

## CORE 115, Paper #1: Leadership and Service (Spring 2014)

Here is the mission statement of this university, as it appears at the beginning of the Valparaiso University Catalog:

Valparaiso University,  
a community of learning dedicated to excellence  
and grounded in the Lutheran tradition  
of scholarship, freedom, and faith,  
prepares students to lead and serve  
in both church and society.

This is how we describe ourselves: as “a community of learning dedicated to excellence.” This is how we describe what values we uphold and where they come from. Finally, this is what we as a community claim is our reason for existing: “to prepare students to lead and serve in both church and society.”

For the next five weeks, we will study a series of texts carefully chosen to help us examine what we mean when we use the word “community,” including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s idea of “the beloved community.” We will see communities torn apart; we will see others coming together. We will see “scholarship, freedom, and faith” in action, as we study various examples of leadership and service demonstrated in these texts.

To foster a deeper understanding of these ideas, the first formal paper you write this semester will be an argumentative paper five to seven pages long that puts you in dialogue with at least two of the writers (or at least one writer and one film director) featured in this unit. Your task will be to come up with an engaging question which your thesis-driven argument will attempt to answer in a persuasive manner.

Your work begins from the first day of the unit, when you discuss Dr. King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Every guiding question on the syllabus could potentially lead you to that question you throw yourself into. Every crisis we encounter in whatever community we visit in the unit, be it Birmingham, Alabama (King), or ancient Thebes (Sophocles), or the west side of Chicago (Addams), is meant to provoke your thinking. Does King stick to his principles of non-violence in his letter to the white clergy? What went wrong in Thebes (and the answer can’t just be Kreon)? How does one help a neighborhood of recent immigrants help itself to become a community? How shall we answer Mandela’s question (from *Invictus*) of how to inspire people to be better than they think they can be?

Let’s think now about the stages of this writing project. Every text and every class period should be occasions for generating questions we hope will lead to paper topics. Every informal is potentially a formal paper in the making. Once you have your question, doing this paper right will require diving back into the texts to find support for claims, and most of what you find you will need to summarize or paraphrase, and then properly cite. What you quote must be accurate, strategic, and properly credited, as well. You must use the MLA format for citations (in quoting, summarizing, *and* paraphrasing). This format is presented in your coursepack and in much more