

Respondeo etsi Mutabor: The Comment and Response Assignment, Young Scholars, and the Promise of Liberal Education



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This essay celebrates *Young Scholars in Writing's* first ten years by considering the journal's Comment and Response section. It locates the activity of commenting on and responding to peer scholarship at the heart of traditional education in rhetoric, argues for an approach that emphasizes *controversia*, the more or less Ciceronian notion of considering both or all sides of a question, details the comment and response assignment at Furman University, and considers several benefits of commenting on and responding to peer scholarship.

Descartes . . . replaced the principles by which medieval thought had been guided ever since Anselm's "*Credo ut intelligam*" (I believe so that I may understand), with his "*Cogito ergo sum*" [I think therefore I am]. Among the possible starting points for our powers of reason, scholasticism had singled out man's faith in the revealing power of God: Descartes seconded it with his no less paradoxical faith in the rational character of existence and nature.

The "*Cogito ergo sum*," for all its rivalry with theology, was one-sided. We post-War thinkers are less concerned with the revealed character of the true God or the true character of nature than with the survival of a truly human society. In asking for a truly human society we put the question of truth once more; but our specific endeavor is the living realization of truth in mankind. Truth is divine and has been divinely revealed—*credo ut intelligam*. Truth is pure and can be scientifically stated—*cogito ergo sum*. Truth is vital and must be socially represented—*Respondeo etsi mutabor* (I respond although I will be changed).

—Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, "Farewell to Descartes"

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

—Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*

Language is not stable but changing and . . . it is perpetually remade by its speakers, who are themselves remade, both as individuals and communities, in what they say. . . . Our subject is rhetoric, if by that is meant the study of the ways in which character and community—and motive, value, reason, social structure, everything, in short, that makes a culture—are defined and made real in performances of language. Whenever you speak, you define a character for yourself and for at least one other—your audience—and make a community at least between the two of you; and you do this in a language that is of necessity provided to you by others and modified in your use of it. How this complex process works and can work well, is our concern. As the object of art is beauty and of philosophy truth, the object of rhetoric is justice: the constitution of a social world.

—James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning*

Rosenstock-Huessy, Burke, and White are but three of many who, responding to the horrors of global war, genocide, and the looming cloud of nuclear holocaust, articulate an approach to human decision making and the advancement of knowledge that is deeply rhetorical. Each in his own way seeks to avoid the fracturing and sanitizing tendencies of structuralist and social scientific approaches while acknowledging the need to constitute a social and intellectual world in which “truth” becomes “vital” as it is spoken—discussed, debated, refined, and questioned—with others. Their approach marks a shift now understood as a “rhetorical turn” (Simons) in the conduct of inquiry that undermines the obstacles to (Bost), and opens new possibilities for, undergraduate research and writing in the humanities.

The several problems associated with undergraduate research in the humanities have been detailed elsewhere (e.g., Grobman and Kinkead xiii–xvi). Most important for our present purpose is the feeling held by many undergraduates that they have little to say that might contribute to ongoing conversations in disciplines to which they are new immigrants. The problem arises most acutely in introductory courses, where even the best students find themselves overwhelmed by the depth of the discussion, daunted by its theoretical density, and hesitant to comment without, as one student put it, “years of study and training.” Their hesitation is a kind of “Anguish of Adso,” the disturbing realization that humanities research means enduring and comprehending a “centuries-old murmuring” between and among the books of labyrinthine libraries (Eco 286).

How might we overcome such fear? Working from the dual assumptions that undergraduate research and writing matter and that one of the central purposes of liberal education is to learn to engage others in thoughtful and constructive discussion and debate, this essay celebrates *Young Scholars*’ first ten years by considering the journal’s Comment and Response section. We agree with former section editor Susan Thomas’s statement in volume 8 that the “Comment and Response feature of YSW provides a safe and supportive environment for YSW readers to interact more formally with the scholarship of their peers and to expand their writing repertoire beyond the research essay” (103) and argue that use of a comment and response assignment rooted in YSW’s longer essays not only benefits student writers but also serves to deepen and expand classroom discussions and disciplinary knowledge in important ways.

Our essay has three parts. In the first we locate the activity of commenting on and responding to peer scholarship at the heart of traditional education in rhetoric and argue for an approach that emphasizes *controversia*, the more or less Ciceronian notion of considering both or all sides of a question. In the second we detail the comment and response assignment at Furman University, and in the concluding section we consider the several benefits of commenting on and responding to peer scholarship.

***Controversia* and Liberal Education**

If we assume that one key purpose of liberal education, broadly conceived, is to foster a competent citizenry, then the primary purpose of university-level liberal arts instruction is the cultivation of civic leaders prepared to engage the local, national, and global communities in which we live. Liberal education takes as its tasks the seemingly impossible: invigoration and stimulation of intellectual curiosity; broad preparation in a diverse set of disciplines and integration of that knowledge into meaningful syntheses; intellectual inquiry in sufficient depth to allow one to contribute to a greater body of knowledge; recognition of the moral, historical, critical, and theoretical dimensions of our lives together without completely forsaking the practical; understanding of the traditions into which one has been born *and* fostering of the critical abilities to maintain the best of those traditions while overcoming the worst; and development of expressive capabilities in writing, speaking, and the arts. At its best, liberal education encourages certain traits of mind (the famous Harvard study of 1945 advanced four: to think effectively, to communicate thought, to make relevant judgments, to discriminate among values) and certain traits of character (wisdom and eloquence, to be sure, but also intellectual curiosity, civic-mindedness, prudence, integrity, responsibility, fairness, and certainly several more) (Curriculum Review Committee; O'Rourke, "*Quaestio*").

This intellectual inheritance informs our understanding of the place rhetoric courses hold in our students' education. In most rhetoric courses we try to promote a cultural and critical knowledge of and appreciation for spoken and written public discourse. Cultural knowledge is knowledge of rhetoric as a literature, one that has shaped and been shaped by the political, social, ideological, legal, and religious forces of our past and present. Critical knowledge is knowledge of and appreciation for the constructive and critical activities of communication: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and judging. Very broadly speaking, one refers to the "what," the other to the "how."

Both are essential to good citizenship and both acknowledge the all too often unstated truth that undergirds and animates contemporary liberal education: there is no immaculate perception. Despite our many commonalities, civic and intellectual life requires us to work with those who see the world in ways we don't, hold beliefs we don't share, and work toward ends we may well find odious. The art of rhetoric grew out of the civic need to manage controversy and disagreement peacefully and constructively, to find common ground, and to understand difference and discrepancy. It is a necessary part of liberal education for, as Donald C. Bryant argued over fifty years ago, rhetoric offers students an "operative philosophy of civil leadership" (404).

Central to this "operative philosophy" is rhetoric's traditional education in the more or less Ciceronian notion of considering both or all sides of a question. Recent scholarship has dubbed this *controversia*, the habit of seeing and arguing *in utramque partem*. Thomas O. Sloane has persuasively argued that this mode of thinking and speaking dominated Cicero's lawyerly rhetorical theory, is clearly evident in the extant texts of Seneca the Elder and others, was an important part of Renaissance scholarly disputation, and has a great deal to offer the contemporary rhetoric classroom (see especially 275–94). Other scholars have traced the influence of controversial thinking to early modern literature (Richards) and the courtrooms of the early American republic (O'Rourke, "Rhetorical Dynamics").

In short, controversial thinking is a mode of invention that adopts, at least initially, an adversarial attitude. Like a lawyer preparing a case, the speaker or writer first suspends judgment, then assumes the role of first one side and then another, striving at all times to discover the strengths and weaknesses of each position and the lines of argument available to each. The result of controversial thinking, when properly employed, is the discovery of strong and weak arguments, the testing of defensible and indefensible positions, and the exploration of new and plausible extensions of existing arguments and positions.

This approach, arguing *pro* and *contra*, was most frequently used in antiquity to teach students how to debate civic questions in the law courts and political assemblies (what Hannah Arendt calls *la vita activa*) (12–17). It is just as applicable, however, to *la vita contemplativa*: the life of contemplation, research, and scholarship. In scholarship, *controversia* appears in many forms, from the writer who explores various sides of a question before coming to the strongest position she can find to a full-blown debate among multiple scholars writing in the *New York Review of Books*. It is this very activity that *Young Scholars*’ Comment and Response section so vividly enacts, and it does so in a way that encourages movement—not least the movement of the scholar from private contemplation to the active engagement of others.

The Comment and Response Assignment at Furman University

“Engaged learning” is Furman University’s distinctive approach to liberal education. It emphasizes the many ways in which students and faculty can and do bridge liberal education’s traditional divides—between theoretical and applied learning, intellectual and civic growth, individual contemplation and public action—through service teaching and learning, extracurricular activities, cultural life programs, internships, and undergraduate research and writing. Engaged learning rejects the image of the solitary scholar in an ivory tower apart from and above community. It assumes that we are citizens as well as scholars, devoted to the wise use of knowledge as well as to its creation, discovery, preservation, and advancement. Our responsibility includes, as Cynthia Ozick reminds us, “the recognition that we cannot live above or apart from our own time and what it imposes on us; that willy-nilly we breathe inside the cage of our generation and must perform within it” (358). In this spirit teachers and students are encouraged to engage broader communities of research, scholarly communication, and activism.

The comment and response assignment participates in and deepens this experience by requiring students to engage their peers at other universities and to do so on matters of enduring scholarly concern. At present we use the assignment in three courses offered by the Furman University Communication Studies Department, the rhetoric program’s home: Introduction to Rhetoric (a sophomore-level course designed to familiarize students with the vocabulary, theories, and critical approaches to rhetoric in preparation for advanced study in the field), U.S. Public Address (a two-semester, upper-level sequence concerned with rhetorical practices—speeches, debates, letters, songs, and editorials—in key controversies in U.S. history), and Rhetoric in the Ancient and Modern Worlds (another two-semester upper-level sequence that focuses primarily on the evolution of rhetorical theory). These courses were designed and are taught in the context of a broader communication studies curriculum, which at Furman also involves a humanities-oriented study of mass communication.

Instructors make the comment and response assignment early in the semester. They ask students to comment on and respond to one of several YSW articles selected by the instructor. The pool of articles varies considerably from class to class and instructors base their choices on several criteria, including the nature of the course, the publication date of the YSW essay, and the manner in which an essay might expand or deepen the course content. In the fall 2012 Rhetoric in the Ancient World course, for instance, O’Rourke offered the essays by Beshara, Ehlers, Share, and Walton as assignment options. Each tackles some aspect of classical rhetorical theory, all were published recently (between 2008 and 2011), and taken as a whole the choices ask students to extend the reach of their thinking beyond the course’s primary texts. The selection of essays encourages students to consider the applicability of Aristotelian conceptions of *ethos* or *epideictic* or the *enthymeme* to texts in contexts radically different from that in which Aristotle was working. The Aristotelian focus works well in this course because we read and discuss Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in the first half, allowing students time to study and ponder the primary text before considering scholar-

ship that uses, modifies, and extends Aristotelian concepts. The assignment then requires students to reread and reconsider the Aristotelian definitions and descriptions and to make the leap, with the essays' authors, to later texts and contexts. It further encourages them to ask good questions, to think about their answers, and to write. When we use the assignment in the Introduction to Rhetoric and U.S. Public Address courses we vary accordingly the pool of articles to which students may respond. The introductory course invariably offers the largest pool of essays (excluding only those tied most directly to the activities of writing centers) and has produced the largest number of published Comment and Response essays.

The assignment itself provides a few simple guidelines. It points students to YSW's website and encourages students to read not only the essays from which they must choose but also other essays in the Comment and Response section. In this way students can acquire a sense of the tone and spirit of successful essays while also exploring the wide variety of approaches earlier writers have taken. The other directions are quite minimal and read as follows:

Your Comment & Response should be between 750 and 1250 words, double-spaced. In a C&R you should accomplish at least two tasks: You must provide a clear, concise, and accurate account of what the author does and you must offer a response to the author. The best C&Rs engage the author and others in a mutual quest for knowledge and understanding. That is, while you may disagree (perhaps even vehemently) with the author, you should strive for a tone of intellectual curiosity and an atmosphere of civil inquiry and principled advocacy. Address your essay to an academic audience of faculty and students interested in rhetoric. The best C&Rs isolate key issues or questions and build an argument around them. That is, a good C&R does not limit itself to "I like David's language" or "Amanda's argument is cogent" but rather seeks to contest, modify, or extend the author's original argument in ways that advance our collective thinking about rhetoric and writing.

To provide an additional incentive for excellent work, instructors also tell students that the very best essays will be considered for revision and submission to *Young Scholars* for possible publication.

From a teacher's perspective, the comment and response assignment provides a wonderful opportunity to encourage students to explore the course content on their own and, much more importantly, to enter into the conversation in a way that is suitable to their knowledge level and immersion in the field. It also provides a venue for instruction about "good rhetoric" and the ethics of scholarship, a venue in which students wrestle not with something they implicitly consider out of reach or beyond their ken but rather with the work of students just like them.

There is no single student perspective on the comment and response assignment. To provide readers with a sense of themes common to most students and to put our varying perspectives into play as a kind of internal *controversia*, we have crafted this next section of our essay into a conversation.

Sean: What was your initial response to the assignment?

[Andrianna] Lee: I approached my comment and response like I would any other college writing assignment. Most students I've met in college (myself included) abide by the forty-eight-hour rule: If the assignment is not due within forty-eight hours it is not yet a priority. With this in mind, I put the assignment aside and didn't begin until thirty-two hours before the deadline.

Stephen: As much as I would like to say the comment and response assignment immediately stimulated my desire to learn and think critically about public discourse, doing so would be dishonest. The truth is, the comment and response assignment started out like any other assignment. I

quickly checked the due date, planned my calendar to make sure I wouldn't have to prepare for a test the same day, and then put it aside to work on later.

Lee: Yes, but I recall that when I first received the assignment I sat in class with what I'm sure was a very smug smile on my face. I came into college with a background in debate and was certain that this assignment had been written for just the skills that I had acquired. I assumed that my training in argumentation would serve me well. I assumed I would be able to pick apart the author's argument and counter each claim with high-quality evidence. I assumed the assignment would be a breeze.

Stephen: I couldn't say I was excited or smug, but I remember thinking that it was nice that Doc encouraged us to write with "our own voice." This was especially enticing considering most of my other classes had us writing historical research papers in which writers virtually strangle their voices in a vain hope of achieving distance or objectivity.

Sean: Did the distant prospect of publication enter into your thinking?

Stephen: Yes! While writing with my own voice was a nice bonus, what really separated this assignment from the rest was your note that the best ones would be submitted to *Young Scholars in Writing* with the possibility of publication. As an undergraduate looking to make a name for himself after graduation, publication sounded like the golden ticket into the community of intellectuals and thinkers. And if not, it would at least add a nice touch to a résumé. As soon as you mentioned that the best essays would be published, the competitive side of my brain clicked on and I thought, "Challenge accepted."

Lee: Quite often it seems that class assignments have little value beyond education and evaluation. This does not mean the assignments are valueless; on the contrary, they can be powerful exercises that hone our writing and research skills and prepare us for more advanced levels of criticism. But it becomes easy to view assignments as just assignments, something that simply needs to get done. In my eyes, publishing was something reserved for professors and other scholarly experts in their respective fields. The process of publication was a mystery and something I never dreamed of experiencing. To think that my writing might contribute to something more than my education—might contribute to a community's understanding of a subject—was to think about writing as I never had before.

Stephen: While my competitive drive spring-boarded my desire to do well on this assignment, something else happened along the way. I read Monique Shetayh's article "Wrapped Up in the Online World: Technology, Communication, Blogging, and Youth Today" countless times, researched great orators and relevant statistics I could integrate into my argument, and spent several late nights in the library working and reworking a decent draft. Looking back on my increased work ethic for this paper, I am surprised more teachers don't implement a similar strategy for their assignments. The possibility of getting a paper published does wonders for the amount of effort put into it. Contrasting with most assignments that rely on the incentive of a grade and a pat on the back to motivate students, the comment and response assignment offered a chance to join a public conversation on rhetoric. Being published meant taking my ideas out of the classroom and into the world.

Lee: I agree. But I never thought that my "assignments" would ever be fit to print, especially with my staunch adherence to the forty-eight-hour rule. So, paradoxically, I saw the assignment as perfect for my debate skill set but writing something that made a contribution worthy of publication as an unachievable dream. I was wrong on both counts.

Sean: How so?

Lee: Well, my original work was not fit to print, in large part because my initial assumptions about "picking apart" arguments and countering claims were way off. In the end, I learned that thinking about "winning" leads to arrogant, needlessly argumentative writing. I was responding to

Shannon Baldo's excellent essay, "Elves and Extremism: The Use of Fantasy in the Radical Environmentalist Movement." Shannon is a peer who had put considerable thought and effort into her essay and to view my engagement with her as a contest to be "won" was to diminish both efforts. In reviewing my original piece I quickly realized that I had missed the mark. The purpose of the assignment was not to be "right." The purpose of the assignment was to view the topic from a new angle and contribute something worthy to a conversation. In reflecting on this assignment, and my undergraduate studies as a whole, I've come to realize that very rarely is one person "right" in the world of ideas. To think otherwise is simple arrogance and to learn of one's own arrogance is extraordinarily humbling. Thankfully, I was given the opportunity to redeem my work. Enter in the editing and revising process.

Sean: Before we discuss editing and revising, let's back up and talk about how you chose your essay and what shaped your response to it.

Stephen: I can't speak for Lee, but I was motivated by the contemporariness of the topics. The articles from which we were to choose concerned questions and issues very relevant to me—to my peers and our social lives. We didn't have to comment on 1940s feminist rhetoric or the structure of an ancient Greek forum (although those options were available). I was free to focus on the present, giving the assignment a much more consequential feel. I eventually decided to respond to Monique Shetayh's essay because she argued for integrating two hobbies of mine—blogging and social networking—into early education.

Lee: Given Furman's recent emphasis on environmental sustainability and my own interest in environmental issues, I was struck most forcefully by Shannon Baldo's "fantasy theme" analysis and its implications for our understanding of the environmental movement. At the same time, my study of this movement, in political science and rhetoric classes, suggested that Shannon's emphasis on the "elvish" elements of the discourse might direct attention away from other, more science-based aspects of the movement.

Sean: Can we safely say then that both of you knew what you would argue before you even started writing?

Stephen: Oh, no, my position evolved as I researched and wrote. While my final paper argued pretty adamantly against Shetayh's integration of social networking and elementary education, I have to say that when I began the assignment I agreed with many of her arguments. Shetayh is a compelling writer who makes a very clear and supported case. Yet despite my original concurrence, the comment and response assignment seemed more meaningful if approached with a critical eye. I could have simply agreed with Shetayh; thus sparing her feelings and adding nothing new to the conversation, but I eventually *decided* to disagree, which allowed for a new perspective to emerge. Disagreeing with her did not come naturally. It was a conscious decision I made for the sake of a more compelling and meaningful paper.

To be honest, the decision was in part inspired by the approach we took in the public speaking class you taught, Doc. In that class we were given free range to speak on any controversial subject, on the condition that we would argue both for and against it. The ancient Greeks called this practice *dissoi logoi*, which we might translate as "different words." Among many other things, I learned that good critics detach themselves from an issue to better weigh different sides with a less partisan lens. I adopted this view for my comment and response assignment, allowing for an argument to emerge that did not stem from my preexisting beliefs.

Lee: From the beginning I was certain about one concern—characterizing even radical environmentalists as participants in an elvish fantasy seemed partial at best—but as I researched the fantasy theme literature I discovered an additional methodological concern. So my thinking evolved: I refined and expanded my initial thoughts.

Sean: One of the chief goals of this assignment and of *Young Scholars* generally is to encour-

age students to see writing as an activity—of researching and thinking and writing, to be sure, but also of editing and revising—that is anything but a one-draft-and-out experience. What was your experience with this more active approach?

Lee: One of the most enlightening (and humbling) aspects of my experience was the path to publication. Until a student experiences the editing, revising, and publishing process firsthand, it is difficult to fully grasp the intricate revisions and ruthless editing sessions a piece may undergo. The editing process is one that allows a student author to learn from journal editors and to be receptive to external criticism. The editing process makes one vulnerable. Students should understand that the piece they originally write will not be the piece they see in print, and for good reason. I recently reviewed my original assignment and was rather disappointed in my work. My structure was scattered and lacked clarity, and my claims were often vague. Submitting my piece for publication highlighted specific areas of my writing that truly need refining. I was not greatly surprised when the editors pointed out the very same issues my professors have encouraged me to correct in the past.

Stephen: A few weeks after the paper was turned in, Doc mentioned I should submit my paper to *Young Scholars*. Overjoyed, I sent my paper in, thinking the hardest part was behind me. I soon found I was wrong. It is simply amazing how good you can feel about a paper with so many errors in it. My editor pointed out fragmented sentences, subject/verb disagreement, unnecessary sentences, and countless other mistakes I was incapable of seeing myself. With huge chunks of my paragraphs crossed out and a mountain of work left to do, I felt a little part of me die inside.

Lee: Yes! I also realized that I received critiques from my professors very differently than I did the editorial staff at *Young Scholars in Writing*. Furman is a small liberal arts university with small class sizes, which allows students and professors to build relationships. It is far easier to receive criticism from someone who has demonstrated an interest in your growth and development than from a stranger. Let me be clear, each editor I worked with from *Young Scholars in Writing* was extremely cordial and patient with me and genuinely wanted to see my best work published. I quickly learned that having your work evaluated by another professional, someone you do not know, creates a feeling of vulnerability. But I believe that vulnerable experience made me a better writer and a more open student.

Stephen: By far the hardest edit to make was giving up my title for the essay. I had spent weeks thinking about a clever and appropriate title, and was crushed when *Young Scholars* announced I would be unable to keep it. Perhaps a close second would be finding out that a few of my online sources had shut down their websites, forcing me to search again for the same statistics in a different reputable source. And this was just the first edit. After correcting all of these mistakes, I would have to endure two more meticulous edits before the paper was finally considered acceptable for publication. Near the brink of giving up, I thought about whether being published was worth the frustration. Thankfully, I kept my spirits up and kept on writing until the job was done. When I finally received two copies of the journal in the mail, I was glad I had spent the extra time to make corrections. The feeling of seeing your ideas published is beyond description.

Benefits

We think the comment and response assignment offers several benefits to rhetoric teachers, students, and scholars, though we are quite certain we have not realized all of them. Four, however, stand out to us.

The first and clearest benefit is that students deepen and expand the object domain of the course as they engage the work of other students. In the Ancient Rhetoric and U.S. Public Address courses, the focus is almost exclusively on traditional discursive texts (e.g., speeches, editorials, and public letters) and the comment and response assignment allows and encourages students to see and explore a much broader array of rhetorical objects, transactions, and dynamics. For

instance, students interested in the influence of the electronic media on late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century political rhetoric might engage Demirae Dunn's "Propaganda vs. Political Persuasion in Politics: Public Beware," while other students, more concerned with questions of authorial anonymity, the public/private nexus, or the move from individual sentiment to social movement so prevalent in postmodern discourse might take on Maggie MacAulay et al.'s, "From Souvenir to Social Movement: PostSecret, Art, and Politics" (Stewart; Curtis). Students in the Ancient Rhetoric class, drawn to the ways in which ancient rhetorical theory was (or might be) received and appropriated by subsequent rhetors, could investigate Christopher Beshara's "Arguing in an Imperfect World: Aristotle, the Enthymeme, and Epideictic Rhetoric," Janel Walton's "The *Ēthos* Factor: Memorable and Forgettable Presidential *Epideictic* Oration," Amanda Marshall's "Rhetoric of Anorexia: Eating as a Metaphor for Living" (Hailey Carmichael), or Rachel Share's "Ēthos, Pathos, and Logos of Chaucer and His Prioress" (Mulliger). Because the Introduction to Rhetoric class is, by its very nature, somewhat broader than the other two courses, the coverage of rhetoric in that class is correspondingly expansive. Still, a one-semester course can introduce students to only so many facets of rhetorical theory and practice, and the comment and response assignment expands even this course's object domain. Students have investigated rhetorical dimensions of teen vampire novels (Snider; Henson), feminist (Hoy; Catherine Carmichael) or postcolonial critiques of Latin American discourse (Noel; Czentnar), socialist ideology and Southern style (Northcutt; Chancey), virtual reality (Ulrich; Delk), museum exhibits (Simon; Good), and song (Anton; Ray), as well as the more traditional texts associated with political oratory (Payne; Farrar).

A second benefit of the comment and response assignment is that it enhances students' understanding of and appreciation for research and writing as important ongoing collaborative and controversial activities with real consequences. In our experience, they come to see that their contribution is best conceived not as the hit-and-run they are taught to value in video games and by talk radio or some forms of academic debate but rather as an integral part of an ongoing activity that involves many others—sometimes others they can never know or meet—to whom they owe a discernable intellectual debt. Because the debt is both obvious and quantifiable (one cannot respond, after all, to nothing), students come to see others who are willing to offer their ideas to a critical public as worthy of respect and learn to treat them accordingly. Ideas have consequences, the assignment slowly teaches, and even if some of those ideas seem wrongheaded, the scholars who spent time developing and refining them have almost always earned something more than contempt. In this way students come to realize the benefit of humaneness so central to Sloane's understanding of how arguing *pro* and *contra* functions in rhetorical (and therefore liberal) education.

A third benefit, closely related to the second but too often overlooked by students and faculty alike, is that the comment and response essays contribute to the growth of knowledge in the field in the same ways that other scholarship does. Most importantly, students come to understand quite quickly that all scholars are students and their own status as tuition-paying members of the classroom community neither vitiates nor mitigates their ability to contribute to the world of ideas. Because invention and the growth of disciplinary knowledge is, as we suggest above, a social and collaborative activity, then the comment and response activity helps students see the many ways in which ideas are tested, refined, and used to support and confirm other research and scholarship. As readers of this journal are well aware, several YSW essays have been cited in subsequent literature, which confirms for students that what they say and how they say it matters.

Finally (and by way of conclusion), we wish to emphasize the benefits of the comment and response assignment to the fulfillment of the promise of liberal education with which we began. If, as we have suggested, liberal education's twenty-first-century mission is to prepare civic leaders capable of understanding the traditions into which we are born, with the critical and expressive capabilities to maintain the best of those traditions while overcoming the worst, then the comment

and response assignment contributes significantly to that mission. It encourages the engagement of others in thoughtful, considered, and meaningful ways, privileges cogent yet cordial argument, and asks writers to use all the wisdom and eloquence they can muster in the rhetorical pursuit of “vital truth.” As we look ahead toward *Young Scholars*’ next ten years, we do so in the spirit of Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, who captured the idea of scholarship as a life-altering activity when he declared, “*Respondeo etsi mutabor*,” and in the spirit of all those writers who, open to change, responded to and commented on the extraordinary work published in *Young Scholars*’ first ten years.

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