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Arguments on the Contemporary Issues in Higher Education

Globalization brought about by the rapid changes in transportation, as well as scientific and technological innovation, has transformed the entire world into a global village. Cultures are coming together into a melting pot creating options that had not been possible before. The rate of information creation, processing, and transmission is doubling every two years, and more books were published in the last hundred years than in all the previous centuries. As the knowledge base accessible to man increases, there is a need for comprehensive educational systems that will assist the students to navigate the ever widening plane of knowledge. While elementary and high schools lay the foundation for learning, the challenge occurs in higher education, specifically college. The question is whether education is still important to our lives and whether we really need it.

Historical Context

It is at college that students learn to sort out information and direct their lives by determining the type and magnitude of thought that they have, as David Foster Wallace states “teach ...to think” (Wallace). College acts as a springboard to an endless array of possibilities afforded by careful application of knowledge and accumulated wisdom (Wallace). However, the reality on the ground differs from the expected ideal. The need to stay relevant to the times have transformed colleges from the institutions of higher learning to the accreditation centers, where students are told what to think, as opposed to guiding them, as they nurture their own thoughts.

William Bennett, the former Secretary of Education, advises college professors to teach students their next dissertation or article (Hacker and Dreifus). Coupled with funding problems, as well as with a perceived loss of directive, colleges are slowly turning into cramming schools, where students are expected to follow specific paths, as opposed to exploring the wide vistas of knowledge and making their own discoveries. This article seeks to analyze the arguments several authors rely on in writing on the issue of college education and its relevance to modern society, using the three Aristotelian rhetoric strategies of ethos, pathos, and logos.

Ethos Argument. Ethos is a rhetoric device that appeals to the authority, character, or credibility of the author making the argument to bolster its assertions. People, who are authorities or specialists in their field, tend to have more credibility when presenting information from their particular field. In the articles reviewed in this paper, the authors try to assert their suitability and expertise in writing their articles, although their professional titles or university degrees are irrelevant to the arguments presented.

For instance, Liz Addison, author of *“Two Years Are Better than Four”* makes an indirect appeal to ethos when she lets us know that she is biology major (Addisson). Additionally, as do Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus, the authors of the article titled *“Are colleges worth the price of admission?”* who are both professors and writers (Hacker and Dreifus). The article titled *“7 major misperceptions about the liberal arts”* by Sanford Ungar was penned by a college president (Ungar). The Kenton commencement speech was obviously presented by a knowledgeable and experienced faculty member (Wallace).

Indeed, the only article that doesn't seem to appeal to ethos is the one by Pearlstein. However, he applies the strategy as well; although he appeals to a different kind of credibility (Pearlstein). For the most part, his article is in a form of narrations given by the different college

students, both past and present. He interviews the beatnik, named Doug Mitchell, who speaks of the heyday of his college days, when book lists got one into college, and the social life of college students revolved around the dormitory lounge. He then narrates of the way college students think of the today's college environment. I find Pearlstein the most ingenious in his use of ethos. This is because it is obvious that most college administrators are already biased in their opinion of college education, since most of them would hardly criticize their employer.

Furthermore, they are invested in the system, and making it look bad would force them to cut themselves off, or at the very least, to distance themselves from colleges. Students, on the other hand, do not have so much investment in college education, and may be able to give a more personal opinion of college education. Pearlstein is crafty enough to get the students, who support his theory that college is indeed a stifled and "infantizing, emasculating" environment, and present their views first, then give the narration of others, who find college life exciting (Pearlstein).

Additionally, Pearlstein is careful to limit his interaction to the so-called "organization kids", whose only joy in college is organizing and attending an event after event, to the extent that their schedules are over-booked (Pearlstein). Contrasted with the beatnik college days of the dorm lounge debates, he makes it clear that, indeed, college is dead. Another element he introduces in his article is that of commercialized, market thinking. He interviews a student, who seems to think that commercialization of universities is a good thing. He carefully fosters his argument by stating that when he asked whether incentivizing science according to its marketability may end up distorting the university's mission to nurture ideas on the basis of intellectual merit, regardless of commercial potential, the supposedly "bright kid" did not understand the question (Pearlstein).

Pathos Argument. Pathos is an appeal to the author's emotions as a means of persuasion, and may take the form of metaphors, similes, or other creative devices. In order to appeal to pathos, the presenter must build some rapport with his or her audience. This is usually done by emphasizing the values common to both the presenter and the audience. Pearlstein seeks to base his argument on the perceived corrosion of values over the years, and uses ethos as a primary means to argue out his case (Pearlstein). Two authors have relied on pathos in order to augment their position. The first of these authors, Liz Addison, bases her arguments primarily on pathos. The very first three words of her article give away her strategy right away "Oh, the hand wringing" (Addison).

However, she makes a good job of highlighting community colleges as appropriate places to acquire college education (Addison). Her single-minded attack on Pearlstein and his rhetoric comes off as being petty and in bad taste. Personally, I think that she focused too much attention on Pearlstein, instead of just highlighting the errors she felt he made then go ahead and build up her case. Appeal to emotion depends upon the use of emotionally leaded words. Addison uses emotional language, such as "pretentious reading list", "friend of fallen face", and that Pearlstein and his friends "are mourning" (Addison). She says that no longer is college important and even the powerful mental imagery of "a retired ballerina taking a seat in the stalls" (Addison). Liz Addison makes use of ethos to build up her case, but emotions can be volatile, and since she creates an impression that she is viciously attacking Mr. Pearlstein, who apparently had something against her in his paper, she comes off as being a mean, unkind, and, therefore, undesirable persuader.

Skillful use of ethos as an argumentative strategy is powerful and can even make long lasting impressions on the minds of the audience. The speaker is careful to create rapport with

his audience by making unconventional remarks and gestures meant to put his audience at ease. He makes a witty comment about perspiring; then gives a short parable, which, he explains, is the tradition of commencement speeches in the US (Wallace). By these remarks, he is able to cut through the natural barriers between him, as a speaker on stage, and his audience. He shows that he is willing to bring himself down to the level of his audience by gently mocking the conventions of commencement speeches. A third effect of his remarks is that he is able to show his audience that he empathizes with them. Wallace uses this ability to empathize with his audience throughout his speech, through *Transcription of the 2005 Kenyon Commencement Address - May 21, 2005*, he says “ If you are like me as a student you have never liked hearing his and tend to feel insulted by the claim that you needed anyone to teach you to think ” (Wallace).

The author and presenter of the commencement speech, David Wallace, is skillful not only in creating rapport, but also in weaving images in the mind of his audience using words (Wallace). He very clearly creates the image of a weary, tiresome adult life, as he talks about the daily humdrum existence that comprises adult life: long, tiring hours at work, trips through the traffic, and long queues in stores full of people, who seem as bored, fatigued, and indifferent as one gradually becomes. The image he creates of “stupid, cow-like, dead eyed and non-human” people reinforces his message that students have to keep learning and keep thinking (Wallace). Careful about what they chose to think about, which, he asserts, is the real meaning of a college education.

Logos Argument. Logos is an appeal to the intellectual and mental faculties of the audience. Through college education we get knowledge and get all the tools necessary in the

knowledge application. The analytical and thinking tools include critical and creative thinking, logic, facts, figures, and mathematics.

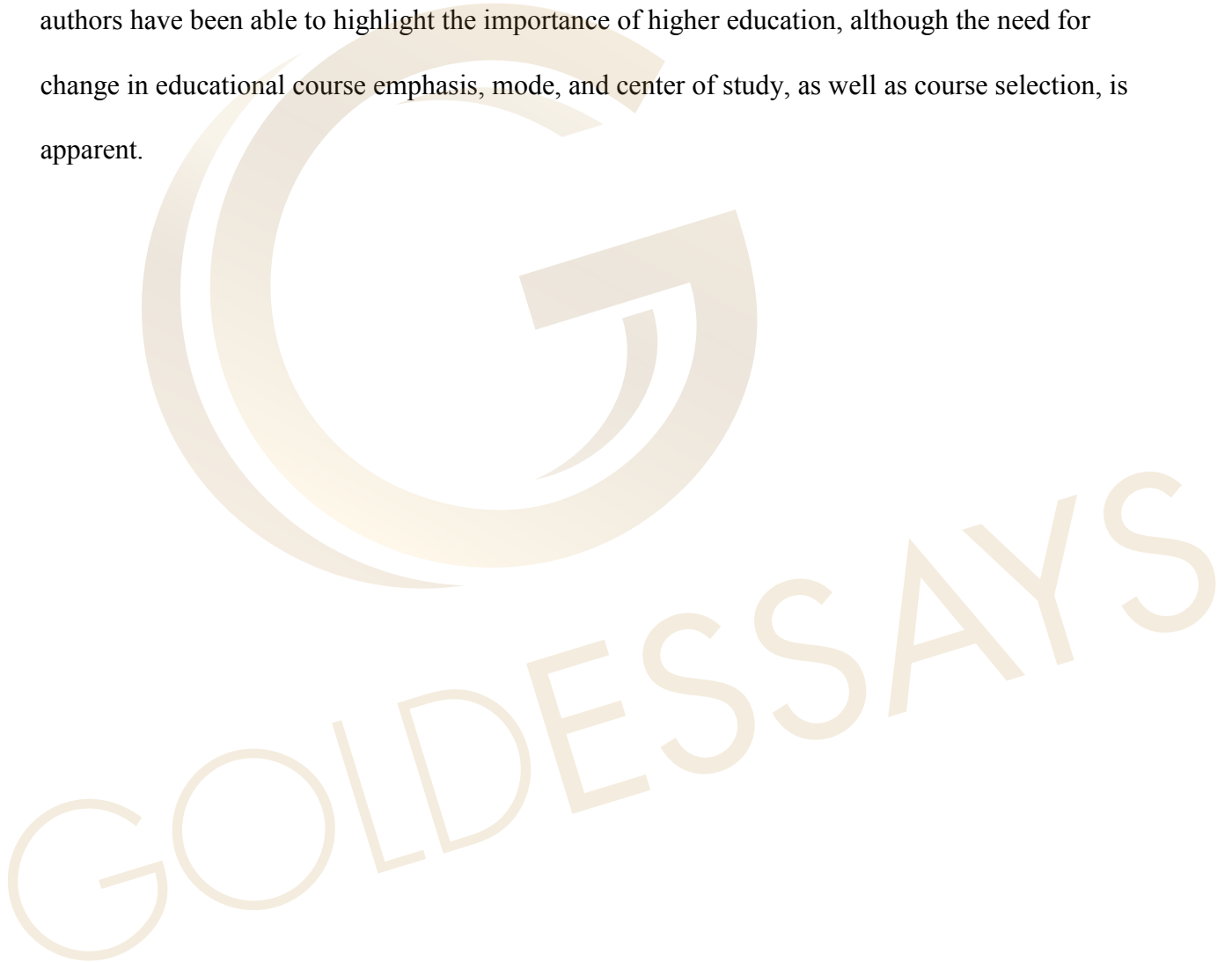
The need for liberal arts in the modern world cannot be over emphasized, despite its apparent lack of marketability, as compared to the courses related to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Sanford J. Ungar, Goucher college president, journalist, and radio host argues out the importance of liberal arts using a clear, logic flow, no doubt guided by the rhetorical strategy of logos (Ungar). Of all the articles reviewed, his comes off as being objective, focused, and to the point. He carefully and clearly states his position, and then provides arguments to support it. Even the organization of the article indicates that he takes a logical approach to presenting his position. His paper is called “*7 major misperceptions about the liberal arts*” (Ungar). True to the title, he has given each misconception its own paragraph, which he deals with it before moving on to the next one.

According to Liz Addison, there is a logical case for community college. She proves the statement by showing the importance of community college in providing an alternative to those, who would be locked out of the college experience due to the restrictive entry requirements (Addisson). She argues that today’s colleges have become centers of work and study, making students into adults before their time, while community colleges are centers for true college education, where people can come in with zero and leave with heads full of dreams.

CONCLUSION

Pearlstein has shown that his credibility and authority relied upon the need not be one’s own. One can appeal to ethos by narrating the experiences of others, who have had significant or firsthand experiences. Pathos is an appeal to emotion, and as we have seen above, one needs to create rapport and then proceed to use mental imagery and descriptive language as they address

their audience. Appeal to ethos can have the negative effect of dissuading the audience, if one is not careful to appear as humane. Any perception of malicious intent on the part of the presenter tends to turn emotions against them and their case. Logos is the appeal to logic, and can be used to clearly state an argument, if the facts and data at hand can be presented in that format. All the authors have been able to highlight the importance of higher education, although the need for change in educational course emphasis, mode, and center of study, as well as course selection, is apparent.



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