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Artifact for Integrative Reflection and Narrative

The work product I'm most proud of for this class this semester is the second essay I wrote. I've explained this a bit in the emails we've exchanged about extending my deadlines for this and other projects, but completing this paper really does represent a huge step forward for me academically and mentally.

When I was last enrolled at UM-Flint I took a class in political science that I absolutely loved. I started off the semester, much as I did this time, nailing my work and hitting deadlines and thinking this was going to be the time that I finally crossed the threshold into a life beyond my mistakes. But then, as happened this semester, something happened that threw me for a loop and got me behind. Instead of asking for help though, I went radio silent and stopped attending class and stopped responding to the instructor's desperate pleas to help me. And I ended up failing a class that I loved by not doing a paper that I was really excited about. This happened dozens of times during my time at UM-Flint and it was heartbreaking to me and all of those who tried to help. But this time I made the first step toward crossing that threshold.

Not only did I fall behind on my work, I had a mental breakdown and came very close to falling into the same pattern of radio silence and failure, but I didn't. The professor sent several emails detailing what I needed to do to survive the class. I made lists, I made space in my head and my desk, and finally just got it done. Finishing the paper opened the floodgates for finishing many of the other assignments I was late on. I also think it's a really good paper.

The idea of greedy corporations being responsible for high inflation is one I've long harbored and was sure of. But the way the assignment was structured and the readings in The Constitution of Knowledge leading up to the assignment forced me to confront my biases on the issue and analyze the issue and the sources I was using. And I had to face the fact that the idea I held onto wasn't true at all.

In my 20s I was a fire breather with my writing and would have taken the most inflammatory POV on the issue just for the attention and to see if I could pull it off. I didn't care about learning anything from the paper. I was in my 20s, I already knew everything, and I was just biding my time until I became famous enough as a writer to leave the everyday nonsense behind. That didn't happen, of course, and before I knew it, I was 46, still not a famous author, and still lacking my degree. But I was ready to learn.

This relates closely to my defining theme of this class this semester and that's the idea that higher education is wasted on youth. I am so much more appreciative of my education now. I'm more contemplative and reflective as well. I've also had two decades of life experience to draw on for ideas and insights and reflection. The AODC has been a life changer not just for the speed and fully online setup, but for this class that was a great introduction to me of what being a student in my 40s can be and how education can help make me a better person, a better worker, and a better citizen.

The best way I can think of to thank the university and the professor for how this class has helped me is to pay it forward by not making the same mistakes next semester. I know myself well enough to know something will always come up and with these accelerated classes I need to have contingency plans in place to keep working no matter what happens. Part of this is not waiting until the last minute to do things. Getting ahead of schedule and building some

cushion into my planning would also have been very helpful this time. Also, I need to realize that I have to be able to work and succeed under stressful conditions to be successful in life. I've managed to find a way to do it finally in my work life, now it's time to start doing it in my educational life. A lot of people have invested time and effort and emotional support into me over the last 25 years, and it's about time that started paying off for all of us.