

## Questions for Professor Crenner

### 1. What was the specific assignment?

Here is the actual assignment handout:

FSEM 028 The Ghost in the Machine F.'05 Crenner  
Paper #3: a topic arising from Matt Ridley's Nature Via Nurture.

From the list of very broad "Subjects" below, pick one that interests you and explore it or a more focused aspect or narrower branch of it. Address it from two of the six "Ways of Looking" in the second list. Do some serious library research (you may work with a partner), until you have at least five sources to draw upon from the library's data bases, books, and academic journals. (Obviously, you will have to look at more than that.) Your paper must also connect your subject with Ridley's book and at least two of the other books you read in our course.

#### SUBJECTS

Happiness  
Altruism  
Goodness/morality  
Violence  
Love  
Sex  
Beauty  
Attractiveness  
Gender  
Mating  
Monogomy  
Infidelity  
Friendship  
Hooking Up  
Charisma  
Leadership  
Empathy  
Racism  
Pets  
Parenting  
Athletic ability  
Team sports  
Fandom  
Talent

#### WAYS OF LOOKING

Biological (genetic, Darwinian,  
physical)  
Sociological (cultural, social)  
Educational (developmental)  
Psychological (familial, personal)  
Historical (development across)  
Ethological (animal behavioral)

Part of the process of finding your subject will be in unpacking each of the terms on the list and considering its associations and sub-categories. "Violence," for example, suggests such possibilities as War, Aggression, Domestic abuse, Bullying, Competitiveness, and so on. The paper should be between six and nine pages long. It

should use a standard citation system (preferably MLA or APA). It should be typed, double spaced, and carefully proof-read, with the pages numbered. It should have an interesting title centered atop the first page, no cover sheets, and your name on the back of the last page

## **2. How does this assignment fit with the goals for your course?**

Lauren's paper addresses several of the goals of all FSEMs as a category, as well as of our specific course (I was in a Pod with Professors Weiss and Pickett). It almost goes without saying that the paper shows proficiency in Graduation Goals 1 and 2, effective communication and critical thinking. Additionally, the paper demonstrates an acquaintance with basic research skills (in preparation, the class had a very useful workshop with Reference Librarian Michael Hunter) and, of course, writing skills. The heart of Lauren's paper, and its principal achievement, I think, is its smart, focused, and substantive exploration of some very well-focused gender issues regarding women in roles of public leadership and power. It thereby addresses not only Graduation Goal 6, but also the over-arching goal of our course, which was to explore what, if anything, is "natural" about human nature.

## **3. Why does this student's essay stand out for you as strong writing?**

I think the paper evinces excellence at both the micro and macro levels. The prose, sentence for sentence, is both crisp in diction and fluid in syntax. The reasoning is cogent, the train of thought always clear, and the arguments well supported by both evidence and logic. And most of all, it is a pleasure to read!

## **Questions for Lauren Gambier**

### **1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?**

My first step in writing this paper was deciding how I would outline my argument, finding a way to structure the paper to both establish a clear link between the lack of political women and social construction of gender, as well as fit in some of the course materials. The paper itself became much easier once I had accomplished that. After coming up with this structure, it was primarily a matter of finding evidence, particularly in the realm of feminist theory, to support my claim, as well as some biological evidence about things such as the heritability of political characteristics.

### **2. What was the most challenging aspect of this essay assignment?**

The assignment itself was very broad. While I don't recall the specific wording of it, it essentially said to explore some area of interest that related to the human mind and social characteristics in some way, including some works read in class as references. Deciding on a specific area of analysis proved challenging, as did refining it into a topic that could be discussed in just nine pages. As a very political person, the topic I chose was very enjoyable to write about, but it is difficult to make a concrete claim when a good deal of the evidence is theory. Thus it was difficult in finding a way to create a substantive link between these theories and how they are realized in practice.

### **3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?**

The overall purpose of the course was to look into the concept of humanity, to find what it is that defines a human being and makes it distinct from other sentient beings. This then offered the opportunity to look for the boundaries between the human and the inhuman, and thus to see that humanity doesn't simply lie in one's status as *Homo sapiens*, but is rather something that is heavily contingent upon the state of the mind. Considering this, my paper is deeply connected to the overarching goal of the course, as it examines the way in which the minds, and thus the humanity, of individuals are shaped, and further purports the idea that the defining characteristics of our humanity are not innate, but are shaped by what happens around us. It raises the question of, at the most basic level, is one first female or male, before they are human, or does their status as a human presuppose their gender? In other words, is the way in which one's humanity develops contingent upon his or her gender, or rather is that gender, and all the assumptions that go with it, only established as a result of the construction of humanness?

### **4. What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?**

Writing this paper was very informative in many ways. I have seen my position as a feminist change significantly since I arrived here at Hobart and William Smith, and that was most certainly aided by the amount of feminist theory that I encountered while writing this paper. It brings a new challenge to the idea of questioning and altering social norms, when they are no longer seen as being social norms, but rather innate characteristics. This is the problem that is created by the concept of idealized femininity in particular, as I see it, as this establishes ideas of what women invariably and inherently are, and thus makes these constructions particularly difficult to overcome. Writing this paper was a great opportunity for me to clash with these notions head-on, as well as a good way, as I mentioned before, to learn to integrate such theory into conclusions about the real world.