**FILA 450 Paper**

As a first-semester freshman at Bridgewater College in 2016, I did not know what to expect in terms of academics. I knew that college was supposed to be challenging, but coming in as a successful student in high school and a member of the Flory Honors Program, I did not know how much of a challenge college would present for me. I quickly learned that college was considerably more difficult than high school, but not so difficult that I could not manage the assignments. What I consider to be my first real college-level assignment was a research paper I wrote about the Iraq War during my freshman PDP class. After I had turned in what I thought was an excellent paper, I was shocked to discover that the professor had given me a “B”—a lower grade than I had gotten on any of my high school papers. Looking back at this assignment now, I realize that I had done a very poor job writing it and that may research and writing abilities have progressed significantly since the fall semester of my freshman year.

My fascination with research began during the spring semester of my sophomore year when I was enrolled in Dr. Bobbi Gentry’s PSCI-250 Research Methods class. This course required me to complete my first self-designed quantitative research project. For my project, I chose to research why certain geographic areas voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election. Using IBM SPSS, I ran statistical analyses that compared the poverty level of each county in the United States with its support for candidate Donald Trump in an attempt to determine if poverty was an influential factor in Trump’s electoral support. My [PSCI 250 Research Methods Final Paper](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-1-psci-250-research-methods-final-paper/) found that while Trump performed worst in low-income counties, he still won more than triple the number of counties that Hillary Clinton won. This research sparked my interest in vote choice and its many variables and took my learning to a new level.

Vote choice is a complicated process involving many heuristics that individuals are not aware of themselves. While I first became interested with vote choice in my Research Methods class, I truly fell in love with it during an independent research project about the impact of Evangelical Christianity on vote choice in the 2016 Presidential Election with Dr. Gentry in PSCI-491, which I completed in the Spring 2019 semester. I conceived the idea for engaging in an independent research project after the thoroughly engaging research experience I had in Research Methods. Coming into the independent research project, I was excited to learn more about vote choice and Evangelical Christianity but nervous because I felt pressured to already know everything about vote choice coming into the initial meeting with Dr. Gentry, which took place in her office in the basement of Flory Hall. During the meeting, however, I quickly realized that an independent research project was not at all about coming into the project with prior knowledge and preconceived notions. Rather, it was about *researching*--digging through sources, finding interesting information, and synthesizing the information to form hypotheses and reach conclusions.

Over the course of the first few weeks of the semester, Dr. Gentry would assign me readings, I would read them, and then I would come into her office to discuss them. The cycle would continue as she assigned more readings for me to go through before our next meeting. Initially, we began by looking at both vote choice and religion literature. Then during the fifth week of the semester, I suddenly came upon the concept of Schwartz’s Value Theory in an article about religion and vote choice. This theory immediately caught my attention and sparked my curiosity, and I excitedly took it to Dr. Gentry’s office for our next weekly meeting. In the meeting, I hurriedly explained Value Theory to her and asked if I could change the course of my overall research project to include Value Theory in addition to Evangelical Christianity and vote choice. Realizing the potential of adding this theory to my other literature, we decided to design a new research project for The Research Experience at Bridgewater (TREB) summer research program.

While I designed a new project for the summer, I completed my original research project on Evangelical Christianity’s impact on vote choice in the 2016 Presidential Election with an addition that included literature on Schwartz’s Value Theory. Completing this research project was a major step in my career as a student as I learned many important things both about the topic of my project and about myself. For example, I learned how to complete a project relatively independently while still being able to ask for assistance and guidance when I felt lost or overwhelmed. With regard to the project, I learned about trends in evangelicals’ political ideology, party identification, issue positions, and voting behavior. I presented these conclusion in my final paper, [Religion and Vote Choice in the 2016 Presidential Election](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-1-religion-and-vote-choice-in-the-2016-presidential-election/). However, perhaps most importantly, I discovered the excitement a research project can bring as well as the rush of finding answers to relevant and meaningful questions.

This last discovery energized me to submit an application for a summer research grant through TREB. Although the application process—which included a project description, a bibliography, and several other forms—was stressful and difficult at times, I knew I wanted to engage in another self-designed research project. With some more help from Dr. Gentry, I devised the research question “To what degree do Evangelical Christians identify with each of the ten basic personal values?” In order to measure evangelicals’ identification levels with the values present in Schwartz’s Value Theory, I designed a survey based off of those that Schwartz used that I could easily administer and spread online.

Using a Survey Monkey account, I disseminated my survey and received over two hundred responses. During the time I was waiting to receive responses, Dr. Gentry and I went over both new and old literature from my independent study the previous semester. The new literature focused heavily on Evangelicalism instead of religion in general. It also focused heavily on Schwartz’s works and other authors’ analyses of his works. When the survey responses came in, I identified the ones who were self-identifying evangelical or born again Christians and eliminated the rest of the responses. I then imported the data into SPSS and analyzed it to find trends. Finally, I reported the final results in my paper, [Reconciling Religious Beliefs with Vote Choice: A study of evangelical Christians’ basic personal values](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-2-reconciling-religious-beliefs-with-vote-choice-a-study-of-evangelical-christians-basic-personal-values/).

Although I had already become familiar with completing an independent research project during the course of my spring semester junior year independent study, the process of completing the summer research project taught me several new things. First, it taught me that pacing oneself is key to not becoming tired of working on a project. This was something I already knew, just from a different perspective. Previously, I believed pacing was important so that one did not get overwhelmed as a result of procrastination. However, during the course of the summer, I realized that excitement can cause me to want to read everything and do everything as soon as possible. When this happened, I would not have any assigned readings or any part of the project to work on for several days. Too much of this and I could have become bored with the overall project. Thankfully, I learned to pace myself and control my research excitement so that I did not blow through everything and not do a thorough job.

At the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester, with my summer research project completed, I decided to base my PSCI-470 Senior Seminar project on the research I did over the summer. My project—[Values, Evangelicals, and Vote Choice](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-3-values-evangelicals-and-vote-choice/)—sought to uncover whether religious values, basic personal values, or political and ideological identifications affected evangelical Christians 2016 vote choice the most. Diving even further into the literature than I had over the summer, I hypothesized that the political and ideological identifications would be the most powerful factor in influencing vote choice, and the statistical analysis supported this hypothesis. Although my Senior Seminar project’s topic was remarkably similar to that of my TREB 2019 research paper, the increased level of statistical analysis increased the difficulty of the project and forced me to develop my analytical ability. Using SPSS and the dataset I gathered over the 2019 summer, I ran multiple regression analyses—something I had never done. This experience forced me to learn how to use SPSS more effectively to answer a more complex research question. [Presenting](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/artifact-3/) my project to my class was a fulfilling moment that served as the culmination of my hard work over the past two semesters and the summer. Building off of this project, I plan to code Donald Trump’s tweets during the 2016 presidential campaign according to the values they express in order to determine evangelicals’ possible level of connection with the tweets.

The multitude of interconnected courses that I have taken and designed—both independently and in a classroom setting—have given me excellent experience for a career in Public Administration. These course have taught me to think creatively as well as rationally, to respond to uncertainty, to remain calm when everything seems to be unraveling, and to solve problems in a variety of different scenarios. All of these skills are crucial to a public administrator as uncertain and chaotic situations are bound to arise and will require a rational but creative individual to handle them. Additionally, my research and data analysis skills will allow me to assess the effectiveness of bureaucratic policies and activities, a skill that is sorely lacking in many bureaucratic agencies. While these courses and experiences have played pivotal roles in my personal development during my time at Bridgewater College, a multitude of others have contributed in their own unique ways to make me the personal I am today.

**Engaging Diverse Perspectives**

Entering Bridgewater College as a freshman, I felt as if I knew who I was. I knew that I would be exposed to a variety of different viewpoints and perspectives, but I believed that I could readily articulate and defend my beliefs either political, religious, or anything else. Growing up with a stay-at-home mom and a dad who was a minister, I held fairly strict religious views and a decidedly conservative political ideology. Expecting to be able to maintain these perspectives relatively easily, I crashed headlong into Introduction to Political Philosophy with Dr. Jim Josefson. My first impression of Dr. Josefson was fairly accurate—a short, slight man who was undoubtedly highly intelligent and unmistakably clear in articulating his left-of-center ideology and non-traditional religious views. With my familial background and conservative Christian belief system, I was entirely skeptical of this possibly Marxist-in-disguise professor.

During the span of the course, Dr. Josefson introduced me and my classmates to various philosophies from a wide swath of philosophers including Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Nietzche among others. Some philosophies immediately resonated with my conservative Christian perspective. For example, Aristotle’s concept of the telos meshed with my views about society. Although I was never racist or sexist unlike Aristotle, I did believe that some people were better suited to different positions in society based upon their inherent essence of being. The works of Hobbes reinforced my Christian views about the desperately wicked natural state of human beings. Reading works such as this gave credence to the beliefs with which I entered Bridgewater College.

While the works of some philosophers supported my original perspectives, one philosopher in particular started me down a path of complete ideological change. Dr. Josefson assigned a paper in which we had to examine the work of one philosopher, argue and defend the philospher’s positions against the supposed attacks of other philosophers, and relate the philosophy to the film *Apocalypse Now*. For my paper, [John Locke’s Political Philosophy](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-3-john-lockes-political-philosophy/), I chose to analyze the work of political philosopher John Locke. Locke’s views on the state of nature being a state of liberty without license in which all men are essentially equal struck a chord with me. Furthermore, his view of God and natural rights, resulting in Social Contract Theory and a limited government were unlike anything I had ever read before. Taking his beliefs to heart, my political ideology transitioned from being steadfastly conservative to being more libertarian with a conservative leaning. Unfortunately, many people view libertarians as completely individualistic people who allow no room for social cooperation. Personally, my libertarian views never reflected this stereotype. In my paper on John Locke’s political philosophy, I had to critique Locke from the point of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau allows much more room for social cooperation which caused me to assimilate some of his views into my own libertarian views. However, Rousseau believes that this cooperation does not come about in the form of a social contract, which he believed essentially eliminated equality in society. I disagree with him on this point, because a social contract protects all by guaranteeing negative human rights thus promoting equality.

From my libertarian perspective based on the works of John Locke and Adam Smith, I largely believed in neoliberal economic policy. I viewed the market as the supreme force in society that should be left free from government interference to the benefit of all humanity. I held this view for well over a year until I took Dr. Huffman’s Intermediate Macroeconomics course in the fall semester of my junior year. This course focused heavily on economic development around the world, examining things such as GDP, interest rates, exchange rates, and government economic policy. In my paper, [Economic Growth: Increasing the Quality of Life](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-4-economic-growth-increasing-the-quality-of-life/), I had to give an argument for why economic growth improved individuals’ quality of life. While this was a relatively easy argument to make, I realized the advantages and disadvantages some countries had in developing economically. This realization cast some doubt on my neoliberal economic viewpoint. Previously, I may have chalked up some differences in development levels to cultural differences in an Aristotelian fashion. The assignment, however, forced me to consider inequality not only among individuals but also around the world between various countries. Ultimately, I decided that the neoliberal view that economic policies, taxes, trade policies, interest rates, and exchange rates within different individual countries better explained the developmental lag that many countries still experience.

**Ethical Reasoning**

My journey to being an individual with a high capacity for abstract thought and ethical reasoning began in PSCI-220 with Dr. Josefson and developed even further in PSCI-401E, Contemporary Political Thought, which was also with Dr. Josefson. In Introduction to Political Philosophy during the spring semester of my sophomore year, Dr. Josefson taught me about the political philosophies of the aforementioned philosophers as well as their ethical theories such as consequentialism and virtue theory. Although Dr. Josefson did cover the ethical theories, the class seemed to be focused mostly on the political philosophy. Contemporary Political Thought, far from being a mere extension of Introduction to Political Philosophy, took ethical theory to the next level for me. In the first couple of weeks, the PSCI-401E covered everything that PSCI-220 covered in an entire semester. This initial refresher was beneficial and quick, but it still dug deep into the works of the philosophers and the theories they developed.

As if the initial refresher to the course did not challenge me enough, the remaining months absolutely challenged and frustrated me. Throughout my entire educational career, I had never taken a class that proved as difficult for me as did PSCI-401E. From Nietzche to Kierkegaard to Hegel, various concepts and ideas in philosophy and ethical reasoning thoroughly confused me to the point that I did not even know what questions to ask to get to an understanding. At these moments, when I did not know what to do or what to ask, I would simply go visit Dr. Josefson in his office.

Dr. Josefson assigned the class a term paper that we had to turn in by the date of our final exam. For the assignment, each student had to choose one philosopher and write a minimum 20 page paper examining his philosophy and ethical theory. Coming from a Christian background, I choose to analyze Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian and philosopher who regularly critiqued the Lutherans and Catholics and their respective interpretations of Christianity. Reading Kierkegaard’s original works proved to be particularly challenging as they were often dense, wordy, and extremely abstract. One day, I read about Kierkegaard’s idea of contemporaneouness within Christianity and was utterly stumped about what point Kierkegaard could have possibly been trying to communicate. In the midst of my frustration and confusion, I walked from my dorm room to Dr. Josefson’s office in Flory Hall. Plopping myself in one of his many wooden rocking chairs, I told him that I had absolutely no clue what the reading was saying. Dr. Josefson began by going over the passage in question with me which then turned into a ninety minute conversation on Christianity and evangelicalism today.

Although I did not follow roughly half of what Dr. Josefson explained to me, by the time I left his office I had a much better understanding of Kierkegaard’s philosophy and ethical theory. As I eventually explained in my term paper—[Kierkegaard and Evangelical Christianity](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-5-kierkegaard-and-evangelical-christianity/)—Kierkegaard proposed an ethical theory that was much different than many philosophers’ theories. Rejecting deontological theories, Kierkegaard believed that people could not know the true laws of God that would allow one to act morally. Rather, in Kierkegaard’s theory, ethics consisted of God giving individuals objective truths that are bespoke to them, which they must act upon with complete obedience to God. Essentially, the action makes for the ethical. Additionally, Kierkegaard also rejected the consequentialism in which many of the Christians of his time believed. He believed that ethics led not to rewards and punishments, but to change within the individual. This specific instance of confusion regarding Kierkegaard’s ethical theory was only one of many that Dr. Jo helped to clarify for me.

Over the remainder of the semester, I frequented Dr. Jo’s office to learn more about Kierkegaard, Christian theology in general, and my own specific religious beliefs. Learning more about my own beliefs came both indirectly and directly through our chats in his office due to Dr. Jo’s unique method of practically philosophizing with the students that come and visit him. While being questioned about my personal beliefs in a non-threatening manner could be uncomfortable at times, I always left Dr. Jo’s office either with a better understanding of what I believed or with a realization that I might need to reexamine some of my views. These realizations were often about my religious beliefs, but this greatly impacted my ability to ethically reason. Merely taking the course and writing my term paper opened me up to a myriad of new ethical theories, but having to actually apply the theories to real life examples during my talks with Dr. Josefson elevated my understanding and ethical reasoning capacity to new heights.

**Citizenship/Ethics and Community Responsibility**

My time at Bridgewater College showed me what fully being a citizen met as well as what it meant to be a responsible member of a community. Coming from Churchville, VA, a town with a population of 194 as of the 2010 census, I was never exposed to a model of responsibility and citizenship within an active community. My small town had no local government and relatively few issues that needed addressing. Being able to vote in my first state and federal election while a freshman at Bridgewater allowed me fulfill one of the most basic civic duties—voting. Although I know that voting is not the litmus test for true citizenship, being able to fulfill that civic duty that served as a milestone in my life as a citizen of this country.

The experience that taught me the most about what active citizenship and community responsibility looks like was my participation in the Showker Prize during my first three years at the college. This competition offered a $5,000 cash prize to a team of at least five students representing at least three different majors of study who identified a difficult problem at Bridgewater College, or anywhere else in the world, and provided a viable solution for the problem. My first-year team, The Stigma Ends Now, which consisted of myself and four other freshman Bridgewater College Flory Honors students, identified stigmas surrounding mental health issues in college students as a problem that kept students who may have mental health issues from coming forward and receiving the care that they need. Our solution was to create a series of informative videos regarding mental health issues, treatments, and mental health stigmas. We wrote the scripts, filmed the videos, edited the videos, and uploaded them to our YouTube channel. After a couple of weeks, we had gotten excellent feedback from viewers across the world who absolutely loved our videos and the message they spread. My team presented our solution and results to a panel of judges at the Showker Prize finale and were crowned the winners of the 2016-2017 Showker Prize. (https://wp.bridgewater.edu/TheStigmaEndsNow/)

I found the Showker Prize such a rewarding process that I decided to do it my sophomore year. This team, Waste Watchers, which consisted of three group members from my freshman year’s team, a new member, and myself, searched for solutions to the problem of food waste both on the Bridgewater College campus and in high schools and colleges across the country. We created a food waste reduction and composting information campaign on Bridgewater College’s campus in order to educate students about the importance of not wasting food and composting food waste. We also created a lesson plan that could be used to teach students of any age about food waste and composting. We presented this lesson plan to both high school and college classes and received excellent feedback and results. Through our hard work and dedication, my team succeeded in winning the Showker Prize for the second year in a row. (https://wp.bridgewater.edu/showker-prize-2017-waste-watchers/)

My junior year, with two of my teammates from the previous two years either studying abroad or having transferred to a different school, I had decided not to participate in the competition. However, another team in the competition learned that I was not planning on participating and recruited me for their team. I decided to join, and my new team—Moving Borders—and I created a website for use by the Bridgewater College Career Services Department that provided Bridgewater Students with better access to internship and career opportunities. Once again, the Showker Prize judges were impressed with my team’s final product and we beat out all other teams in the crowded field to claim the victory trophy. (https://wp.bridgewater.edu/movingborders/)

My participation in three victorious Showker Prize projects taught me multiple useful skills and life lessons. Most importantly, the Showker Prize process showed me how I can make an immediate positive impact on the world around me simply by taking intentional, thoughtful action. The experience enabled me to demonstrate community responsibility through the process of identifying problems and issues that needed solutions and then taking the steps to put those solutions into place. As a citizen of the Bridgewater College campus, I view it as my duty to strive to amend any issues that students or the school itself may be facing. That is how my teams arrived at our project topics: student mental health, food waste on campus, and a lack of student knowledge about available internships. Through my efforts to be an active citizen and take responsibility for problems in the BC community, I believe I have made many monumental changes both within myself and in the community.

**Global Citizenship and Intercultural Competencies**

Coming from the small, rural town that I did, I had never been fully exposed to what most would consider to be a diverse or multicultural community. My high school was 97% Caucasian and had more Russian exchange students than African-American students. Although it my area completely lacked any semblance of diversity racial or ethnic diversity, I was not ill-prepared to handle the transition to a diverse campus such as Bridgewater College. My parents raised me excellently; I was taught to respect all races, cultures, ethnicities, orientations, and other dimensions of diversity despite the negative views select individuals in my community may have held. This tolerant upbringing resulted largely from my parents’ benevolent Christian views and beliefs, making them very kind and caring people.

Once at Bridgewater, I experienced more diversity of all kinds than I ever had in my entire life. One of my most eye-opening experiences with diversity my freshman year came when I ate dinner with ten or so international students, and I was the only American at the table. Listening to the international students talk about their home countries as well as their individual experiences with American culture caused me to realize that there are multiple ways to view American society. This realization revolutionized my worldview—while I was still an American, I was also a citizen of a much larger global community. Since that moment, my perspective on global citizenship and multiculturalism have been enhanced both in and out of the classroom.

Many of my political science classes such as Introduction to Global Politics and Introduction to Comparative Politics, as well as my two semesters of taking French, gave me the opportunity to engage in multicultural-based discussions in the classroom. However, one class in particular helped enhance and refine my perspective on global citizenship and multiculturalism—Honors Latin American Politics or PSCI-300H. This class, taught by Dr. Kevin Pallister, focused on the political, economic, and social structures of the various Latin American countries. I learned not only the cultures of specific countries, but also the shared cultural values that extended across much of the entire geographic region. Prior to taking the course, I knew that Latin American countries mainly spoke Spanish, had very turbulent political histories, and were generally cash-crop based economies due to colonialism, but I did not understand the historical and cultural contexts that contributed to these shared characteristics. Learning more about the legacy of colonialism, the Spanish influence of *machuismo,* and the history of social movements brought me a deeper understanding of not only the region but also the world.

Originally, PSCI-300H did not have an honors-level distinction. In order to transform it into an honors course, three other honors students and I decided to become “experts” in different countries on which we wrote blog posts and communicated to the class about current events. I chose to become an expert on Venezuela because I knew that the turbulent political, social, and economic climate within the country would provide me with plenty of content to write about in my blog posts. We also had to write a research paper with a topic of our own choosing. I chose to write about why legislatures in some Latin American countries choose to impeach their corrupt presidents while legislatures in other Latin American countries have no impeachment movements even though the presidents are very corrupt. This research paper, [The Relationship between Legislatures and Presidents in Latin America](https://wp.bridgewater.edu/lmorgan/essay-supporting-item-6-the-relationship-between-legislatures-and-presidents-in-latin-america/), allowed me to examine the cultural and political differences between Latin American countries. Overall, the countries with high levels of corruption in the legislature did not impeach presidents who were clearly guilty of crimes. This multicultural analysis allowed me to hypothesize that Donald Trump would be impeached—a conclusion I reached well before impeachment proceedings began in the U.S.

**Conclusion:**

My time at Bridgewater College has been a deeply rewarding experience that has provided me with myriad opportunities to develop myself through acquiring skills and engaging in introspective examination. My personalized education program taught me how to engage in research, analyze statistics, and perform myriad other tasks that will benefit me as a future graduate student majoring in Public Administration. Coming from a small town in which I was raised according to the prevailing religions and political views, I have been able to examine my beliefs and determined that some needed revising. I developed the ability to ethically reason—a skill that is useful in all areas of life and will pay dividends in the future both for myself and my community. Coming from a small community with essentially no model for active citizenship, I discovered how to get involved in community activities and make a change in the world through my participation in campus events and programs. The relative unfamiliarity with cultural diversity throughout the first eighteen years of my life developed into a deep appreciation for other cultures as well as a desire to learn more about them. Without my time at Bridgewater College, I would not be the competent and capable young man with a desire to continue developing and growing that I am today.