

Sample Abstracts from *Building Bridges*

*"We're supposed to be perfect the first day
on the job, and then show constant improvement."
—Ed Vargo, baseball umpire*

Many HTTC research conference presenters offered thoughtful, well-written abstracts for inclusion in the *Building Bridges* selection published by UCI. But though clearly written, several needed to show evidence of more discriminating *research* and *critical thinking*. If you wish to improve the quality of *your* abstract, study the edited 250-word ones below, which display a variety of virtues. Their approaches and independence of thought take them beyond the level of summary. Not necessarily all their sources are included in their bibliographies.

ART HISTORY

In this abstract Aileen Chu (Golden West College) summarizes her own interpretation of three well-known paintings by Vincent van Gogh, influenced by her reading of his letters to his brother, Theo. She then notes that her conclusion is arrived at via a methodology fusing biographical with formal analysis, with the accent on the biographical approach. (Ms. Chu was the winner of the 2006 John and Peggy Madden Directors' Award.)

Starry Nights

*"And all the same to feel the stars and the infinite high
and clear above you. Then life is almost enchanted after all."
--Vincent van Gogh*

Vincent van Gogh's inner struggles are revealed in his letters, actions and art. He desired to belong, yet was an outsider, even "something of a recluse" (qtd. in Brusse). He wrote to Theo that he often found it "painful . . . to mingle with people" (6 July 1882). Yet Vincent wanted love and a home. Rebuffed by other women, he took in an impoverished prostitute, saying "to try to kill that feeling—that strong wish to have a household of my own—would be suicide" (6 July 1882).

Reading his letters affects our response to his art. As my paper shows, *Starry Night* reflects Vincent's desire for love in conflict with a fear of intimacy, a tension found in other starry-skied works such as *The Night Café Terrace* and *Starry Night over the Rhône*. The night café contrasts a bright gathering place with a dark blue sky; the *Rhône* painting unites two people in a cosmic nightscape.

The dynamic vision of *Starry Night* depicts more overtly the sense of struggle. The church spire, representing his family's and society's faith, barely reaches the heavens, whereas a cypress, often symbolic of death, stretches into the stars. Here Vincent portrays a non-physical death, an escape from his need for society and love. Leaving the rigid lines of the city, where he is constrained by his uneasiness with people, he ascends symbolically into the life and movement of the unbounded sky.

My inferences combine a psychoanalytical reading of his letters and life with a consideration of technique. This approach, influenced more by biography than aesthetic form, focuses on Vincent's art as a revelation of his spirit. Given that perspective, I see in all three paintings, but most explicitly in *Starry Night*, Vincent's conflict between two needs: intimacy and freedom. (295 words)

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- . *The Night Café Terrace on the Place du Forum*. 1888. The Artchive. 16 Dec. 2005 <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/V/van_gogh/cafe_terrace.jpg.html>.
- . *Starry Night over the Rhone*. 1888. The Vincent van Gogh Gallery. 16 Dec. 2005 <http://www.vg-gallery.com/painting/p_0474.htm>.
- . *Starry Night*. 1889. The Artchive. 16 Dec. 2005 <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/V/van_gogh/starry_night.jpg.html>.

Kiren Gopal (Saddleback College) won the 2005 HTCC May DuBois Director's Award for his proposal abstract. In this summary of his presentation he does not comment on his methodology, but he does give reasons to support his evaluative thesis (which is widely accepted in the art world, incidentally) that artist Robert Rauschenberg is a major innovator in American art history. (All the following abstracts derive from the 2005 conference.)

Redefining Rauschenberg

Every so often an artist comes along who not only changes the landscape of art itself, but does so by challenging many of its core beliefs, ideals and clichés. Robert Rauschenberg's combinations fuse sculpture, painting, and collage, in the form of freestanding three-dimensional pieces of art. Due to his lack of funds for art supplies, Rauschenberg assembled everyday objects he found on the streets of New York. In doing so he broke down barriers in art. He once said, "I really feel sorry for people who think things like soap dishes or mirrors or Coke bottles are ugly, because they're surrounded by things like that all day long, and it must make them miserable" (Tomkins 194).

Rauschenberg's impact on modern art is undeniable, from his contributions to technology-based art, to his interjection of political and social issues into art, to his enduring influence on many of today's prominent artists.

Through his art he spoke out against the Vietnam War, American foreign policy, and many other social and political issues relevant at the time. In 1967, he founded Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), allowing artists to collaborate with engineers.

In creating his combinations, or "combines" as he called them, Rauschenberg took the painting off the wall, put it on the ground, and changed the face of contemporary art. His combinations were a statement about the kind of materials that could be accepted in art: they were also a means through which the artist expressed many of his personal and political beliefs. His longevity and significance in the art world cannot be understated; Robert Rauschenberg is truly one of a kind. (271 words)

Works Cited and Consulted

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Gouveia, Georgette. *The Ironist*. 8 Nov. 2003 <<http://www.thejournalnews.com/newsroom/092803/e0328artscene.html>>.

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Robinson, Mark. *Robert Rauschenberg's Combines*. 25 Feb. 2005 <<http://wmbc.umbc.edu/~mark/artwork/art323/paper1.html>>.

Tomkins, Calvin. *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*. New York: Penguin USA, 1976.

BIOLOGY

Kimberly Hoyt (San Diego City College) presents her hypothesis, then describes how she went about testing it. After describing her methodology, she deftly evaluates the results of her findings, pointing out what they showed—or did not show—and what else needs to be done.

Ethnology and Communication of Stingless Bees

This report assesses the laboratory testing of my hypothesis that stingless bees use patterns of movement to recruit nest mates to forage for food. Results and recommendations are included.

Among the first known social bees, stingless bees existed 80 million years ago, during the Cretaceous period. Since prehistoric times, the Yucatan Maya have been keeping the *Melipona beecheii*, rigidly adhering to traditional ceremonies and practices in their methods. In spite of this tradition, the biology of stingless bees is poorly understood. We need to know how bees collect the nectar, resin and pollen that are used in traditional medicine and which may have important antibacterial and antifungal properties. Since "recruitment" is a technique whereby stingless bees collect food, understanding patterns of recruitment communication is also an essential goal.

For this project I converted a video of the *Melipona panamica* stingless bees into a movie format to be analyzed on the Videopoint program, where the bee's flight and movement inside the nest was plotted. I then saved the plotted points onto Excel and created scatter graphs. Using the Java Memory Profiler software, I conducted a statistical analysis of the effect of sucrose concentration on the movements of bees inside the nest, focusing on displacement, velocity and acceleration.

These *Melipona panamica* stingless bees displayed an array of reactions to various qualities of food. However, my hypothesis—that a forager's motion from a richer food source would communicate excitement—was not supported by these preliminary results. Variables such as sample size and auditory pattern testing need to be assessed as well. (256 words)

HISTORY

In this abstract Michael Klein (Citrus College) briefly surveys high school history books, finding in them what he criticizes as an egregious oversight: the failure to credit Native American tribes for their contributions to our country. He provides information to support his thesis that the Iroquois exerted a significant influence on the development of American democracy—thus reinforcing his point that high school texts mislead students by marginalizing Native Americans and omitting their important contributions to our developing nation.

A “Savage” People’s Influence:

The Influence of the Iroquois Confederacy upon America’s Founding Fathers and American Psyche

The process of recounting history is undeniably interpretative, and involves deciding which data to include—an act of interpretation in itself. Some scholars, intentionally or not, omit important events altogether. Even when significant facts are selected, historians can fail to provide adequate explanations of them. High school history textbooks, and even some college-level textbooks, are guilty of omissions and misinterpretations so blatant as to amount to falsehood. One such error lies in the failure to provide sufficient discussion of the contributions Native American groups, specifically the Iroquois, have made to the creation and evolution of American democracy.

American history, especially when told from the perspective of a white European male, does not always provide a complete and thorough discussion of the facts. In 1877 Lewis Henry Morgan wrote: “It is worthy of remembrance that the Iroquois commended to our forefathers a union of colonies similar to their own as early as 1755” (Morgan 132). Indeed, the Iroquois Confederacy had a dramatic impact on the foundations of American democracy. Though some scholars argue that Morgan’s contention overstates Iroquois influence, this paper demonstrates that American democracy, our Constitution, and our Founding Fathers were significantly influenced by the Iroquois. Elements of Native American ideals are found as well in other facets of American culture, in our language and food production. It is time to add this information to the public record and correct the historical irony involving the Iroquois: that from a people categorized and marginalized by society as “savage,” our founding fathers borrowed ideas integral to the foundations of American democracy. (258 words)

Works Consulted

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Payne, Samuel B. “The Iroquois League, the Articles of the Confederation, and the Constitution.” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996): 605-620.

Morgan, Lewis H. *Ancient Society*. New Jersey: Transaction, 2000.

POLITICAL SCIENCE

Thai Hoang (Golden West College) evaluates the opinions of political commentators. His approach reveals critical thinking. He looks at alternative information that the commentators failed to consider, and critiques their reasoning, accusing them of rushing to judgment, since he sees what they overlooked: rival causes for the Bush victory of 2004.

Gay Marriage, the 2004 Elections and the Moral Majority

“Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.”
—Mark Twain

When President George W. Bush was re-elected on election night 2004, political pundits had a ready answer for why he won: gay marriage and the moral majority. A CNN poll showed that 22 percent of voters felt that the most important issue was moral values, and 80 percent of those polled had voted for Bush. The Republican strategy of including gay marriage bans in eleven state elections was given the credit by analysts for making morality a central issue and thereby re-electing the President.

If the analysts had looked closely at each state contest, they would have seen that the gay marriage bans had little effect on the presidential elections. Bush’s margin of victory in the nine amendment states he won was comparable to his results in 2000. Gay marriage did not help or hurt gubernatorial, senatorial or representative candidates, either. In the gay amendment states, only one incumbent from either party, a Republican, lost his seat. In fact, voting against gay marriage was more popular than voting for President Bush in all states except Utah.

It is important to note that the polls never defined what morality was or what respondents thought morality to be. Naturally it makes sense to consider any voter’s decision to be one that he or she considers moral. There were many factors that re-elected Bush; giving credit to one issue is too simplistic. It was hasty to conclude that a particular concept of morality was the reason for Bush’s re-election. (248 words)

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"2004 Presidential General Election Candidates and Election Results." Federal Election Commission. 25 Feb. 2005 <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/PresPrimary2004.pdf>>.

Piccalo, Gina. "Union and Division: The Electorate's Response to Gay Marriage Sent a Community Reeling, but Hope Lives." *Los Angeles Times*. 6 Nov. 2004: E1+.

PSYCHOLOGY

In their presentation Erin Coulter and Irene Nham (Citrus College) display critical thinking in an independent approach to research, using information they gained from reading, along with their own on-site observations. Although they do not explicitly evaluate their methodology, they inform us of it and come to their own conclusion.

Childhood Aggression: Social Factors of Influence in a Child-care Environment

Childhood aggression, an all-too-common aspect of the social interaction among children, is often influenced by children's environment and level of supervision. Researchers sometimes stereotype males as performing bullying aggression (physical aggression), females as performing relational aggression (insults or social rejection). However, research undertaken at the Citrus College Childcare Center contradicts those stereotypes, showing that both genders perform types of aggression thought to be specific to their opposite gender.

The amount of time children spend in a childcare center may also influence their level of aggressiveness, according to research psychologist Jay Belsky of Birkbeck College, London. He states that "there is a constant dose-response relationship between time in care and problem behavior" (CNNfyi.com). Many children in the Citrus College center were there for thirty and more hours per week. The high child-to-adult ratio at the center also led to many acts of aggression that went unnoticed by supervising adults. The adults present were often distracted by each other or by a small group of children. Female children were observed instigating a conflict with another child (usually male), yet only the child who retaliated was caught and subsequently punished. Hence the child who initiated the conflict was rarely disciplined. Females were also observed waiting for opportune times to commit acts of bullying aggression; therefore they were less likely to be caught, resulting in less punishment, since they successively hid their bullying. The layout of the outdoor playground also created hidden areas which became hotbeds of aggressive behavior.

Thus, the outdoor environment (in contrast to the more controllable indoor environment), level of supervision, and time spent in daycare all factored into the observed aggression. (273 words)

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The Associated Press. "Study: Child Aggression Linked to Hours in Day Care." CNN.com. 12 Nov. 2004 <<http://cnn.com/2001/fyi/teachers.ednews/04/19/daycare.aggression.ap/index.html>>.

Berger, Kathleen Stassen. *The Developing Person Through Childhood and Adolescence*. 6th edition. New York: Worth, 2003.

Patten, Peggy. "Girls, Aggressive?" Nov. 2004 <Adoption.com. <<http://library.adoption.com/Child-Development/Girls-Aggressive/article/3279/1.html>>.

PHILOSOPHY/RELIGION

In this cause-effect analysis, Marc-David Jacobs (Citrus College) gives an evaluative analysis of causes for a psychological phenomenon in American Christianity, using the Weber explanation to suggest a social effect of one method of assuaging guilt.

Assuagement and Its Function In Modern American Christianity

Assuagement—relieving guilt—is a function of religion that can be observed in American Christianity, especially since 1900. Three major sources of guilt needing assuagement during this period derived from a person's sense of his or her (1) inability to alleviate the sufferings of humanity, (2) culturally inappropriate behaviors or attitudes (most commonly self-righteousness), or (3) inaction toward his or her own salvation.

Outside modern-day America, one explanation of assuagement was found in Sigmund Freud, who proposed in his 1939 *Moses and Monotheism* that the foundation of Christianity—the death of Jesus—was an act of expiation whereby a scapegoat figure suffered and died, not for all people, but to relieve a historical-cultural guilt over the murder of the Hebrew tribal father, Moses.

The dominant version of Christianity interpreted Jesus Christ more broadly: as a divine scapegoat who had saved humankind through his exculpatory death. This teaching, though it may have engendered feel-

ings of guilt in persons who felt responsible for Christ's suffering, nonetheless allowed them the comfort of believing that they could be saved through their faith alone, without requiring a great deal of effort on their part.

Perhaps the most famous explanation of assuagement in the United States is the one by Max Weber, who theorized in his 1905 work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that the American ethos was influenced by the Calvinist dogma of predestination. John Calvin taught that God had already predetermined who would join him in eternal bliss, and who would suffer damnation. Thus, Americans may have felt impelled to show by worldly success that they were among the members of God's Elect, as Weber noted, but they could find consolation in the notion that their salvation depended on gratuitous grace, not their own good works. Since the poor or overtly sinful had been divinely predestined, any attempt to "correct" them would prove futile, perhaps even blasphemous. Hence they could strive for material gain while ignoring, with a clear conscience, the sufferings of the less fortunate. (332 words)

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SOCIAL SCIENCES

Robert Yeager (Los Angeles City College) gave a problem-solution presentation. His abstract surveys the field and its history to identify a serious issue with contemporary inheritance courts, along with current avoidance maneuvers. That part of his research project involves finding and imparting information. But he goes further: he manifests creative thinking in proposing specific solutions to the problem.

From Chancery to Probate: Overcoming Challenges in the Inheritance Courts

Today's probate courts in Los Angeles are nearly as infamous for their lengthy delays and costly cases as was their 19th-century-London equivalent, the Court of Chancery. Then as now, legal professionals financially exploited the inefficiencies built into the system of court estate administration. Though various efforts have been made over the last one hundred fifty years to address the numerous delays, soaring expenses, and prolonged suffering identified with the Chancery Court, much of the same structure and procedure that created those difficulties exists today in Los Angeles's Probate Courts, causing similar problems for its litigants.

Unfortunately, rather than attempt to improve this ineffectiveness, contemporary legal professionals have focused their efforts on employing a variety of alternative estate planning options to avoid the courts altogether, evading the puzzle instead of working to solve it. An examination of this new industry of estate planning based on the avoidance of Probate shows that legal professionals today, as in the nineteenth century, view the transfer of inherited assets as a great financial opportunity, using the complexity and inefficiency of the courts to their benefit rather than attempting to repair them for those they are employed to serve.

Based on extensive research, my essay recommends possible solutions to this ongoing problem, including the innovative titling of assets and new formulas for legal fees and investigative time limits on each case. It is only through these and other real solutions that there may still be hope for preventing our Probate Courts from joining history's legacy of legal neglect. (253 words)

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- Owens, Alistair. "Property, Gender and the Life Course: Inheritance and Family Welfare Provision in Early Nineteenth-Century England." *Social History* 26.3 (2001): 5-7.
- Witkin, B.E. *Summary of California Law*. Vol. 12, 9th ed. San Francisco: Bancroft-Whitney, 1990.