



Prescott College

For the Liberal Arts, the Environment, and Social Justice

Helpful Hints for Crafting a Successful Academic Focus Essay

The Academic Focus Essay has been an application material utilized by the Prescott College Master of Arts Program for the last several years to evaluate prospective students for the program. The following information has proven useful to applicants, as it gives a general idea of what our faculty is looking for during the committee review stage of the application process.

The purpose of the Academic Focus Essay is essentially an in-depth outline of what you want your graduate program to look like. It also prepares you for the process of creating self-designed classes. You are required to create three self-designed courses within this essay.

Remember, for your program, you will be required to design a total of five courses, three in this paper, and the other two with the assistance of faculty in one of your first classes within the program. Please follow the sample as you are thinking about how to present the courses in your essay. For the purpose of this essay you are able to utilize either MLA or APA format for citing your resources; however, whichever one you pick, please remain consistent throughout.

Below, you will find examples of the various parts of the essay, including a self-designed course.

Sample Course Description with Suggested Reading List:

APPROACHES IN ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY: CULTURE AND ECOLOGY

This course consists of a critical analysis of the interrelations of culture, social structure, and human ecology. I will examine social organization as influenced by characteristic patterns of resource exploitation. This course will include a study of Environmental Anthropology, focusing on theory, major environmental questions, problems, issues, and possible solutions. Topics will include environmental issues pertaining to land/sea and natural resources, deforestation, population problems, poverty and environmental justice, natural hazards and risks, resource conflicts and warfare, economic development, mineral and oil extraction, landscapes, and biodiversity conservation.

Possible Texts and Readings

Crumley, C. (2001). *New Directions in Anthropology and Environment: Intersections*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Haenn, N., & Wilk, R. (Eds.). (2006). *The Environment in Anthropology: A Reader in Ecology, Culture, and Sustainable Living*. New York: New York University Press.

Johnston, B. R. (Ed.). (1997). *Life and Death Matters: Human Rights and the Environment at the End of the Millennium*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.



Prescott College

For the Liberal Arts, the Environment, and Social Justice

Kormondy, E. J., & Brown, D. E. (1998). *Fundamentals of Human Ecology*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Redman, C. L. (1999). *Human Impact on Ancient Environments*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Townsend, P. K. (1998). *Environmental Anthropology: From Pigs to Policies*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Social and Ecological Literacies

The Academic Focus Essay also asks that you address how your proposed program is going to increase your own awareness and the awareness of others about social and ecological issues. This is an important detail, since the requirement captures Prescott College's mission which is to create agents of positive social and ecological change.

Sample Statement of Social and Ecological Literacies:

"One of the goals of my studies is acquiring the skills necessary to use cultural knowledge, which can be learned through anthropological research, to identify possible solutions to both social and ecological problems. These issues are included in most of my courses and will be addressed in works submitted in the study packets. While a majority of my studies focuses on the Andes and Amazon, it is my hope to incorporate the same anthropological methods to address local social and ecological issues as well and to pass this knowledge on to the next generation."

Practicum Idea

One requirement of the graduate students in each Master of Arts Program at Prescott College is to put theory into practice by completing a practicum. It is common for students to align their practicum with their after-graduation plans. For example, if a student has a goal to introduce a new curriculum in Sustainability Management at the community college level, that student can seek out an opportunity to teach a course from the new curriculum at their local community college. An example for a student who is interested in working for a government agency, would be to consider a practicum with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. *Students pursuing teacher certification will have their student teaching count as their practicum.*

Sample Practicum Idea:

I. TEACHING INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY



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If possible, under the supervision of the Anthropology Department Faculty I would like to work with the Virtual Campus of Harrisburg Area Community College in designing and teaching a college level introduction to Cultural Anthropology internet course.

Thesis Idea

A common characteristic of a graduate degree is the completion of a Thesis as the final project. At Prescott College you can choose between doing a hands-on thesis project and completing a traditional thesis that is based mainly on library and field research. Some of our students have started a non-profit organization as part of their thesis project; others have implemented an Environmental Education program at their high school. Here is an example from an applicant's program proposal.

Sample Thesis Idea:

Through my studies and preliminary practicum research, I hope to narrow down the focus of my thesis topic. However, two of the possible topics include:

The Importance of Cultural Preservation to the Ecological Environment

"Ecuadorian Ecotourism," Can It Preserve Cultural Identity and the Environment?