

WRITING PLACEMENT TEST

PART I: Readings, Pages 1-4

PART II: Argumentative Essay, Page 5

PART III: Self-Placement Essay, Page 6

You must complete all 3 parts of the placement test and then email your 2 essays to:

Writing_Placement@bloomfield.edu

Essays must be shared either through a word document or in the body of your email.

PART I: Readings

Read the following four articles about free speech and college campuses (Pages 1-4). When you finish the articles, you will be asked to write an argumentative essay based on the readings.

The instructions for the essay can be found on Page 5.

Volokh, E. (2015, November 2). The importance of protecting even the thoughts we hate. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

The Supreme Court's decisions "protect the freedom to express" even "the thought that we hate" — including "discriminatory" viewpoints expressed by student groups at public universities. So wrote [Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#), no stranger to fights for equality but also a strong supporter of the freedom of speech. This came in her majority opinion in [Christian Legal Society v. Martinez \(2010\)](#), but the dissenters agreed on this.

Future movements, from all political positions, need that protection. And they won't get it if colleges teach students the habits of censorship rather than of freedom.

And the reason for this understanding of the First Amendment is clear: As the court wrote in a [1972 college student speech case](#) (quoting [Justice Hugo Black](#)), First Amendment protection "must be accorded to the ideas we hate or sooner or later they will be denied to the ideas we cherish."

One way that speech restrictions often grow is through what I call "censorship envy." Say one group wins a ban on speech that it finds offensive. It's human nature for other groups to then ask: What about speech that offends *us* — harsh criticism of Israel, or of certain religious belief systems, or of abortion, or of America?

Are we second-class citizens, whose feelings can be insulted with impunity, while other groups are protected? Are we weaklings who lack the power or status that the others have used to suppress the speech they hate? And if we're not second-class weaklings, we demand the same "protection" from speech that offends us. That's censorship envy, and it's a powerful force supporting the growth of speech restrictions, at universities and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, we're seeing many at universities, including student groups, administrators and even the federal Department of Education, trying to suppress student speech, [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#) and [again](#) -- and the list could go on. Oddly, many of these restrictions come from political groups that see themselves as outsiders fighting the powerful. If that's really so, how can they give the government extra censorship powers that can so easily be used against future "progressives" like them?

Justice Ginsburg has seen how many civil rights movements succeeded in America, in large part because of their speech and the constitutional protection for such speech. Future movements, from all political positions, need that protection. And they won't get it if colleges teach students the habits of censorship rather than of freedom.

McCartney, K. (2015, November 2). Today's students have a new way of looking at free speech. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

College students today hold a range of views on free speech. Some adhere to a strict interpretation of the First Amendment: All speech must be free. Others assert that free speech is not truly available to all, especially members of marginalized groups. For these students free speech is a nuanced concept because, in the words of the University of Baltimore law professor Garrett Epps, "[Repressing speech has costs, but so does allowing it.](#)"

At my campus, an appointed group of faculty, staff, students, alumnae and trustees spent last year assessing the challenges of discourse. They found that, counter to the idea that today's students fear opposing perspectives, most students want their college to be a place where uncomfortable ideas can be debated openly. Further, most agreed that we don't have the right not to be offended, although we do have an obligation to learn what offends.

Parents who marched for civil rights or protested the Vietnam War during their own college years will know from experience why free speech matters. The lessons some of us learned during those years opened our eyes and often set us on our life course. In their own development as activists and leaders, students today are navigating the added complexities of online discourse, in which the ability to comment anonymously can be simultaneously liberating and destructive, giving voice not only to offensive ideas but to ad hominem attacks, and, in some cases, harassment. Perhaps this is one of the reasons today's students are interested in the boundaries of free speech. As a society, we will benefit from the conversation they are fostering.

Sometimes we are changed by debate; always, we are tested. Other times we are not changed because our opinions reflect a moral certainty on matters of importance to us; our deeply held beliefs are linked with our identities. Still, this does not mean that we cannot disagree openly about any issue, and when we do we must counter argument with more argument. Consensus should not be the goal – even about free speech.

Byron, K. (2015, November 2). Millennials are creating a more inclusive and just world. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

One-third of female students in my graduating class who responded to the Association of American Universities' [Campus Climate Survey](#) reported being sexually assaulted during college. For these students, sexual violence isn't a difficult conversation, it's their life. They are constantly balancing their healing and their education, frequently while navigating a campus that they share with their assailant. It's unreasonable to expect student survivors to leave their personal experiences at the classroom door. Trauma affects how students learn and academic discussions about trauma and violence should take this into consideration.

Promoting a rigorous academic environment does not mean making space for every idea that pops into a student's head. Academic discussions make space in conversations to hear from people who have valuable knowledge to contribute. Safer learning environments ensure that students who have experienced violence are able to contribute without putting their experiences up for debate. More inclusive classrooms raise the level of discourse and nuance in academic conversations by promoting the free speech of student survivors, allowing others to learn from their experiences. Widespread campus sexual violence hurts entire campus communities and those communities should have an obligation to respond and support survivors in their healing and their learning.

There are those who think calling for safer academic environments is "coddling" or "infantilizing" to students. This view frames student survivors as weak and implies that when they receive support from their community, they are made weaker. Claiming that survivors of sexual violence are overly sensitive is a way of protecting other students from confronting difficult truths about the nature and prevalence of violence on their campuses. Classrooms and campuses that are sensitive to the needs of traumatized students provide opportunities for all students to engage with difficult material, not just those with the privilege of distancing themselves from the topic at hand.

Those who want to frame this issue as an attack on free speech on college campuses are ignoring the reality of campus sexual violence. Requests for safe spaces or trigger warnings are not about hiding from ideas but about finding ways to engage without disturbing the people most directly affected. Students are not avoiding or silencing difficult conversations, they're learning to face them in ways that are both academically rigorous as well as sensitive to the needs of everyone in the room. Through these discussions, they are becoming a generation of leaders ready to create more inclusive and just world.

Stascavage, B. (2015, November 2). The problem with echo chambers on campus and beyond. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

I think the unwillingness to have uncomfortable discussions at college is a recent development of the growing polarity in our society. And the effect of this polarity is pointing to the creation of stovepipes of thought, in which knowledge of valid opposing ideas has waned.

College campuses are not alone in this development. The stovepipes of thought have set up echo chambers where the range of acceptable discussion is narrow. Gun-toting right wingers? There is a round-the-clock source of information for those viewers, where all news is conveniently presented and analyzed to fit their world view. Liberal environmentalists have their own feed of filtered information.

Not only that, but a relatively small yet vocal and active group can sanitize discussion in those echo chambers by aggressively targeting dissenters, pressuring them to convert or leave. A salient example is the reaction at Wesleyan to [my article on Black Lives Matter](#). Instead of engaging in discussion, a [small group](#) targeted the student newspaper for publishing an unpopular opinion.

Students are developing this idea further. Instead of being content with their own sanitized echo chambers, they are extending their worldview to the surrounding environment. These vocal activists are culturally terraforming the environment around them, using public shaming and soft threats as their means to keep voices they disagree with in check. The evidence of aggressive targeting by these activists already exists. [Speakers have been uninvited, comedians have sworn off performing at campuses](#). This is cultural terraforming in action.

When they graduate, they will take these values to their respective industries. And if the recent [upheaval surrounding my college newspaper](#) is foreshadowing, the news media industry may have a problem on its hands.

The end result will be even more polarization in America, with societal fault lines growing increasingly contentious and unproductive.

PART II: Argumentative Placement Essay Instructions

The major goal of the writing program is to teach students to write argumentative papers with a clear thesis, logical development, and correct source use. As such, the College needs to know how well you can perform these tasks before you begin, which is what this section of the placement test is designed to do.

This essay is the first academic impression you will make to the College and to your future writing instructor, so do your best and **remember everything you may have previously learned about thesis statements, topic sentences, quotations, and citations.**

As with most of the essays you write in college, you may seek outside help for this essay. You may consult with family, friends, tutors, and/or teachers. They may give you feedback and help you think of ideas, but ultimately the ideas and writing must be your own. The point of this placement test is to determine what class will best serve your needs. If the essay you send in does not reflect your actual writing abilities, then you will struggle in your writing class. Using the sources you were previously provided, write a 2-3 paged (double-spaced) argumentative essay in which you answer the following question:

- **Background:** The First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects freedom of expression, forbidding Congress from making laws that would limit freedom of speech or freedom of the press. Throughout U.S. history, this right has been challenged and defended, interpreted and re-interpreted.
- **Background:** Students on many campuses are concerned with debates of ideas and therefore also with free speech issues. Some believe in unrestricted discussion and expression (including uncomfortable ideas and even hate speech), protecting all ideas from censorship. Others argue for curbs on totally free speech on campus. Some would ban hate speech; some would refuse to have controversial speakers or performers come to campus. Some believe effective learning environments require “trigger warnings” and “safe spaces”; others see those considerations as compromises that endanger intellectual freedom and debate. The definition of *free speech* is itself a debate.
- **Question: What would be an appropriate free-speech policy for a diverse college campus? Describe the benefits and disadvantages of your proposed policy.** Please remember that this is an academic essay, so the readers will not be looking for your personal experience. Instead, readers will expect you to mention, quote, and cite the news articles that you were given (a works cited page is also expected).

When you are done with the essay, you should email it (in the body of the email or as a MS Word document), along with your self-recommendation, to Writing.Placement@bloomfield.edu. Please remember to include your name, student ID number, date of birth, and address.

PART III: Self-Placement Essay Instructions

Now that you have written an argumentative essay based on readings, you should think about writing it and your other experiences with reading and writing and make a recommendation about which writing class you think you should be in.

You should write a one-page (double spaced) essay in which you recommend the writing course that you think you belong in based on your abilities. You should provide specific supporting evidence for why you belong in the class you chose.

The coordinator of the writing program or the director of the writing center will read your argumentative essay and your recommendation essay to see if the skills evident in your argumentative essay match the class you recommend. If you place yourself at a level that your argumentative essay does not justify, the coordinator of the writing program will contact you for a conversation about your writing placement.

Below are descriptions of the three writing courses from which you may choose. Below the descriptions are behaviors typical of successful students in each class. Use these as a guide for making your choice, and remember to include specific evidence for your choice.

WRITING 106: Analytic and Argumentative Writing

About a third of new students take this course. It meets twice a week and focuses on writing thesis-based analytic and argumentative papers. Students who pass this course with a C- or better take WRITING 107 the next semester. Students should choose WRT 106 if they:

- Could distinguish between the readings' main points and the supporting evidence.
- Used evidence from the sources in their paper, instead of personal experience.
- Integrated quotes from the provided readings as evidence.
- Felt comfortable planning and organizing the paper.
- Are comfortable reading roughly 10 pages of text for each class.
- Are comfortable writing 5-page papers.
- Are familiar with the ideas of thesis, topic sentence, and counter-argument.
- Are familiar with and use the writing process, including writing multiple drafts for papers.
- Consider themselves good readers and writers.

WRITING 105: Enhanced Analytic and Argumentative Writing

About half of new students take this course. It meets three days a week and focuses on writing thesis-based analytic and argumentative papers. Reading and writing assignments are the same as those assigned in WRITING 106, but students receive more time to complete the assignments and more feedback from instructors. Students who complete WRT 105 with a C- or better take WRT 107 the next semester. Students should choose WRT 105 if they:

- Could mostly distinguish between the readings' main points and the supporting evidence, but sometime became confused by the articles.
- Used evidence from the sources in their paper.
- Provided quotes from the readings, but didn't always fit them in well to the rest of the paper.
- Felt comfortable planning and organizing the paper.
- Are comfortable reading roughly 7 pages of text for each class.
- Are a little nervous about writing 5-page papers.
- Can use the five-paragraph structure to write a paper
- Have used the writing process, including writing multiple drafts for papers.
- Have heard of, but are not completely sure of, the terms "thesis," "topic sentence," and "counter-argument."
- Grew up speaking a language other than English at home and are fairly confident in their ability to control written English.
- Are sometimes unsure about the correctness of their grammar.
- Consider themselves "ok" readers and writers.

WRITING 95: Reading & Writing for College

This course does not count for college credit but will prepare students to successfully complete future writing courses. About one in eight new students take this class. It meets four times a week and focuses on the foundations for reading and writing for college. Students who pass this course with a C or better take WRITING 105 the next semester and WRITING 107 the semester after that. Students should choose WRT 95 if they:

- Struggled to understand the readings.
- Relied mostly on personal experience, rather than textual evidence, to answer their paper.
- Had difficulty developing an answer to the placement essay question.
- Are often unsure how to plan and develop a paper.
- Often are not comfortable with knowing when paragraphs should end and begin.
- Are not comfortable writing 5-page essays.
- Are unfamiliar with the terms "thesis," "topic sentence," and "counter-argument."
- Are often unsure about the correctness of their grammar.
- Grew up speaking a language other than English at home and are not confident in their ability to control written English.
- Consider themselves poor readers and writers.

When you are done with the essay, you should email it (as MS Word document or in the body of the email), along with your argumentative essay, to Writing.Placement@bloomfield.edu. Please remember to include your name, student ID number, date of birth, and address.