

## Reflection Paper

I did not know much about the effects that drug production, distribution, and abuse had on society as a whole prior to taking this course. I had learned about the dangers of addiction and health problems that can develop as a result of drug use, but there was never a focus on why disenfranchised communities or individuals might feel compelled to produce and distribute illicit substances.

This course went into a lot of detail about different categories of drugs, such as narcotics, amphetamines, cannabinoids, tobacco, and alcohol. I learned a lot about the chemical makeup of different substances and how they affect the body. I also learned a lot about the history of these substances and that they were oftentimes used in a natural form cultivated from each substance's plant of origin. As our scientific processes became more advanced, humanity was able to isolate and purify the chemicals in these plants which resulted in stronger effects, both positive and negative. Some of the first pharmaceutical versions of these drugs were widely used without restraint, and the resulting epidemics were followed by legislation that banned use of these substances. Nowadays, advocates are pushing for decriminalization for illicit substances so that addicts can get treatment without the fear of serving prison time.

I think the most profound thing I will take away from this class is learning about the concept of harm reduction and the idea that we should strive to make people as safe and comfortable as possible even if they are addicts and actively abusing drugs. For example, harm reduction programs will offer needle exchange programs where users can obtain clean needles or they will offer a place for people to use that has onsite staff to intervene in case of overdose or other medical emergencies. While harm reduction is a good policy solely for the fact that it strives to protect people from disease and suffering, it also translates into savings for health care and government support programs, oftentimes with returns of 2x or more of each dollar spent.

I have always been sympathetic to those who suffer from addiction because I thought that breaking free from a substance dependency took more willpower than most people possessed, but taking this course has helped me to develop more understanding and empathy for the addicted brain and to realize that addiction is a medical condition instead of simply an issue of willpower. In the past I thought I could talk a loved one out of addiction if I was just convincing enough, but now I feel like I'm in a better position to support someone by helping them find resources for addiction treatment.

I am a casual, social drinker. I drink alcohol anywhere from a couple of times a month to once every few months. While I have personally felt like my drinking patterns don't pose a problem, after taking this course I realized that because I drink heavily when I do consume alcohol, I am still at risk for developing disease or having altered brain chemistry. In the future I want to be

more mindful of my alcohol consumption and limit it to a much healthier 2-3 drinks on the days I drink.

I am taking a Nutrition course at SLCC this semester as well, and an underlying current I've noticed in regards to human health and safety is that poverty is an overt threat in several different ways. Someone stuck in poverty will not have access to healthy food, medical care, or resources to better themselves and their situation. They might struggle to provide for their family and community because they cannot obtain adequate nutrition, or they may become injured and unable to fully recover. They will likely turn to drugs to cope with physical or emotional pain caused by their situation or will look into drug production or distribution as a high-risk, high-reward way to make end's meet. Poverty is a major cause of stress worldwide, and the United States is no exception. People who suffer from chronic stress have a limited capacity to make good decisions, they suffer from limited willpower, and they often turn to harmful coping mechanisms. I believe that we can solve many different problems that plague humanity by helping lift people out of poverty.