

102 Assignment 2: Essay on a local issue

These sample essays were successful in previous classes. Note where improvements can be made.

Essay 1. Here, note how the student had a persuasive point demonstrated by looking at the issue through several approaches.

Doctors need to stay

Pennsylvania is one of 11 states facing the burden of physicians moving elsewhere due to soaring medical malpractice insurance premiums (Raupe). Because this problem has only been festering for two years, there are plenty of doctors still remaining. However, if allowed to run rampant, there will be numerous problems in the years to come for doctors and their patients. The Pennsylvania Medical Society reports that in the last two years, over 900 doctors have left the state due to high insurance premiums (Bender). Investigation into the matter points to two reasons for such an increase. The first reason is revenue problems for insurance companies and secondly rising medical malpractice jury awards (Raupe). To reduce the number of doctors leaving Pennsylvania, jury awards in malpractice lawsuits need to be reduced to values that are not excessive.

Pennsylvania doctors pay a large sum for their insurance costs. Simple medical malpractice insurance, which is required, cost them \$100,000.00 a year, not to mention optional packages such as the Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error Fund which is another \$100,000.00 annually (Raupe). No doctor in their right mind would stay and pay more when they can go elsewhere and pay less. As a result of such high costs for insurance, Governor Rendell has already sent legislation to the state General Assembly to reduce these costs by half (Raupe).

The costs in Pennsylvania are also rising due to the stranglehold attorneys have on the U.S. Justice System. This forces doctors to pay higher premiums on their malpractice insurance. Studies conducted show that lawyers are searching for the top courts in terms of jury award amounts to file the claims for their clients (Lewis). Consequently, the physicians must increase the costs on their services just to pay for the increase in insurance premiums. Ultimately, all the added costs fall on the shoulders of the patients who rely on medical care from their trained professional. For some this is not such a burden because their own insurance will pay for most of their medical costs. The patients hit the hardest by this are those with no insurance, which pay out of their pocket with each visit. Congresswoman Melissa Hart stated "insurance premium rates where they are now are hazardous to Pennsylvanians health" (Bender).

The doctors are not the only players in this game closing up shop in Pennsylvania. Insurance companies are as well (Smith). Since 2000, nine companies have stopped selling insurance in Pennsylvania, forcing doctors to buy from the state's Joint Underwriting Association (Smith). It just so happens to be that this is the most expensive

insurance a physician can purchase (Smith). The doctors are impacted directly by this situation but they are not alone.

A spokesman for previous Governor Mark Sweiker stated the obvious in 2002: "there are a lot of people out there who are scared and concerned about the availability of their doctor" (Smith). With the numbers of practicing doctors dwindling, they are much more dispersed throughout the state. Having to change doctors can not be a good thing and it is even worse when the same doctor has been used for many years. Over time there are bonds formed between a doctor and their patients. With doctors leaving, it forces those dependent on doctors to find a new one and go through the entire process again. When asked about these circumstances, Dr. John Williams commented "it is an unfortunate situation because the trustfulness that is formed is the most important aspect to a patient." (interview) The only way to form this trust is through many years of service from the same physician, something that would be missing in this situation.

As malpractice lawsuits continue to mount around the country, they continue to mount with the medical specialists as well. In fact, over half of the lawsuits are brought against surgeons (Raupe). Therefore, fewer and fewer medical students are willing to study to become a specialist (Smith). Who can blame them? There is plenty of money to be made as a family physician. As a result of fewer specialists, patients in need of their services are required to travel further distances. This increase in distance traveled and less competition in the field falls yet again on the patients in the form of higher costs.

The solution proposed here goes beyond that proposed by President Bush. The way to stop this matter is to put a cap on the highest monetary values a jury can award, with a committee overseeing all lawsuits brought against certain physicians. This cap needs to rest at the amount at which the doctor pays for his insurance. Only those doctors who pay for additional insurance policies should have the pleasure of the established committee to oversee any lawsuit brought against them. If the committee deems the lawsuit "frivolous" and carrying little merit, then it never goes to trial and the doctor does not have to pay for a settlement outside of court. In Pennsylvania, the minimum a jury can award is \$100,000.00. This would prevent the lawyers from requesting jury awards that are excessive. The main reason behind this is the lawyers receive a percentage of their client's winnings in legal fees. This results in higher jury awards which raise insurance premiums. With this cap, this would not be permitted.

Opposing such a reform would be the American Trial Lawyers Association who believes a cap would not cause insurance premiums to drop (Howe). When President Bush raised the idea of a cap, Mary Alexander, the president of the American Trial Lawyers Association, stated "it appears President Bush trusts politicians in Washington, not American juries, to decide what is fair compensation" (Howe). How do members on a jury know more than a politician in Washington? They do not; members of a jury are selected by each side's lawyers from normal everyday folks. The committee proposed here would be composed of lawyers, judges and doctors. Such a committee would be ruling on whether a files lawsuit should make it all the way to a trial or be thrown out.

This would keep doctors at their practices and not in the courtroom battling frivolous lawsuits.

It is clear that the only way to keep doctors in Pennsylvania is to place a cap on jury awards in malpractice lawsuits. This would not only eliminate frivolous lawsuits but prevent trial lawyers from achieving excessive rewards for their clients just so they can make more money as well. A similar cap was put into practice in California 25 years ago and California is not on the list of states that have doctors leaving in droves (Howe). If it can work in California, it can work in Pennsylvania.

Essay 2. In the essay below, the student built his case by not only showing the many reasons why battlefields should be preserved, but by challenging the points of view of those on the opposite side of the issue. In addition, he looked at the issue from a range of perspectives including historical, economic, and educational. Note both his introduction and conclusion where his passion for the topic was clear without adding wordy first person phrases to state his opinions.

Be careful--this student did very well integrating a local approach into a more national issue. Make sure your papers are as Pennsylvania specific as possible and don't try to take a more general concern and merely plug in occasional references to local situations.

The Fight for Preservation

From 1861 to 1865, the Civil War raged primarily in what is now the eastern United States. This war defined us as a nation, set millions of slaves free, settled the question of states rights, and claimed the lives of roughly 600,000 American soldiers out of the three million that fought ("Impact"). It echoed through the decades and centuries, from US presidents to new technology to better weapons and tactics to racism and minority rights. The war's effects can still be felt today. While the generation that was nearly cleared from the face of the earth has changed our nation forever, the sites where they shed their blood are disappearing fast. Development and suburban sprawl have taken their toll, and now defensive positions are becoming freeways, forts are becoming residential neighborhoods, fields that saw enormous assaults are becoming Wal-Marts, and places where great leaders fell are becoming Pizza Huts. While there are national parks and battlefields in place to preserve these hallowed grounds, there are far too few of them, and they incorporate too small a percentage of the ground fought over. When these sacred spaces are being lost at an alarming rate, it is important to continue the fight, the fight to preserve our nations battlefields (Greene 8).

Presently, about 30 acres of civil war battlefields are lost each day to development (Greene 8). The problem lies in that much of the fighting centered around important cities, crossroads, and rail junctions, all of which are now expanding with suburban sprawl. With the national park service holding only a small portion of battlefield land, many significant historic sights are being lost to business ("No Stopping"). For example, in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, the spot where General Jackson accepted the largest surrender of US forces until the fall of Bataan is now the site of a 7-11. The site where

General Clayborne was killed at the battle of Franklin is now a Pizza Hut. Where brigade after brigade of Federal troops were mowed down at Fredericksburg now stands blocks and blocks of additional building onto the city itself. Where Union troops retreated during the first day of Gettysburg sits a car dealership ("No Stopping"). Examples such as these can be found on nearly every civil war battlefield in the country. While Walmarts and Pizza Huts can be built anywhere, once a battlefield is paved over, it is gone forever. While these places should be preserved, they are still being destroyed in the name of progress. As the song goes, "they paved paradise, and put up a parking lot." (Mitchell)

Many will argue that history is already written in books, that the National Park Service already has enough land, that the soldiers are already in our memories, and that its not worth preserving battlefields and hindering business. This is partially true. Of course, many battlefields surround growing cities. Large businesses could use these spaces to stay close to the residences of their employees. Likewise, people would like to live on what is now battlegrounds to stay close to developing cities and shopping centers ("Reasons"). While these arguments have valid points, in reality well preserved battlefields produce millions of dollars in revenue each year. The tourist industry benefits greatly from battlefields. Visitors to many battlefields spend around 75 dollars a day per person, and tourist to the Gettysburg battlefield alone spent 120 million (Osbourne 1). This is just one battlefield around one town of about 7,000. Figures in this range are the norm for many other battlefields, many of which are also around small towns. When it comes to business, having a well preserved battlefield draws in large sums of money to the local communities (and in tax revenue). In addition, once a park is protected, it takes little money to keep up, which results in large profits (Osborne 5). Because of this, business isn't harmed because of the protected land. Aside from the economical benefits of battlefield preservation, there are larger and more important reasons. Protected battlefields serve as a monument and tribute to those who served. A common saying goes "freedom isn't free. "The Civil War remains an enduring example of this truth, where our very existence as a nation was in doubt. It is therefore proper and fitting that we preserve the grounds where many men gave their lives to keep our nation strong and free. Beyond honoring veterans, civil war battlefields are also high in historical significance. On these fields, our nation was strengthened, great leaders rose and fell, weapons and tactics were advanced to mirror the fighting that would come in World War I (Jacks 3). Also, new technology such as the hot air balloon was tested as well as advancements in the medical field, industry, etc. In preserving battlefields we also preserve the story of how our society advanced, and not just the battles themselves (Jacks 4). Battlefield preservation gives students of history a chance to stand in the same place that many important people in US history were, to see what they saw, and to better understand why they did what they did. These places give a better feel and understanding of historical events, which helps us and future generations understand how we got to where we are today. By knowing where we came from, we can better understand where we are going, and better learn from the mistakes of the past. Finally, preserving battlefields gives an advantage to our modern military. Places such as Antietam, Gettysburg, Fredericksburg, Bull Run, Harpers Ferry, and Shiloh give a unique look at military history, text book military history. Granted, while our army no longer lines up shoulder to shoulder and charges with fixed bayonets, the basic principles of fire support, maneuver, flanking, exploiting, scouting, and logistics remain the same (Jacks 5). Battlefields offer soldiers a unique look

at historical scenarios. Preserved battlefields also allow soldiers to see the terrain as the generals did, and in so allow them to see why decisions were made. By bringing units to battlefields for military analysis, the leaders and soldiers of these units directly learn from the mistakes of the past, and benefit from it (Jacks 6). There are few better ways to explain why it is important to tie in with the flanks of neighboring units as can be shown on the first day's battlefield at Gettysburg. There are few better ways to show why reserves should be kept, and why interior lines are helpful than the West woods at Antietam, and there are few better ways to stress how important artillery support and reinforcements are than Picket's charge. Battlefields can be a great training tool for today's military, and can help in keeping the price of our freedom as bloodless as possible.

Clearly, battlefields serve many purposes for contemporary and future generations. They honor those who died for our nation. They serve as a training tool for the military. They preserve our nation's history, and they supplement local incomes by tens of millions of dollars a year. By helping civil war preservation groups, and not destroying monuments and topographical features in National Battlefields and Military Parks, these benefits can endure for centuries, and continue to educate future generations while providing a place to relax in the middle of nature. The benefits of battlefield preservation greatly outweigh the negatives of making business build in other areas. For these purposes, battlefields should be preserved as best as they can be.

("Works Cited" deleted here. Source names were altered.)

Essay 3. This paper is a good example of how you can take a local situation and then expand it into dealing with the issue more generally. However, the paper would be stronger with more sources and more local examples.

Red Lion School Shooting

On April 24, 2003, 14-year-old James R. Sheets shot and killed himself after he murdered his school principal, Eugene Sergo, at Red Lion Junior High School (Strauss). This is only one of the 3 acts of violence that took place in central Pennsylvania schools in the past week. The students who committed these crimes had much in common; for example, they were all white males (Lucien). However, such physical profiling is not the answer to putting a stop to such crimes. Creating a better school environment, reaching out to students in need, and better parenting is the answer.

Perhaps better awareness about troubled youth can prevent tragedy in Pennsylvania schools. For example, friends of James R. Sheets say that he told them that he despised principal Eugene Sergo and that he had brought a pocketknife into school prior to the murder (Strauss). Friends of Sheets also said that he was not acting like himself in the days leading to the shooting. He was upset because he had broken up with his girlfriend. He told fellow student, Danica Shirey, that he was contemplating suicide. "In the very beginning of the year I remember him saying, 'My life isn't fair, I'm going to kill myself,'" said Danica, "But then he said he was just kidding and 'I would never do something like that'" (Strauss). The signs that Sheets showed to his friends demonstrated

that something was wrong and that he was in need of help. Therefore, it is very important that the faculty of Pennsylvania schools become more involved with its students. Teachers and counselors should get to know each and every student as an individual. After all, these students are spending 8 hours out of their day at school. If the faculty were more involved with students as individuals, the change in them would be more obvious. In Sheets' case, if the faculty of Red Lion were more involved with him as an individual student, the signs that were made clear to his friends that something was wrong would have been made clear to them too. Therefore, help for students in need would be more readily available and violent crimes would be lessened.

However, the faculty is not the only group of people that should be more involved in a student's life. The weapon that James R Sheets used to murder himself and his principal was one of the 3 revolvers that Sheets had stolen from his stepfather (Strauss). 80 percent of violent crimes at schools are shootings, and the students doing these shootings have access to fire arms (Lucien). People at this age are legally not allowed to purchase such weapons. So whom are they getting them from? In many cases, they are getting them from their parents.

Having a child and owning a gun at the same time is a risky thing to do. However, there are ways that this situation can be made safe. If there is a gun inside of a house, a child should never know where this gun is. They should not even be informed that there is a gun inside of the house at all. If a child is able to steal 3 revolvers from a parent, like Sheets did, without this parent even knowing it, the parent is not doing his or her job to protect their child. Therefore, a lack of parenting is a big cause of the violent crimes being committed by young students in our state.

Another problem that leads to violent crimes in Pennsylvania schools is the ability that students have to bring weapons into school. On Wednesday, April 23, Sheets had brought a 3 to 4 inch blade to school and exposed it to a fellow student on the bus ride home from school (Strauss). When asked why he had brought the blade to school, Sheets responded by saying, "To see if I could get it through (Strauss)." Sheets most likely used this blade as a test. He passed the test, and because he was able to bring the blade to school, it was more incentive for him to bring his stepfather's revolvers to school the very next day. Red Lion school officials claim that once the students are inside of the school, there is security to prevent intruders from entering. However, there is no security to check on the students themselves.

There are ways to prevent such problems. Every school should contain a lobby with a school official waiting to greet each student. This may be intimidating to many students, so this official should take this opportunity to make the student feel welcome rather than making them nervous. Just knowing that someone is there every morning to greet these students will help to prevent students bringing weapons to school. A lack of weapons in schools will help to decrease to number of violent crimes that take place in our schools each year. Although it is almost impossible to stop these crimes completely, there are things that can be done to decrease the number of them. Parents and teachers

forming better relationships with these children and getting to know them better is the best place to start.

Note: In the last file of student papers for this semester, there's a good paper on Home Schooling that's also a good example of dealing with a local issue.