

“Filling Basic Needs” Summer Report

This summer internship was extremely impactful to my future plans and goals as I begin a career in writing and research. Not only did this internship make it possible to further the amount of work completed on my overall writing project, but I was, more importantly, able to come to an understanding of the kind of work, time, and discipline that it takes to engage in a serious writing endeavor.

This summer, under the mentorship of Dr. James F. Peterman in the department of Philosophy, I initiated, in a serious manner, the writing of *Filling Basic Needs: Education and Development in Bangladesh*. This text is to become the book that covers the history and experience of Richard Hubbard and Sohan Rahman in the founding and maintaining of their non-governmental organization, *Basic Needs*. The Basic Needs Program is a student-led charity dedicated to protecting the welfare of the deeply impoverished children in Bangladesh. At the present, it is focusing its efforts in a small village in Mymensingh, located in the Dhaka District of the country, about 3 hours outside the capital. Taking six weeks out of this summer to dedicate to this writing project is key to its future success.

To mention a note concerning how this project came as a possibility, from my first contact with Richard Hubbard concerning working with his program during an information lecture that he delivered at Sewanee on medical school and his work in Bangladesh, I saw his example as an opportunity to understand the work that I would like to do one day. Personally, this is an exploration into the establishing of a humanitarian project in the hope that I might replicate the structure, creating a similar service project in Indonesia, where I have once lived, for the *anak jalanan*, or street children. When I mentioned the idea to Richard in our initial contact, he saw it as an opportunity for his program’s story to add a valuable piece to the

discourse on NGOs and felt that such an opportunity might provide a text “dedicated to getting all of the facts correct” concerning the carrying out of humanitarian work—even the less desirable aspects—something that he felt most NGO-centered writing generally lacked. Hubbard expressed to me, “one thing we will have to think about is the fact that numerous “non-fiction” books that have been written on humanitarian projects have recently been debunked as full of inaccuracies, so I have a strong interest in getting all our facts straight.”

In order to begin writing such a book, I had to think about how to undertake such project. The structure of execution, I learned, would be key not only for the physical aspect of doing the writing, but also for beginning to capture this beautiful story in its unique veracity and complexity. I first started with my major outline and dedicated a certain amount of time each day to work on my project. This was all that I knew about writing a book. I originally thought that after following these two practices that the book would practically write itself. I was wrong. During my first few weeks, I struggled in the face of the massiveness of the text and from my limited knowledge, trying to crank a story out. This was not working. I stepped back and took some time to actually research writing, especially the kind of book I was intending to write and the sort of concepts, cultures, and histories that would intersect with what I was doing. This was a huge step; however it was not the most important one. The best act while confronted with this stumbling block was to turn to my advisor.

I originally wrote in my proposal that Dr. Peterman would be instrumental to “critically examining the themes that arise in my research, especially those pertaining to the matters of “philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and critical theory.” I thought that the theory would be my biggest lesson; however it was the praxis that took the foreground.

I remember sitting with Dr. Peterman one morning at the Blue Chair restaurant to discuss the progress of this book. The conversation went on a million tangents into philosophy, linguistics, and other subjects over which we could have an epistemic exchange. However, no matter how tangential, all of these topics seemed somehow to lead to the key problem I was encountering in my writing—that of simply getting the words coherently onto the page. I was writing and working on bits and pieces of random areas and was completely overwhelmed, because, at that rate, it seemed that the task would never be completed. His advice to me was to temporarily abandon my goals for the book, my thesis, and “principle messages” and “just tell the story”. Tell the history of the program, plain and simple.

After taking this advice, I focused less on trying to “write a book” and more on writing the story and understanding the basics. I had already conducted a few interviews over Skype with Richard for the book so I had a good corpus of information. However, all of it was as disconnected as my writing was. I began to focus those subsequent interviews on getting the simple history of the program. I also continued to read into Bangladesh’s history and culture which provided further guidance.

With this new plan and other limitations, I had to adjust my project goals. This was another lesson that I learned: the awareness of when to readjust your goals in order to be most efficient. Initially planning for a ten-week internship, I stated that I would complete “by the end of my internship the outline/table of contents, each chapter introduction, and 60 single-spaced pages”. This was totally unrealistic as simply interviewing, researching, and reading took time, which was necessary to even have material on which to write. I readjusted my goals and this summer I was able to complete an entire book template, the table of contents, the compilation of a complete introduction (15 single-spaced pages), a strong and focused outline, the book’s

primary “thesis” or message, the chapter of images, a stronger bibliography, critical notes for expansion, and the initial writing in other areas of the book.

I consider the work that I was able to complete during the course of this internship a success. The lessons that I learned—that of focusing on the essence and then moving into the complex, as well as focusing and appropriately adjusting the principle goals at hand—will be fundamental not only to the success of this book, but also to my future career in writing.

References

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