Claire Mueller’s Summer Essay 2011: What does it mean to be educated in your field of study?

I do not see the value in perpetuating a system that allows the world to wither. An education will teach me to think critically about how to change this system. I also do not see any value in providing a world to my children that will not provide for them. My main interest, therefore, is sustenance. Transportation is one of the biggest contributions to the continuing environmental degradation. The solution is found in the local production of food and industry. Instead of shipping our food for 10,000 miles before eating it, our solution is to grow it in the same city as it will be eaten, thus significantly reducing the pollutants necessary for our food consumption.

This goal will require me to understand mass production and transportation of food. I will need to understand what allows us to mass produce food, whether the production of these crops indoors is possible, and whether the indoor production of these foods is better than the sweeping factory farms that currently exist. I will have to be educated about the problems that can be caused by mass farming relating to animals, the ecosystem, and how changing these systems might affect the economies in those regions.

The economy is often the biggest concern to the government, and thus the biggest pause given to my goal. I must understand the effects of urban farming on job availability, both in urban and rural settings. If the production of food becomes an urban activity, then what will farming communities resort to for income? I must understand the underlying politics on the issue of food production so that I can defend my position in a political arena.

The ability to critically think will allow me to see the interconnectedness of issues, and to design multi-faceted plans to deal with these problems. For instance, urban farming could provide jobs for the unemployed, food for food banks, cheaper food for local markets, and improve our local economy. While this may, in the short term, negatively impact larger companies, in the long run it will increase US buying power by returning the wealth to members of the community who can pay that money to the education and well being of their locality. This type of multi-faceted solution will allow me to work with a variety of groups and remain open-minded about solutions to a variety of problems.

Currently I am a critical thinker, but do not have any knowledge on the economics of a local economy, the processes used in urban farming, or the problems with mass farming vs. local growing. I hope to work with local groups like Seattle Tilth and Seattle Pea-Patch to learn more about the positive things local gardening can do. I will feel that I have achieved my degree when I can understand in a complete way what the pros and cons of urban farming may be, and how to implement social change within a bureaucratic assembly.