

Jacksonville University  
English Department

**ENGLISH 103 EXIT ESSAY**

The English department at JU requires students enrolled in ENGL 103 to take an exit exam focused on research, writing, and citation/documentation. These skills are emphasized throughout ENGL 103. Students must demonstrate proficiency in the above skills in order to pass the exam and exempt ENGL 214.

YOU MAY USE THIS SHEET FOR NOTES. WRITE YOUR ESSAY ON THE LINED PAPER.

- Select one of the following options and read the article carefully. You may wish to spend a few moments organizing your thoughts and writing down some ideas or an outline.
- Using appropriate conventions of organization, structure, and language, write a formal essay in response to the prompt, referring to the attached source article you selected. Your essay should demonstrate:
  - f. an effective introduction that establishes a focus for the essay
  - g. an essay body that is organized, unified, and developed
  - h. that you can properly integrate into the essay a summary, a paraphrase, and a quote (at least one of each should be evident in the essay), and cite each appropriately
  - i. appropriate documentation at the end of the essay
  - j. standard grammar and general mechanics

**Option I--“Warning: College Students, This Editorial May Upset You”**

**PROMPT:** The LA Times editorial board argues that one of the main points of a college education is to give students the opportunity to “confront difficult or uncomfortable material,” and that universities “cannot bubble-wrap students against everything that might be frightening or offensive to them” (1-2). Based on the information presented in the editorial, and drawing on your own knowledge and experiences, how do you think universities should address the “trigger warning” issue?

**Option II --“How Much Are College Students Learning?”**

**PROMPT:** In Wildavsky’s essay, he calls for the institution of a national, standardized test to measure learning at the college level. He bases his argument, in part, on the fact that we have national tests on learning at the K-12 level, but not college, and he suggests that we need to use a similar method in higher education. Considering the information presented in the article and your own experience, discuss whether national, standardized testing would be beneficial at the college level.

# Los Angeles Times

Editorial

## **Warning: College students, this editorial may upset you**

**'Trigger warning' policies, like one proposed at UC Santa Barbara, are antithetical to college life.**

By The Times editorial board

March 31, 2014

The latest attack on academic freedom comes not from government authorities or corporate pressure but from students. At UC Santa Barbara, the student Senate recently passed a resolution that calls for mandatory "trigger warnings" — cautions from professors, to be added to their course syllabi, specifying which days' lectures will include readings or films or discussions that might trigger feelings of emotional or physical distress.

The resolution calls for warnings if course materials will involve depictions and discussions of rape, sexual assault, suicide, pornography or graphic violence, among other things. The professors would excuse students from those classes, with no points deducted, if the students felt the material would distress them; it is left unclear how students would complete assignments or answer test questions based on the work covered in those classes.

The student resolution is only advisory, a recommendation that campus authorities can turn into policy or reject. They should not only choose the latter course but should explain firmly to students why such a policy would be antithetical to all that college is supposed to provide: a rich and diverse body of study that often requires students to confront difficult or uncomfortable material, and encourages them to discuss such

topics openly. Trigger warnings are part of a campus culture that is increasingly overprotective and hypersensitive in its efforts to ensure that no student is ever offended or made to feel uncomfortable.

Trigger warnings have been used on the Internet for a long time, first appearing on feminist websites visited by victims of sexual attacks; the goal was to protect assault victims from material that might trigger post-traumatic stress disorder. The warnings spread to a wide variety of websites and material that readers might find troubling.

That's fine for websites that voluntarily choose to caution their visitors, but it's exactly the wrong approach for colleges and universities. Oberlin College in Ohio already has gone further than UC Santa Barbara, issuing official trigger-warning guidelines for professors that sound almost like a parody of political correctness: "Triggers are not only relevant to sexual misconduct but also to anything that might cause trauma. Be aware of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism and other issues of privilege and oppression. Realize that all forms of violence are traumatic."

Worse, the Oberlin guidelines go on to advise professors to remove "triggering material" from their courses entirely if it is not directly related to the course's learning goals. Such instructions come dangerously close to censorship.

Chinua Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart" is listed by Oberlin as one possible "trigger" book because of its themes of colonialism, racism, religious prejudice and more. At Rutgers, an op-ed in the student paper suggested that study of "The Great Gatsby" should require trigger warnings about violence and gore. And then what happens? Should students be excused from reading a work of great literature, or be allowed to read a sanitized version?

Professors, uncertain of what might be considered too sexual, too warlike or so forth, might issue warnings so broad that they're meaningless, or feel pressured to bleach the syllabus to a pallid version of a real college course.

There are students who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, a serious psychological condition that calls for sensitive treatment. Students who have been diagnosed with it could explain their situation to individual professors, who almost certainly would be willing to work out a sensible accommodation, preferably one that wouldn't involve missing multiple classes.

But the Santa Barbara resolution doesn't cover only students who have been diagnosed with PTSD. Any student who is discomfited by the material would be excused from class if this were campus policy.

As psychologists point out, a post-traumatic response is just as likely to be triggered by something that has nothing to do with subject matter: a glimpse of the same blue-colored clothing that was visible during a traumatic event, or a certain scent that was in the air that day. Colleges cannot bubble-wrap students against everything that might be frightening or offensive to them.

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## How much are college students learning?

By Ben Wildavsky

updated 1:10 PM EDT, Sat April 19, 2014

CNN.com

### How much are college students learning?

*Editor's note: Ben Wildavsky is director of higher education studies at the Rockefeller Institute of Government, State University of New York, and policy professor at SUNY-Albany. The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the author.*

**(CNN)** – If you want to know how U.S. schoolchildren are performing, you don't have to look far: A wealth of information is available, thanks to the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Go online and see, for instance, that Massachusetts children outperform those in Texas, that average math scores have gone up nationally over the past 20 years and that the District of Columbia was the only urban district to improve in math and reading in grades 4 and 8 last year.

But what if you want to know how much students are learning in college? Here, the trail grows cold.

The Obama administration's proposed college ratings would measure access, affordability and outcomes such as graduation rates – all of which are well worth tracking. But there's no proposal to find a way to measure student learning.

This failure to examine systematically what is, after all, the core mission of colleges is a big problem for U.S. higher education. We're awash in efforts to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of our colleges. But without a better base of comparative evidence, we won't really know how these reforms affect learning.

That's why it's time for NAEP to go to college.

Tests of what college students know are nothing new, of course, within individual classrooms and institutions. Comparative, standardized measures are rarer, though – and much more controversial among college leaders.

There's the Collegiate Learning Assessment, or CLA+, which examines critical thinking, reading and writing skills and is administered to small samples of undergraduates at about 200 colleges each year. But many wary administrators contend the CLA should be used for self-assessment and career placement rather than college-to-college comparisons. And some won't make their data public. That may be no surprise: a 2011 book drawing on CLA data found dismayingly low levels of student learning across the nation.

It's the same with the National Survey of Student Engagement. A growing number of colleges use this survey, which doesn't measure learning directly but asks students about things such as how often they write long papers or talk with professors outside class. However, many still don't release the results off-campus, preferring to use them for internal improvement.

An intriguing new initiative led by Massachusetts will compare student learning across nine states by evaluating work such as student papers and lab reports. But because it will consciously avoid standardized tests, its ability to make credible cross-state comparisons may be limited.

The enormous advantages of an integrated, independent national test are clear. Like the NAEP used in elementary and secondary schools, a college NAEP could be administered to representative samples of students around the country. It would provide broad national and state-level results, including a breakdown of learning outcomes by race and socioeconomic status, and trends over time. It wouldn't assess individual colleges, which should alleviate the (overblown) anxieties of educators worried about curriculum-narrowing or one-size-fits-all rankings.

Still, the idea has long been contentious. It last received serious consideration more than 20 years ago, when the National Education Goals Panel recommended a voluntary national assessment to gauge the number of college graduates with advanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills. But higher education groups torpedoed the proposal. They argued, among other things, that a single measure would be unfair to institutions with large proportions of disadvantaged students, including community colleges.

Today, a collegiate NAEP would undoubtedly face similar objections. In fact, even as an idea, it already has – in rather dramatic terms.

Clifford Adelman, senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, contended recently that the "shadow of a government test," taken by very different kinds of students, studying a variety of subjects at a wide range of institutions, "is enough to freeze the soul, let alone elementary statistical sanity."

But objections based on the diverse nature of American higher ed don't carry a lot of weight when lobbed at a sample-based test of vital academic skills that any student should be learning at any college.

Indeed, testing expert Gary Phillips of the American Institutes of Research, who once ran NAEP, has sketched a persuasive vision of a new experimental test that could make cross-state comparisons and also provide achievement data for different groups of institutions, from community colleges and liberal arts schools to Ivy League universities.

The next time a state boasts about the prowess of its universities, wouldn't it be nice to have an objective yardstick – a reality-check that shows how those undergrads stack up academically against their peers in the rest of the country?

It's an appealing prospect. Why not give it a try?

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