Vision Essay:

I am a student who is concerned with the future of mankind. I see us angling towards a waterfall that will lead to our demise, in that our current course leads us towards increased globalization with a focus on consumption. Little effort is being made by governments and the majority of citizens to turn this practice around. People are sucked in by the promise of a better life through newer computers, microwaves, and video games, without any focus being put on local communities, environmental problems, or fulfillment in our daily lives. We perpetuate a system of life without ever evaluating the pros and cons, successes and failures of that system. I want to use my education to evaluate this system, and then to learn what can be done to fix it. I want to learn about the value of community, local economy, and individual values in society. My goal is to understand what needs to be done to turn around this trend of increased pollution, lack of community, and disconnect from the planet we live on.

As we are learning in CEP 301, I see increasingly the connection between individual property and the loss of community value, but I refuse to let future generations see the effects of this. As people increase their focus on themselves, they lose focus on the community and those around them. Statistics show that since the rise of consumerism in the 1950’s, there has been a steady decrease in reported happiness of the population. This is because with the advent of technology, people no longer need to be interdependent. As people lose their interdependence, they become more isolated, and lose a feeling of belonging in their communities. Community belonging is important to fulfillment. It gives value to us as individuals. Without a purpose, who are you? If your only purpose is to consume, then your only value is a price tag. As part of a community, your value as a person is much deeper than that. Your value is your contribution, your conversation, your personality. These things are irreplaceable. Such a focus is being put on consumption that people are forgetting those values, distracted by the ads telling us that our hair isn’t pretty enough, or your shoes aren’t cool enough, or your phone is “old news”. I want to remind people of the important values that are being lost through a focus on consumerism, and bring back the ideal of a self-sustaining local economy, with a community that knows and cares about one another.

In order to have a self sustaining economy, we need land and resources not to be completely depleted. Thus, I do not see the value in perpetuating a system that allows the world to wither. With our increasing consumption, we all close our eyes to the negative effects this has on the world. This is called a “shadow ecology”, or negative environmental impact that cannot be seen by consumers. I am interested in learning to lower the shadow ecologies produced by the United States by teaching people about the value of locally made, fair trade, or sustainably produced goods. Therefore, in my education I want to learn about how economic equality effects people’s ability to change the environment around them. I used to think these topics were not related, but after my PoliSci 384 class, I see that they are intrinsically linked. I want to show the world how these are linked to encourage others to be aware of their consumption practices.

My value in education, therefore, is understanding the important connections between community, consumerism, culture, and the environment. All of these ideas are interconnected through a variety of intermediate topics. CEP will allow me to explore these through a tight-knit community that encourages growth and a self-designed curriculum. Previously I have been involved with many community programs, and have found that most of them are run by small groups, rather similar in style of governance to CEP. Thus, I feel that my experience on Friday’s will be invaluable to my future work in the community.

I am excited by the opportunity to study with such a diverse and exciting group of students. Together we will push each other to try new activities, learn about different ways of thinking, and most importantly, to explore about what a community means and how you can build it. My education will start me down a path towards sustainability and community education that will benefit future generations.