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Degree Objective: MA in English, PWR concentration
College: GMU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences
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Goals Statement

Eleven years ago, when I told my mother that I wanted to pursue a BA in English at GMU, she asked me, "What are you going to do with that?" With some annoyance at her seemingly rhetorical question, I flippantly responded, "Well, seeing as how I need a piece of paper proving to the world that I'm competent enough to get a *real* job, and since I enjoy reading and writing, why not English?" By the irritated look on her face, I could see that she thought I perceived her question as being offensive. "I was only asking," she shot back sharply. Such feedback loops of grievances between me and my mom were typical. Like many a mother from 1960s rural South Korea who were educated under the tutelage of mores and folkways, she had an uncanny sense for detecting when a child was being disrespectful to their elder. I, on the other hand, was raised osmotically absorbing the sensationalized miasma of early-1990s network television, when it seemed that family values and audience ratings were dichotomically interlinked. In other words, my mother and I rarely interpreted anything the same way. However, I believe it was this routine of misinterpretations, misperceptions, and subsequent arguments that gave me the practice and cognitive wherewithal to succeed as an English major and later as a technical communicator with goals of becoming an even greater one.

It was not until my third year studying at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) that pursuing English as my academic focus actually occurred to me. My Creative Writing teacher, Professor Jennifer Daniels (now Associate Dean of Languages and Literature at NVCC, Annandale), assigned the class to write a poem for homework. Even though I had never written a poem before, the process immediately felt familiar, as though I had always mentally abstracted moments and feelings. As Prof. Daniels was about to hand me my grade for "Beach Week", she paused and professed, loud enough for the rest of the class to hear, that I had written an excellent poem, and that I should really consider submitting it to Calliope, NVCC's journal of art and literature, for their annual Best in Publication contest. I placatingly agreed, to move her attention away from me, but then I truly considered it. To me, it was akin to buying a first pack of cigarettes and lottery scratchers on your 18th birthday—things not normally done, but the timing of which makes it feel obligatory. I was utterly dumbstruck when, a few weeks later, Prof. Daniels announced in front of the class that my poem had won the first-place prize in poetry. Now, as I meditate on that moment, a sort of exasperated relief permeates it, for it was not until then that I truly felt I had found my calling. I just did not expect that it was the calling itself that would end up finding me. Five months later, I began my concentration in poetry at GMU.

It was in my first semester at GMU that I realized how little I actually understood about the inner workings of the English language. Sure, I would have plenty to say on how I felt towards the text at a superficial level, but rarely did I stop to analyze why and how I was affected. Are my feelings about the text exactly what the author was hoping I would feel? If so, why is the author intent on me feeling that way? And then, eventually, what elements of the text proves those intentions that I am conjecturing? In my English Synthesis course, Prof. Erika Lin showed me how easily one could get lost in critiquing literature, sometimes to the point of undecidability. However, for me, it was not the answers one could find through literary criticism that intrigued me; it was simply the process of interpretation, especially in poetry where one punctuation mark has the potential to alter meaning entirely. In studying poetry, I sharpened my awareness of how readers might interpret my own writing, or more importantly, misinterpret it. I would later learn that ruling out misinterpretation is one of the cornerstones of technical writing.

A year and a half after I graduated from GMU with a BA in English, I was interviewed for my first job as a technical writer. I was almost sure that I would not get the job, seeing as how my background was in poetry and crafting lattes at Starbucks, but the dread of placating a perpetual line of caffeine addicts for the rest of my life compelled me to follow through. Throughout much of the interview, my soon-to-be boss asked me a slew of industry-focused questions to which my answers were meager. He then asked me how studying poetry made me qualified to be a technical writer. I told him, "Saying more with less," or something to that effect. Seven years on, though, it feels like I have written enough for an entire lifetime. I should feel a sense of accomplishment in this fact, but the truth is that I feel my abilities are stagnating.

In my current position as a full-time technical communicator, I have come to enjoy working on large, complex documentation projects. However, the methods and systems I use to build such documents are outdated and inefficient, and thus often result in an end product that lacks the effectiveness I desire. By being a part of GMU's Professional Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) program, I intend to learn more expert ways of managing such projects, such as how to structure a document using markup language, or how to incorporate the principles of instructional design into the creation process. I also wish to hone my technical writing abilities even further to ensure I can capture my audience's attention and maintain it throughout the driest of subjects.

Altogether, I wish to find and develop novel and superior techniques to assist me in serving my readers. My current knowledge and skill sets have served me sufficiently, but as I look into the future and see continuous advancements in technology percolating into our daily lives, I cannot help feeling that those proficiencies will eventually become obsolete. Completing the PWR program will afford me the flexibility to grow professionally and work on larger, more complex projects that were previously outside my reach.