrict the creativity so many seek within their academic pursuits.**

Personal Stories

In this section, I will be drawing upon my own personal experiences in order to better encapsulate, demonstrate, and illuminate *past-perfect prejudice*. As opposed to the personal anecdotes used previously to this section, these stories will be a far more detailed account of what I have experienced: the negatives, positives, and the unconventional. These stories will serve to give the reader of this thesis a detailed, first-hand account of what it's like to be an undergraduate student experiencing *PPP*.

Background

The setting where all of the following recountings will take place is Champlain College. Champlain College finds its home in Burlington, Vermont, sitting on a hill overlooking its titular lake. Its campus is composed of a mixture of classical Victorian houses repurposed to new ends, and modern architecture designed to complement the existing historical structures. Champlain is a relatively small school, being home to only about 2000 students when I was attending. Being so small, there is an emphasis placed on high levels of student-professor interaction, and small class sizes. While Champlain is primarily a business/profession oriented college, focusing on its internationally recognized video game design and business programs, it also boasts an innovative approach to the liberal arts. The Core Program at Champlain College staggers the liberal arts across all four years of a student's degree, as opposed to being heavy on the front end, while saving their professional development or major specific courses for later on. This allows students to get a taste of their profession early on, while also not burning out on the humanities due to over-concentration. Additionally, the Core classes aren't divided up like the traditional array of liberal arts offerings. Rather than taking history, English, and so on, students' classes are divided by concept. Students take classes in the humanities such as Concepts of Self, Concepts of Community, and Scientific Revolutions—viewing the traditional liberal arts lessons and materials through these specific lenses. The result is a much more engaging and dynamic form of education in the humanities that seeks to grab students' attention and present tried and true ideas in new and interesting ways.

When I attended Champlain College, I was pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Communications with specializations in Information Technology, Marketing, and Public Relations. As I have mentioned above, my many specializations gave me the opportunity to experience the academy from a multitude of perspectives. Different departments of education tend to have different approaches to teaching and presenting their material, and logically so. It makes sense to teach students about the subject of something much more professional and distant, such as computer science, in a vastly different manner than one would a more intimate and personal subject, such as art, or literature. Dabbling in all of these different areas of study allowed me to see a much clearer picture of what teaching in the academy is like as a whole. When I finally walked across the stage and was handed my degree, I felt confident that I had not just a concrete understanding of my areas of study, but also of the academic environment I was leaving behind.

Negative Experiences

In this section, I will be outlining a selection of my personal experiences with *past-perfect prejudice*, and how they impacted me. I will explain the context that led up to the actual event, the event itself, and what resulted from that event.

My first story of experiencing *PPP* is actually one we have already touched on. In the section *Statements of Principles and Themes*, under *Personal Experience*, I mentioned an example where a student was barred from using themselves as an expert reference in their own paper. That student was me. I was taking one of my Core classes, this one being *Rhetoric II*. Focusing primarily on the skill of writing itself, we combined analysis of classic literature and writing from prompts in order to refine our craft of the written word. Being the second installment of the class, *Rhetoric II* focused less on the basics of college-level writing, and more on both the nuances of how to further advance your own style, as well as how to become more adept at the administrative components of academic writing. We learned new styles of citations and bibliographies, how to properly format our writing for multiple situations, and more.

One of the assignments we were tasked to complete was to choose a passion we had (preferably outside the classroom) and write a paper on it. The paper was to cover three main areas: our own personal

interaction with our passion, the history of when it originated and how it came to be what it is now, as well as the current state of it. In order to ensure the validity and coherence of the sections relating to our passion's history and current state, we were required to include a specific number of either outside literary sources or expert testimonials. All in all, it was a fairly standard writing assignment that sounded like it would be fun. Personally, I relished the opportunity to have a chance to write about something I was passionate about, rather than the more common literature analysis or technical writing.

I chose to write my paper on the martial arts. Ever since I was very young, the martial arts had been something I was fiercely passionate about. My journey began when I was only five years old. On one of my first days in kindergarten, I had the excitement of beginning my school career dampened by a violent event. One of the other children I attempted to make friends with decided that they didn't like that one bit. Their strategy to try and end this unwanted interaction wasn't to walk away, or to tell me to stop, but to wrap their hands around my neck, and try to strangle me. I instinctively wrenched his hands away from my throat and promptly ran away. The rest of that day proceeded in a decidedly more normal fashion, and eventually it was time to return home. Once there, I told my mother about the events of my day, and within a week I had been enrolled in a martial arts class.

For the next five or so years, I studied a Korean martial art by the name of Moo Gong Do. Through my instruction, I learned not only how to defend myself, but also discipline and a sense of duty. I was taught that learning how to defend oneself and others brought with it a responsibility to use that knowledge wisely and not for reckless or malicious purposes. I learned a wide variety of physical techniques, and also journeyed down the more spiritual avenues of the martial arts, practicing meditation, controlled breathing, and artistic martial forms. Towards the end of my five years, I reached the final rank before I would be ready to test for my black belt. In Moo Gong Do, since the founder of the art is still alive, practitioners have to travel to test with him in California in order to receive their black belt. When it came time for me to do this, I was given the unfortunate news from my family that we did not have the money to both fly me across the country, and to stay at a hotel for the required amount of time. This meant I would never be able to progress further in the ranks in Moo Gong Do.

Unable to earn my black belt, I decided to diversify my experience, rather than stay stagnant. Over the next ten years, I devoted myself to studying as many different martial arts as I could, using my existing base in Moo Gong Do to more quickly pick up on and incorporate the various arts I studied into my existing knowledge base. By the time I reached college, I had studied a total of ten different styles to varying degrees. By all accounts, I was an expert in the martial arts.

Returning to *Rhetoric II*, I'm writing my paper on my passion. I detail my own experiences in the marital arts, and move on to its history. I lean on the writings of some of the earliest martial artists, who described where the pursuit originally came from, and how it began to evolve into what we know it to be today. To inform readers about the transition martial arts experienced when the world began to modernize, I borrowed from the words of Bruce Lee, one of history's most accomplished martial arts figures. When it came time to discuss the current state of the martial arts, it occurred to me that I didn't need to look any further for an expert than myself: I had been training and studying the martial arts for almost my entire life, and I had a generously diverse background, with experience in ten different styles that spanned most of the globe. I drew upon this wealth of knowledge to give readers a window into how the martial arts fit into today's world, and what it's like being a practitioner of them. Confident that I had done the assignment justice, I turned in my paper, and returned my attention to other things.

When it came time for us to receive our papers, the grade I saw written on the front page was distinctly at odds with my expectations. I combed through my work, looking for any typos or lapses in proper writing protocol that I might have missed. When I found none, my confusion deepened. I wondered if it could have been a mistake, or maybe there was a part of the assignment I had simply forgotten about. I pulled out the rubric we had been given and double-checked that I had covered all the required areas: no issues there either. Out of ideas, I made a mental note to speak with my professor after class so I could unravel this mystery. The minutes ticked by, and eventually the class came to a close. As the students were filing out, I caught the professor's attention and presented him with my quandary. I explained how I had checked and rechecked everything I could think of that might result in my grade being lowered the way it had, but I came up with nothing. I asked him for the answer to my mystery, and the answer he gave only succeeded in confusing me further: I was told that I was lacking the required number of either literary or

expert sources in my paper, so my grade was capped at a certain level. Having so recently looked back over the rubric, I knew that number was four. I counted the sources in the paper: two ancient martial artists to discuss the origins, one to speak to the evolution, and the final expert (myself) to discuss the current state. I explained this to him, and made it very clear that my paper did indeed possess the required number of experts within it.

The response I received to this was that I simply could not be an expert in my own writing. This was offered without an explanation or rationale, simply a standalone commandment. When I pressed for more information, I was only told that I didn't have the sufficient credentials to be considered an 'expert' in the field. This is where I started to feel the effects of *past-perfect prejudice*. I explained to my professor (even though I had already summarized it in the paper) the history I had in the martial arts, and asked why my credentials weren't sufficient to merit the title of 'expert'. The first response I received was that I didn't have any official degree on the subject, nor had I been published. This demonstrated that my professor lacked understanding of how the world of martial arts worked—there were almost never practitioners who earned those specific types of recognition. The common form of status in martial arts was rank, usually shown by either the color of the belt worn, or additional markings on the belt or uniform. After explaining all of this, I was told I still did not meet the threshold of experience to be considered an 'expert'. In the end, no resolution was reached, and I was forced to rework the final section of my paper, including another outside expert, rather than being able to use my own experiences.

This story of *past-perfect prejudice* brings into focus two of the four key pillars: pillar number one (Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past), and pillar number three (Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past). The first pillar is manifested in the numerical source requirements of the assignment itself. Making a certain range of grades inaccessible without a fixed number of outside sources demonstrates a skewed weighting between the student's own efforts and their inclusion of outside materials, favoring the latter. The second pillar is shown through my dispute with the professor. Even though I was in possession of an impressive and diverse set of knowledge and credentials in the relevant field, I was repeatedly denied the freedom to make use of that skillset in an 'expert' capacity. Setting this

precedent made it quite clear to me that my own experiences and credentials were always going to be considered inferior to others.

Not all instances of *past-perfect prejudice* need involve writing assignments. Another example from my past shows us how *PPP* can take shape in just about any academic situation.

In my freshman year of college, I was still largely ignorant in the ways of the academy, as is common. I, along with my peers, strove to find our footing and discover how to excel. One of my first classes during this formative time was psychology. I selected this course because it seemed to be a perfect stepping stone forward for me. I was (and still am) infinitely fascinated by understanding how people thought and operated, so it seemed a natural fit. As the semester began, and I experienced my first few weeks of classes, I started to settle in. Psychology in particular was engaging to me; we learned about all the basic frameworks of the human mind, and how they came to be. I was enthralled.

As the semester moved forward, I began to notice a change in my favorite class: we spoke less and less about the actual *psychology* in psychology, and increasingly more about the individuals who pioneered those advances and paradigm shifts. Needless to say, I was disappointed. What had once been my favorite class quickly became a part of the week I came to dread. While I understood the importance of learning about who discovered what, I couldn't wrap my head around why it deserved *more* time in the classroom than the actual ideas themselves. What I had signed up to learn about was quickly vanishing from the classroom.

My dissatisfaction with the course came to a head when we took our first exam, nearly a third into the semester. The exam itself wasn't anything out of the ordinary: a paper test handed out in class that checked our knowledge of the material we had learned thus far. Though I had become largely disillusioned with the class as a whole, I was still invested enough that the test did not prove to be a challenge. I took my time and carefully addressed each question, finding the answer somewhere within my mental archives. Once I was satisfied that the test had been given its due attention, I submitted my work, and made my way to my next class. During the next few classes, the test was the furthest thing from my mind. Nothing even

close to remarkable, it was simply one more piece of work to do—now that it was done, there was no need to dwell on it.

Or so I thought. The next morning, we all sat down to begin class, and our tests were handed back. I didn't get a perfect score, but I hadn't been expecting one; I was happy to receive an A, regardless of the particulars. This held true until I stumbled upon one question marked as wrong, that I was *sure* I had answered correctly. The question asked what the fastest growing demographic in America was currently. Presented as a fill-in-the-blank style question, we were given no hints or acceptable answers to choose from; we had to have retained the knowledge, and now be able to reproduce it. I had answered senior citizens, since modern medical advances had allowed people to begin living longer and longer. My answer had been crossed out in red, and written next to it, was the 'correct' answer: the millennial generation.

The reason this vexed me so much, was because I knew my answer was right, because it was an area I had been researching for other classes recently. I was ready to confront my professor, but not wanting to put my foot in my mouth, I went back to double-check my research. A few quick minutes of googling brought up the data from the US Census, which confirmed my memory on the subject. Armed with this information, I confronted my professor about why my question had been marked wrong, when my answer was factually correct. At first, I was simply told that my answer was not what the book said, so it was wrong. Normally, this would be a sensible rebuttal to a student claiming a correct answer, but I was prepared. I shared my findings with my professor, walking her through my process, and how I knew that my answer was, in fact, correct. I then asked that my overall grade be amended to reflect the change in assessment of my test. My professor informed me that this was unnecessary, as my answer on the test would be remaining 'incorrect'. When I asked why, she repeated that my answer did not match the book, and that the test was on the book we read in class, not the real world's data. I was floored. How could I get a question wrong when my answer was accurately reflected in the world around us? Why would my professor prioritize the information in a textbook (which was years out of date) over the most current census data? In the end, I got no answers, because she made it very clear that the conversation was over. Not long after, I decided to drop the class—the only time I did so in my entire academic career not related to a change in majors.

This particular example of *past-perfect prejudice* shows us that it can emerge anywhere in the academy, not just in written work, where it is most common. The story of my uncooperative test question showcases the second pillar (Stifling New Ideas Generated by Today's Students), in that my up to date personal research was discarded in favor of older material simply because 'it was in the book'. Teaching with this mentality consistently endangers students' quality of education, because it ignores new information and pigeonholes subjects into fitting entirely within the selected texts of the given course. When this happens, we also see the fourth pillar (The Stagnation of Ideation in Academic Culture) at work. When students are not permitted to introduce new information into the classroom, and professors also ignore everything not already present in the course's preselected literature, the flow of knowledge is stymied. This categorically disadvantages students, and causes them to miss out on countless opportunities in their academic career.

Positive Experiences

Not all of my time in higher education was highlighted by low points. In addition to some spectacularly unpleasant experiences, I was fortunate enough to also get a taste of some truly excellent professorship. These are the moments I still fondly look back on, and draw reference from when I find myself leading students of my own, whether in my professional-military setting, or during my remaining time at the academy.

One of my best experiences with academic culture was during the middle of my undergraduate study, in a Core class by the name of Scientific Revolutions. In 'SciRev', students would be taken through human history with a focus on the discovery or invention of technologies that revolutionized the way humans lived. Everything from the discovery of fire, the beginnings of agriculture, the introduction of iron, and more modern leaps such as electricity and the internet were all covered. Everyone in the class was engaged and interested, primarily because the format of the class was like nothing any of us had ever participated in before. Out of all the Core classes at Champlain College, SciRev was perhaps the one that most drastically deviated from the traditional assortment of humanities classes. Science, history, and even politics were all present in the same course, but managed to coexist without feeling forced together or

overcrowded. This was due to the very specific lens these topics were viewed through. SciRev also managed to keep itself balanced by refraining from delving too deeply into any one aspect of a particular scientific revolution. For example, if we were talking about the invention of the internet, we would cover all of the relevant individuals who contributed to its creation, but we wouldn't dwell on their specific backstories or niches; the focus remained true throughout the length of the course: on the scientific revolutions themselves.

The same type of ethos was also present in the assignments given to us throughout the semester. The topics of our papers seemed appropriate and were engaging, while the requirements and assessment structures were intuitive and dynamic. Unlike our previous examples, which would prominently feature the first pillar (Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past), the way papers were assessed and graded in SciRev was different. There was still often (almost always) a requirement to lean upon the relevant works of the giants of the past, but how we did it was up to us. There weren't any hard and fast requirements to have a certain number of sources or citations; you didn't have to use a specific text to find your answers. The requirement was much simpler: your paper had to be sufficiently credible.

This method of assessing papers may seem much more open-ended than our previous examples, and that's because it is. While some may point out that this lends itself to possible misunderstandings between professor and student, that never happened in SciRev. This is almost entirely due to the excellence and diligence on display by the professor. One of the recurring themes about classrooms where *past-perfect prejudice* is present, as opposed to classrooms where it is not, is that the former requires a good deal less effort on the part of the professor. Having fixed requirements that students must achieve, and having all of those requirements based on outside materials and factors, makes the professor's job of grading work less a task of evaluation, and more a game of 'check the box'. Another possible reason for the prevalence of *PPP* within the professoriate may be the desire for an easier, less challenging interface with students.

Another positive experience I can recall is from a class titled: Creativity and Conceptual Development. Taught by the author of one of the references for this thesis, Cinse Bonino, the class was true to its namesake. Students learned how to better interface with and unlock their creative abilities by working

in groups, solving puzzles, coming up with unlikely solutions to complex problems, and generating ideas from the ground up. The content of the class was almost 100 percent focused back inward on the students, forcing them to dig deep in order to find the solution or create the next step of the project at hand—with purposely very little outside material to draw from for aid.

This is not to say that outside materials were forbidden in the classroom; students were allowed to take inspiration from any source that struck their fancy, but when it came to actually doing the work required in class, the format simply wasn't compatible with a copy-paste approach.

A specific example I fondly recall was a problem solving activity. The class was presented with a problem, and then asked for all the obvious solutions they could think of. For every straightforward solution, the professor would impose a condition that made the given fix impossible. This went on until the class was out of ideas. The next step was to tell the students to get together into groups and solve this now unsolvable problem. At first, there was a reaction bordering on outrage: *How do you expect us to solve this now?* was the question on everyone's lips. But when the professor remained unmoved in her request, and promised everyone that the classes who came before them had succeeded, indignation turned to determination, the various groups all intent on solving the problem placed before them. Eventually, new solutions began to emerge, though nowhere near as straightforward as the initial crop of offerings that the problem was amended against. Students had to pull from the deep corners of their brains, making use of the less common bits of knowledge they had all accumulated over the years, and then bring those bits of information together to discover new uses for the combination of their trivia.

What was born from this exercise were two distinct things. First and foremost, the problem at hand was met with a battery of some of the most unconventional solutions any of us had ever heard of. Secondly, and perhaps more subtly, was the other result of our shared dilemma: there was a marked increase in the confidence the students had in the power of their own brains. In just one class period, the effects of the third pillar of *past-perfect prejudice* (Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past) were stripped away from us. The solving of the unsolvable problem showed all of us that we are academic, intellectual, and creative forces to be reckoned with all on our own.

It is this type of outcome—empowering students to realize they can become giants themselves, while at once imbuing them with new knowledge and information—that all professors should strive for. As can be seen from our previous two examples, *past-perfect prejudice* need not play any part in order to achieve this.

Unconventional Experiences

In addition to my more formal education within the setting of the classroom, my time at Champlain College was home to another, far less typical variety of academic endeavor. Early in my time at Champlain, I was approached by a professor who had a vision he wanted to realize. He saw three distinct groups within the college: the students, the faculty, and the staff. He also noticed that those three groups rarely (if ever) interacted with one another outside of limited, official capacities. As a way to change this, he envisioned a once weekly meeting where individuals were always welcome, regardless of which group they hailed from, and where discussion was free-flowing and natural. Together with a few others, that professor and I founded his brainchild together, eventually coming to call it Roundtable.

Roundtable, as mentioned in the section *Methodology*, under *Personal Experience*, is a discussion forum that meets on Champlain campus once per week, where all members of the community are welcome. There is no set agenda for discussion—that task instead falls to all the members present to decide. This means that everyone is free to talk about whatever happens to be on their mind on that given day, and the results have been spectacular. Everything one could possibly imagine has come up at one point or another. Roundtable has had its share of traditional scholarly subjects, such as philosophy, science, history, and etymology, but it has also branched wildly into topics of popular culture, social justice, and outright absurdity. Within the setting of Roundtable, the classical and outlier topics interweave seamlessly, resulting in the most diverse and engaging discussions within the academy I have ever seen.

Even after I left Champlain College in the spring of 2013, Roundtable continued. During my pursuit of my Master's degree, I've been fortunate enough to be able to return to Roundtable, this time as a

facilitator, rather than a student attendee. One of the most remarkable parts of returning in this new capacity, is how little changed for me. Aside from occasionally giving the conversation a slight nudge here, or advocating for the group to let a quiet person speak there, my week to week experience didn't really change. It is a testament to the success of Roundtable that I could have the same level of interaction, whether as a student or as a facilitator.

How does Roundtable relate to our topic of *past-perfect prejudice*? The beautiful thing is that it doesn't at all. The types of problems inherent in *PPP* don't ever occur. The four pillars I've been able to point out in almost every interaction (at least to a small extent) are wholly absent in this setting. On the other hand, the giants of the past are perfectly at home; at times it seemed they were sitting right there with us, settling in at Roundtable for a round of lively discussion. This is because, for members of the academy, it is second nature to call upon these giants when they themselves are unsure of something. The discussions at Roundtable were punctuated by the inclusion of references both from memory, and from on the spot research. Watching a debate be augmented in real time by internet sleuthing from knowledgeable professors and determined students is perhaps the best refutation of *past-perfect prejudice* I have witnessed. Roundtable proved once and for all that it is entirely possible, and even likely, that a natural balance between the giants of the past, and the ideas of the students of today will form within the academy, provided it is given the space to do so.

One additional, far less academic area where I have encountered *past-perfect prejudice*, is during my time in the military. I have been serving in the United States Army since March of 2015 as an infantryman. I am now attending graduate school as the next step in that journey, and I fully intend to continue serving until I have dedicated the 20 years that the Army considers to be a complete career. The Army is a very hierarchical organization, where an individual's rank plays a large part in how they interact with others, what roles they can fill, and how much responsibility they are trusted with. With this type of structure comes a heavy expectation that lower ranking individuals will not only comply with the orders of their superiors (they're legally required to do so), but also that they will blindly trust the knowledge and expertise of these people. This type of trust makes sense and is essential to survival on the battlefield, where the difference between life and death could be the time taken to ask "why?" On the other hand,

expecting such blind faith is less reasoned during the much safer, more even-tempered day to day life of a soldier in garrison.

Another facet to know about the life of a soldier is that there are excruciatingly specific regulations governing what we can, can't, and must do. There are stipulations on everything from how we can dress (both in and out of uniform), to how we discuss the military, to the manner of address we are required to use for various groups of people. All of these requirements are codified in regulation, which is meticulously organized and available to all service members online. Given that all of our regulations are made so easy to access, there shouldn't be any issues when it comes to everyone understanding exactly what their limitations and requirements are. This is unfortunately very far from the truth. During my time in the Army, I discovered a manifestation of *past-perfect prejudice* that is perhaps the most straight-forward, clearcut example I've even seen.

One of the most common ways that soldiers go against regulation (intentionally or unintentionally) is in regards to their uniform and appearance. The specificity of our uniform regulations borders on asinine at times, and even for someone who is well versed, an occasional misstep is almost unavoidable. To combat this, soldiers of any rank are encouraged to make an on the spot correction when they see another soldier wearing their uniform improperly. Most times, the deficiency can be corrected in seconds, and all is well. The more helpful among us will even go so far as to educate the service member on why what they were doing was wrong, and where exactly they can find the particular snippet of regulation that governs the detail in question.

Up until this point, all is well and good. Soldiers correcting other soldiers in the spirit of making sure we all look sharp and are within regulations is widely seen as a positive interaction, even if the initial correction can sometimes be rather blunt. The situation becomes an issue when a senior ranking soldier corrects their junior, and is mistaken. When this situation occurs, one of two things will happen: either the lower ranking soldier will simply trust their senior, or they will know the regulation themselves, and respectfully attempt to correct their superior on the matter. As you could imagine, the second option often doesn't go over terribly well. I have witnessed this situation many times, and even been the cause of it

myself. Unfortunately, a good chunk of senior leaders in the Army will take such a correction of their knowledge as a sign of disrespect, or even a personal attack. Instead of asking their junior to produce the regulation they are citing, so as to prove their case, they will simply write off their correction, often times berating them for daring to ‘talk back’ to a senior ranking individual. This results in most soldiers simply acting as if the word of their seniors is gospel when it comes to regulation, rather than getting into the habit of going to the *very* accessible online catalogue to resolve their questions.

This situation presents multiple issues. First, this type of interaction sends the clear message to junior soldiers that their knowledge is simply not as good as that of their senior ranking counterparts. This is a direct manifestation of the third pillar (Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past). Soldiers are being taught they even if they know the correct answer, they are not ‘as correct’ as someone senior to them. Secondly, the regulations of the Army are not a static thing; they change as time passes, with uniform regulations specifically demonstrating significant changes over the years. This means that someone who is senior ranking, and therefore has been in the Army for a long time, is likely still operating on their understanding of uniform regulations from their earlier years, which was passed onto them from *their* senior, and so on, and so on. This means that often times, younger soldiers will actually have a more up to date understanding of uniform regulations, yet they are sometimes being required to receive their information from an outdated source. This is a clear example of the first pillar (Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past).

This small example from my military years shows us that *past-perfect-prejudice* is not only limited to the academy. It also shows us *PPP* laid bare in a starkness not usually seen through the multifaceted levels of academic environments, which will help us to better understand it, and therefore combat it, within the academy.

Implications

Now that we understand both that: *past-perfect prejudice* exists within the academy, and how it manifests itself within it, we must ask the next logical question: what are the effects of *PPP* on the world of higher education? Understanding specifically *why* and *how past-perfect prejudice* is harmful will be essential to taking steps to help remove it from the academic system and culture. In order to accomplish this, we will be looking at the impacts of *past-perfect prejudice* through the lenses of meaning making and creativity. We will then address whether or not the structures of the modern academic classroom are conducive to the changes that may be needed in order to unseat the prevalence of *PPP*.

Meaning Making

Both Robert Nash and Victor Frankl, the author of Man's Search for Meaning, are passionate about meaning making, insisting that it is an essential ingredient in a person's life in order for them to succeed. Fewer places in the world see meaning making more at home than in the setting of the academy, where students constantly strive to discover new facts about themselves, and the world around them. This holds true for professors as well; every new crop of students is a fresh set of lenses through which they can view their familiar material in a new light.

What exactly is meaning making? Seen through the lens of Frankl's *Logotherapy*, meaning making is a method of living that focuses, "...on the meanings to be fulfilled by the patient in his future." (Frankl, 2000) While Frankl is describing this sentiment with respect to his patients as a psychotherapist, the same idea holds true for students as well. We make our meaning in the academy by setting goals for ourselves (both internal and external), and then taking the steps needed to reach those goals. Both in reaching the goal and during the journey along the way, we find fulfillment in the effort and the reward. Indeed, meaning making is so important, that Frankl goes on to say, "Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a 'secondary rationalization'..." (Frankl, 2000)

What does this mean for the academy and its contamination with *past-perfect prejudice*? When we see students being guided away from introspection and self-generated ideas, we are losing a key part of the equation of meaning making—if students are unable to personally connect to the material placed in front of them, how can we expect them to derive any meaning from their studies? Frankl supports this claim, bringing our attention to the fact that,

“A public-opinion poll was conducted a few years ago in France. The results showed that 89 percent of the people polled admitted that man needs ‘something’ for the sake of which to live.” (Frankl, 2000)

This reinforces the need for students to have a personal connection with the materials they're studying, rather than simply viewing them as a means to an end, and is further illuminated by another survey Frankl mentions, this time directly pertaining to college students:

“Another statistical survey, of 7,948 students at forty-eight colleges, was conducted by social scientists from Johns Hopkins University. Their preliminary report is part of a two year study sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health. Asked what they considered ‘very important’ to them now, 16 percent of the students checked ‘making a lot of money’; 78 percent said their first goal was ‘finding purpose and meaning to my life’.” (Frankl, 2000)

These numbers show us that one of the key facets of the academy is meaning making, or as Frankl would put it, finding the *will to meaning* (Frankl, 2000). When students aren't allowed to interface with their own ideas to a sufficient extent, meaning making becomes much more difficult, if not impossible.

Meaning making is also inexorably tied to a number of other concepts that are essential to the success of students making their way through the academy. Chief among them is the trait of confidence. Students need confidence in themselves if they are to rise to the challenges posed by earning a Bachelor's degree and beyond. This confidence largely comes from two sources. First, successful endeavors along the path will imbue students with an understanding that *yes, I can do this*. Secondly, participating in something

that feels at home and as though it is a purposeful use of one's time will inevitably lead to a confident mindset. This is where meaning making and confidence come together, and it is precisely what *past-perfect prejudice* threatens. If students are unable to gain confidence from the work they are doing at a *logotherapeutic* level, they will be far less likely to feel at home in their academic environment, or to believe that they can truly excel.

What will result from this lack of access to meaning making within the academy? A system in which its participants are being starved of the very thing they originally sought to gain cannot sustain itself. If 78 percent of students are unable to fulfill their primary motivation for entering the academy in the first place, I foresee a gradual decline in engagement by students, in matriculation, and perhaps even a drop in the number of young people participating in higher education as a whole.

Creativity

Equally as central as meaning making to a student's journey through the academy is creativity. Students learning how to unlock their creative abilities and integrate those more abstract-centric thinking patterns into their scholarly work, is what will take that work from merely a rehashing of already existing data, to the heights of an original creation. Put simply, creativity is the force that allows students to take those first steps on the road to becoming giants themselves.

What are the impacts on creativity by the presence of *past-perfect prejudice*? In her book, [One Key: SEE, One Key: DO, Accessing Your Brain's Creative Abilities](#), Cinse Bonino tells us that an important factor to unlocking your creativity is being willing to appear ridiculous:

“Being willing to look ridiculous can improve your ability to *see* exponentially, because you can see more when you stop worrying about failing or looking stupid.” (Bonino, 2019)

This concept relates directly to the second and third pillars of *past-perfect prejudice* (Stifling New Ideas Generated by Today's Students, and Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past).

When our own ideas are already under siege, it becomes even more difficult than it already is for students to be willing to expose their ideas to others. Bonino explains:

“We worry about losing our credibility. We are concerned people might judge us poorly or fail to take us seriously if we put forward an idea they regard as silly or not worth considering.” (Bonino, 2019)

Another important interaction that the second pillar (Stifling New Ideas Generated by Today’s Students) takes away from students is practicing the skill of making connections and developing new ideas and patterns by intuitively interacting with one’s existing knowledge base. Speaking in terms of what students *should* be able (and be encouraged) to do, Bonino writes:

“Tap into whatever associations come up for you when you think conceptually. Some of your thoughts will seem random. Others will obviously be from memories or experiences you’ve had. Still others will creep toward your inner vision as if they are hiding on the periphery of your consciousness.” (Bonino, 2019)

When students are given the freedom to allow their ideas to be sourced from any corner of their brain, and to form in real-time within the classroom, creativity will flourish. This is exactly what the second pillar of *past-perfect prejudice* prevents them from doing. Instead of being encouraged to follow their own inklings and ultimately discover their own ideas, as Bonino suggests, students are instead shepherded away from their own creations before they even have a chance to develop. They are presented with the ‘superior’ alternative of an already finished idea, the work of another they are now meant to utilize. This type of behavior not only stifles creativity, it teaches the student that creativity isn’t worth pursuing in the first place.

The final relevant impact of *past-perfect prejudice* on creativity we will be examining pertains to the first pillar (Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past). Much like how creativity needs the freedom to pull from any and all regions of the mind in order to be able to function optimally, the creative process also

needs time to unfold. All ideas begin as nothing more than a ‘maybe’, and need a proper amount of time and space to grow from their humble beginnings into a fully fledged and complete idea. The first pillar of *PPP* takes this time away from students, constantly redirecting their attention away from their own creative process, mandating instead that they spend their efforts analyzing the already finished creative process of the giants of the past. While this might give the students a window into a cross-section of the path of creativity ‘start to finish’, it fails to allow them to experience it themselves. Creativity is not something that humans can learn simply by watching: it needs to be lived. Bonino backs this sentiment in her own words, telling us:

“In order to create we first need to conceive it. We have to imagine *what* we are trying to create. But this is a bit of a contradiction, because in the beginning we do not have a *specific* vision of what we are attempting to bring into being. Nevertheless, we need to be able to describe it conceptually to ourselves in order to grasp a *sense* of it...Instead of rushing forward toward a preselected destination, we could choose to use critical thinking skills to help us form a conceptual grasp...” (Bonino, 2019)

The impacts of divorcing the creative process from the daily activities of students in the academy are exactly what occurs in the fourth pillar of *past-perfect prejudice* (The Stagnation of Ideation in Academic Culture). Keeping students from viewing creativity as one of the core pursuits of their academic journeys will only succeed in shrinking the pool of ideas that the academy itself is dependent on for growth. Without new ideas and concepts continuing to be generated by the students of the present, the ideas of the giants of the past go to waste, nobody standing on their shoulders to see any further than they themselves could. Bonino has the definitive word, saying:

"Creating something new involves putting things – thoughts, ingredients, components, or whatever – together in a new way. The design or plan for how you will ultimately decide to put things together will be based on the new meaning you create using the new connections you discovered.” (Bonino, 2019)

The Current Structures of the Academy

The current iteration of the academy, in both codified systems as well as unwritten culture, is a product of hundreds (if not thousands) of years of evolution. Higher education is a constantly changing beast, torn between remaining true to its history, while simultaneously struggling to find ways to incorporate all the data and perspectives of an ever-evolving world. Somewhere within this dance, *past-perfect prejudice* was born, perhaps in an overzealous attempt to remain loyal to the roots of scholarship. Regardless of how it came to be, *PPP* has been wildly successful in reshaping the various constructs within the academy since its inception. The question we have to ask ourselves now is simple: can the current structural arrangement of the academy facilitate a vision of higher education without the inclusion of *past-perfect prejudice*?

In short, the answer is: yes, but it will require considerable effort. All of the basic structures that exist currently within the academy are compatible with a *PPP*-free future, but in order for that to be realized, they will have to be altered in order to align with this new paradigm.

Methods of Assessment

As has been discussed before, codified structures of assessment, such as rubrics, grading scales, and specific assignment requirements, are currently rife with problematic occurrences of all the pillars of *past-perfect prejudice*, but specifically the first (Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past) and the third (Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past). This is largely in part because these are easy requirements to make into black and white dichotomies. When a professor sets a numerical source requirement, the student either has or has not met that requirement, with almost zero room for debate.

This temptation towards binary assessment may be understandable due to its ability to *decomplexify* a professor's workload, but it is still far from acceptable. Binary assessments are largely only possible when asking simple questions: *did the student include this many sources; is the student's paper at*

least this many words; were the required number of different types of sources included? Questions like these completely ignore the actual quality of the work produced by the student, and choose instead to only focus on quantitative assessments. In order to shake off the yoke of *past-perfect prejudice*, professors will have to make their peace with abandoning such methods of assessment, opting instead for evaluations that focus on judging the quality of the student's work, rather than binary factors.

Definitions of Expertise

The third pillar of *past-perfect prejudice* (Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past) is currently one of the driving forces behind who many members of the professoriate will consider as 'expert' or 'scholarly' sources, and who they will not. There is a large swath of members of the academy (teachers and students alike) who will only allow an individual into one of those hallowed categories under very specific circumstances: *it's not a reliable source unless it's been published in one of these journals; if they don't have a degree they aren't qualified on the subject; they're still a student, so they aren't an expert*. Statements like these place the entirety of an individual's merit specifically on the judgements of a small group of members of the academy, as opposed to anywhere else. This method of defining expertise is wholly incomplete, as it lacks any acknowledgement that there are other equally valid ways that one can become sufficiently credentialed *or* experienced to constitute the title of 'expert'. Examples of other such areas include professional certifications, trade titles or ranks (such as *journeyman* plumber, or *black belt* in a martial art), and straight up personal experience.

Discounting these other measures of acumen not only embodies the third pillar of *past-perfect prejudice*, but it also leads to the fourth (The Stagnation of Ideation in Academic Culture). When a vast wealth of information is ignored, such as the sum total of humanity without a 'scholarly' validation of their expertise, academia as a whole loses a considerable portion of the resources it has available. Willingly forsaking knowledge is not something that has ever been accepted by institutions of learning and discovery, and the example above should be no different; the academy simply must accept that it is doing so by looking at the situation through a lens unclouded by *past-perfect prejudice*.

Overview

While many of the existing structures commonly found within the academy have been cultivated in an environment contaminated by *past-perfect prejudice*, this doesn't have to mean that the structures as a whole need be abandoned. As we can see with the two examples outlined above, most of the faults contained within the various constructions of academia aren't issues that run to their core. This tells us that, thankfully, the academy as an institution won't have to be rebuilt in order to shake off the phenomenon of *PPP*. While that is indeed good news, it does not mean that there is any shortage of work to be done. As a whole, the academy will have to abandon binary methods of assessment—both in terms how it evaluates students' work, as well as how sources of information and expert opinions are regarded. Advancing the culture of higher education past such methods and habits will take not only a dedicated effort from the professoriate, but also a willingness from the educational institutions themselves to change; the efforts of all the professors in the academy will amount to nothing if the standards maintained by the colleges and universities who employ them remain unchanged. Put simply, we have a lot of work to do.

Takeaways

What have we learned from our analysis of the academy? We examined the codified structures, cultural patterns, and common practices of both the professoriate, as well as the students of higher education. We viewed these areas through the lenses of the personal experiences of different professors within the academy, my own background in undergraduate study, as well as the expert opinions contained within two texts. Through this journey, we identified our phenomenon, *past-perfect prejudice*, concluding that yes, it does in fact exist. Once we were certain of this fact, we turned our attention to understanding what shapes *PPP* takes within different components of the academy. We isolated four key pillars of *past-perfect prejudice*: the first pillar, Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past; the second pillar, Stifling New Ideas Generated by Today's Students; the third, Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past; and finally the fourth pillar, The Stagnation of Ideation in Academic Culture. These four pillars proved capable of encompassing nearly all major instances of *past-perfect prejudice* manifesting within the collegiate setting.

Once we understood the various shapes that *PPP* can take, it was time to examine the potential impacts it could have on the various factions within the academy. Predictably, students were found to be the most adversely affected, with professors and the academy as an institution trailing closely behind. Overall, the effects of *past-perfect prejudice* can largely be categorized by students who were never given the opportunity to tap into their own creative potential or to use their own ideas, and professors drifting further and further from being in touch with their classrooms. Potentially, these effects could lead to a general disinterest and divestment in the academy by young people over the coming generations, if nothing is done to stem the current trend. As I mentioned above: we have a lot of work to do.

What needs to change?

We now know that in order to escape the bonds of *past-perfect prejudice*, the academy needs to make changes. But the question remains: what actually needs to change, and how much does it need to? Are there areas within the academic setting that don't require any attention, and can remain as-is? To

answer this question, we have to look back on the specific areas that were found to cause students the greatest amount of turbulence along their journeys through scholarship, and identify what about them requires alteration.

Binary Methods of Assessment

We are now aware that using binary methods of assessing students' work leads to an unbalanced system of grading which heavily favors rewarding quantitative benchmarks over analyzing the actual quality of the student's work. This leads directly to the first and third pillars of *past-perfect prejudice* (Over-reliance on the Giants of the Past, and Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past). In order to circumvent this issue, the ways in which students' work is assessed will have to change.

This is an area where the degree of change could hypothetically vary wildly, from small tweaks to a complete overhaul of the current system, and still achieve the desired results. At the bare minimum, we have to see the elimination of binary assessments. What does this mean? This means that professors will have to abandon the rigid nature of assignments as many know them today. Requiring students to write a specific number of words, or to include at least an exact number of outside resources, places the focus of the assessment on checking boxes on a list, as opposed to committing time and energy to producing a quality piece of work. Instead of such binary methods, professors will have to adopt far more dynamic standards—asking open-ended questions of their students' work rather than searching for numbers. Like the example from my time in *Scientific Revolutions* at Champlain College, simply asking the question of a student's paper: *is your work adequately sourced?*

This type of evaluation will undoubtedly require more investment on the part of the professoriate; it will demand a much more thorough analysis of each student's work, judging each on their own merit, rather than simply setting them next to a template and seeing if it matches up. Other examples of binary assessments will be easier to solve. Take page requirements or word counts: both are binary measures of a paper that contribute very little to the grading of a student's work if used as a barrier to positive assessment.

On the other hand, the length of a written assignment can be a useful tool for students to understand the level of depth and complexity that the professor is looking for. The easy fix to this is what I have encountered in many of my graduate level classes: the professor would simply tell us that they expected our papers to be *around* a specific number of words or pages. This effectively communicated to us the relative expectations of complexity and depth, but didn't penalize us if we weren't quite there.

While small adjustments like the ones suggested above would go far in eliminating *past-perfect prejudice*, one could also opt to take the more radical approach. Completely overhauling the way students' work is currently assessed within the academy has likely been a topic of discussion since the first student received their first grade. While such a total facelift has never truly caught on within the mainstream of the academy, it could certainly be a solution to addressing *PPP*. Removing the concept of letter grades entirely, where a student's performance is directly tied to a numerical value, would shatter many of the holds that *past-perfect prejudice* currently has on the academy. The replacement for the discarded system would share much in common with the solutions already described above; the new paradigm of assessment would focus entirely on dynamically evaluating students' work rather than trying to force it into a box on a rigid rubric and assigning a value to it from there.

This type of evaluating will change the entire way the academy functions. Without numerical values assigned to students' work, the entire way we rank students and decide their scholarly worth would have to change. Again, this would require a greater commitment from the professoriate, because what would replace such expressions of worth would be a much more personal type of conveyance. Instead of institutions viewing a student's cold and distant transcript in order to determine their eligibility to participate in a given program, it would be a much more intimate ritual, with professors describing the work and scholarship of their students to the relevant entities directly. This type of system would make it all but impossible for *past-perfect prejudice* to ever again find a hold in the assessment system of the academy.

In order for this type of change to be implemented successfully, another change will have to happen first. The average class size will have to shrink. This is necessary, because in order for professors to be realistically expected to put forth the greater amount of effort required, they will have to have fewer

students to spread their attention among. This is already a trend at many of the best colleges and universities in the world; it simply needs to be adapted elsewhere, and to become the norm. In order to find the resources to make such a change, institutions may have to reevaluate their financial priorities, or even admissions numbers. Though these changes may seem extreme, the results would certainly be worth the discomfort of the transition; the better educated students that will inevitably result from this change will be more than a sufficient reward.

The Academy's Definitions of 'Expert' and 'Scholarly'

One of the largest roadblocks to students feeling as though their ideas and perspectives have been validated is the way in which the academy decides what work is 'scholarly', and who is an 'expert'. This concept is at the core of both the second and third pillars of *past-perfect prejudice* (Stifling New Ideas Generated by Today's Students, and Communicating to Students their Inferiority to the Giants of the Past) while also less directly perpetuating the fourth (The Stagnation of Ideation in Academic Culture). Under the current paradigm, students are often told that their own work is not sufficient to be deemed 'scholarly', and that their experiences (though sometimes quite vast and far reaching) do not qualify them as 'experts'.

This is another area, though admittedly indirectly, where binary-ism once again rears its head. The academy has many tropes regarding the validity of a work or individual, and those tropes are once again the easy way out. Declaring all written works unscholarly unless they are published in a particular selection of journals or databases, for instance, is a good example of this phenomenon. When this approach is taken, the members of the academy release themselves from the burden of having to determine for themselves if a given work is rigorous and informed enough to meet the standards to be called 'scholarly'. Relinquishing this decision results in two effects. The first is that the decisions made are relegated to a higher level (inclusion by the databases and journals), which means more distance between the decider and the potential work being scrutinized. With that distance comes a greater degree of standardization, and a severe reduction in dynamic interaction with the material.

The second result of such a system of exclusive journals and databases, is that a dynamic of false exclusivity will be created. Oftentimes, these resource banks will be something that a college (of even sometimes an individual) has to pay money to earn the privilege of accessing. Over time, these databases will amass more and more work within them, and further bolster their reputation as an exclusive and exclusively scholarly source of information. This snowball effect leads to another opportunity for professors, and even entire institutions, to take the easy way out. If one of these databases is an option for students, it's so simple to mandate its use, labeling works found elsewhere as 'unscholarly'. This creates a self-perpetuating preferential valuation, which will continue to loop back on itself and become more and more entrenched within the institution it is a part of.

Instead of relying exclusively on such databases, degrees or titles earned, or critical acclaim, the professoriate must again opt for a more nuanced approach. The aspect of those written works accepted into scholarly journals can undoubtedly be found elsewhere. All this requires of the professor is to be willing to investigate their students' sources for themselves (or allow their students to provide alternate validation), rather than trusting a third party to do the work for them. The same holds true with claims to expertise. While there is nothing wrong with trusting the acumen of an individual who holds a relevant degree or professional title on a given matter, the list of those qualified should not stop there. As has become the pattern, professors should be willing to engage with a student when presented with an unconventional claim of expertise, even if verifying that claim requires more digging than might a traditionally credentialed alternative.

Changing the current system of defining what constitutes 'scholarly' and 'expert' sources will open up the academy to a whole new dimension of information, and allow students the freedoms which will result in them feeling more included and heard in their own academic settings.

Teaching Styles and the Balance Between Original Ideas and Existing Work

The academy as an institution has many purposes, but one of its central functions is to teach students the skill of higher order thinking. Higher order thinking is when one learns new information, then

goes on to analyze that information with the goal of synthesizing it to be workable through their own lens. The end goal of higher order thinking is to be able to create something entirely new through the process described above. This ability is a highly coveted skill, sought equally by both individuals for their own purposes, and by corporations desiring an intelligent and adaptive workforce in order to remain competitive in an ever more cutthroat corporate environment. For a very long time now, the academy has been the place for students to learn this remarkable talent.

Unfortunately, *past-perfect prejudice* threatens this arrangement. When the pillars of *PPP* are present, specifically the fourth pillar (The Stagnation of Ideation in Academic Culture), higher order thinking becomes discouraged, and could potentially even cease to be taught entirely. This is due to the tendency for students to be shepherded away from using their own original creations in favor of existing constructs in environments where *past-perfect prejudice* runs rampant. What results from this is the teaching of lower order thinking, which involves recognizing new information (as opposed to understanding it), identifying what it is (rather than taking the next step to analyze it), and then remembering and reproducing it at a later time (instead of synthesizing and utilizing it to create something new).

The difference between these two methods of thinking is quite clear when set side by side. Higher order thinking prepares a student for almost any situation they could be faced with; this is because inherent within higher order thinking is the ability to adapt, and to take existing information and change it into something new to suit the current situation. This type of conceptual liquidity is entirely absent in lower order thinking, which only allows someone to intake new information and then reproduce it at a later date. The foundational ideas of what the academy stands for all swirl around the concept of taking steps forward into the future of knowledge, bolstered by what has already been discovered by one's predecessors. This concept cannot survive without the continued presence of higher order thinking within the academy.

Addressing the question of how to defend against the encroachment of lower order thinking into the academy is a bit more difficult than with our previous two areas of discussion. This is because higher and lower order thinking are very abstract concepts in comparison, and their inclusion into the fabric of the

classroom is even more so. In order to foster environments where higher order thinking is the default option, the entire balance and dynamic between the ideas of today's students, and works of the giants of the past will have to be shifted. Currently, the focus in many classrooms is on the works of others from start to finish. Students will react to those works in the forms of writing papers, having classroom discussions, and so on. Sometimes, students will be asked to create a few new ideas along the way as well. What almost never happens, though, is a shifting of the class focus from the words and ideas of others, over to the ideas generated by the students themselves. This type of change to the standard classroom format would open the door to students being able to really play with the knowledge they had accumulated thus far, and reinforce to them that their ideas matter.

Teaching a class in such a way enshrines higher order thinking as the centerpiece of the coursework, acting as the tool allowing the students to progress from the first stage of the class (intaking new information and ideas), to the second (creating new ideas for themselves and critically examining them as the new focus of the class). It would also serve to buck all four pillars of *past-perfect prejudice*, removing their influence from the template of courses within the academy.

Creating this new type of class structure will be no easy undertaking. Doing so will require an almost complete revision of the way classes are created, specifically further towards the end of the course. Finding ways to cover all the relevant material, while still leaving time for students to create for themselves, and then to analyze those creations together, will require unconventional and unintuitive solutions from the professoriate. In many ways, this particular leg of the journey to unseat *past-perfect prejudice* will be one that students and professors must take together, and will likely also present the most difficult challenge yet.

What can be done?

While a true elimination of *past-perfect prejudice* will require systemic change, that doesn't mean that individuals can't meaningfully contribute to a solution. Large scale changes don't begin as unstoppable movements, touching every corner of the relevant organization; change starts with people, one at a time. Below are some of my suggestions for changes that educators within the academy can implement inside their own sphere of influence. Some of my suggestions may seem small, but all of them come from the fervent wishes I have heard students express, or have had myself. These are changes that, if implemented, will serve to make your students feel as though their own scholarship and experiences are being valued.

Incorporate SPN Writing

As I mentioned above, Scholarly Personal Narrative Writing is a form of scholarly writing created by Robert Nash which fuses the telling of personal stories with the more traditional review of previous academic writing or research within a narrative framework. SPN Writing creates a space where students' own ideas and expertise can sit alongside the works of the past, both working together in order to convey central themes, produce reasoned arguments, and provide validity to ideas expressed. Tweaking your courses to incorporate SPN Writing either alongside, or opposed to, traditional academic writing will send a clear message to students that you as a professor value both the foundations of the subjects you are teaching, *as well as* the ideas your students will generate by standing atop those foundations.

It is important to note that SPN Writing (the style in which this is written in) is, in and of itself, an effective deterrent to *PPP* because it, by its very nature, places the bulk of its focus on the students' explorations, ideas, and discoveries. It encourages students to think for themselves. This inherent quality of SPN Writing directly addresses the issues outlined in the above section: *The Academy's Definitions of 'Expert' and 'Scholarly'*. By having this naturally occurring aspect of the SPN style, you as a professor can then carry it forward into other areas of the classroom. If students' papers are already formatted to address both the viewpoints and data of external sources, as well as their own experiences and discoveries, then the discussions generated from reviewing those papers will follow suit, and so on. It is in this way that SPN

Writing will bring your classroom to focus more upon the students sitting in it, rather than constantly looking backwards.

What? So what? Now what?

There are three steps a great professor will take their students through when teaching. First, they will ask *what?* What are we talking about, what are the important ideas at play? Next, they will ask *so what?* Now that you understand what we're discussing, why are we discussing it, what relevance does it have outside itself, and why does it matter? The final, and arguably most important step, is *now what?* Now that I understand the ramifications of the subject, what does it make me think about, what are my opinions, and what can I contribute? It is this last step that so many professors so often neglect, or even outright omit. This needs to change if you desire your classroom to be free of *past-perfect prejudice*.

The remedy to this is in plain view within the three questions: *what, so what, and now what?* These three questions, advocated for by (once again) Robert Nash, are tools to directly apply to the classroom. Ask your students these questions as the lesson progresses. Make it clear to them that *you* care about the '*now what*' part of the lesson. Ask questions of your students that probe their own opinions on relevant subjects. Encourage them to try and use their own life experiences and scholarly efforts to build upon the works being discussed. Many students are often held back from venturing into this territory on their own for fear that their endeavors will at best be considered unnecessary, and at worst, unscholarly and detrimental. It is up to you, their professor, to break this paradigm, even if it is only within the walls of your single classroom. Even if you may not believe your students to be feeling in the ways I have described here, I promise you it is worth the effort; many students experience *PPP* and remain silent, unwilling to take the risk of prioritizing their own sense of academic fulfillment over their degree.

Conclusion

The world is becoming more and more complex by the day. Advances in technology, a tense international landscape, and easier access to our fellow humans than ever before are painting our future to be one of great potential, but also of great uncertainty and difficulty. In order to be prepared for that future, the humans of the world will need more resources available to them than ever before—chief among these resources will be mental capital. All eyes will fall upon the academy—the colleges and universities scattered around the globe—to produce this desperately needed commodity.

If we allow *past-perfect prejudice* to retain its grip on the academy as it does now, we in higher education will undoubtedly fall short of the ever-increasing threshold of this requirement. It is for this reason that the changes discussed above are paramount. By maintaining the status quo, and continuing to enshrine *PPP* as a core aspect of academic culture, we are going to be doing more than just failing our students. That is not to say that the failing of students by the academy is a small issue; the academy was built for the express purpose of granting new knowledge and mental tools to the scholars of tomorrow, and failing in that mandate is nothing short of abysmal. That failure, as monumental as it is, will be dwarfed in the future if we do not change our ways. As the intricacies of the world mount, the academy will be more strained than ever to produce properly equipped graduates. Failing to do so means not only that we are failing the students themselves, but humanity as a whole. If the academy cannot manufacture the necessary mindsets, paradigms, and valuations needed to take on the challenges of the coming future, then who can?

Past-perfect prejudice is a complicated and nebulous aspect of the current incarnation of the academy. Its creation stems from many legitimate aspects of academic culture, and higher education as a whole. Due to its deeply embedded nature, spotting it is often a difficult task, while removing it is even more so. Nonetheless, we—the members of the academy, all must persist in our efforts until the academy is free of the specter of *PPP* for good. The path leading to this goal will most likely be one of the most tumultuous periods in the modern history of higher learning, but it is assuredly worth the ordeal.

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Glossary

Complexifying

“... we may find our particular niches in an ever complexifying society.”

Sometimes, when writing, you come upon a linguistic situation that is simply impossible to satisfy within the official lexicon of the English language. When this happens, you have a choice: take what exists, and use it to best amalgamate your true intentions; or be daring (and possibly just a bit ridiculous) and offer your own contribution to the ragtag tapestry that is the modern English language. *Complexifying* is just such a word; while many other combinations of ‘real’ words and alternative sentence structures would have certainly allowed me to forgo the need to create my own dictionary entry, none adequately captured the essence of what I truly meant.

Complexify: to further add complexity to an already intricate and multi-layered situation.

Past-perfect Prejudice

“This particular example of past-perfect prejudice shows us that it can emerge anywhere in the academy, not just in written work, where it is most common.”

In the section *Statements of Principles and Themes*, the following definition of *Past-perfect Prejudice* (also referenced as *PPP*) is offered: “...the academy’s dogmatic insistence regarding the over-use and hyper focus on the materials and minds of the past...” To phrase it another way: *Past-perfect Prejudice* is the culmination of all the small decisions, policy choices, and daily minutiae which come together to create a culture that disincentivizes all members of the academy from lending appropriate and proportional credence to the voices and expertise of current students, especially when stacked against their forebears.