

M3- Getting Started- Grad Projects

MAGIC: THE GATHERING AND ITS CULTURAL AND LITERARY
RELEVANCE

CODY A PETERS

My proposed and approved graduation project is an ethnographically based research project into the literary culture of *Magic: the Gathering*, with a specific focus on the culture of Magic in B.C., as well as its literary cultural relevance and following. In addition to this, a portion of the project will be devoted to the literary relevance both influencing the game itself, as well as its outward reaching literary influence on other sections of its own culture. Essentially, this will be a non-traditional research project utilizing traditional investigative and academic principals and techniques and applying them to a non-traditional focus. In essence, it will be an ethnography and literary analysis of the culture and literary elements surrounding *Magic: the Gathering* in the region of the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia. All of this is in an effort to generate a more holistic understanding of what it means to be a collection of literary works, and an effort to create an illustration of how this literary element of any given culture influences and changes the identity of the cultural group itself.

As for the resources and methodology that I will utilize to achieve this goal, I will be using a variety of different methodologies spanning both the academic realm of Literary analysis, and the anthropological domain of ethnographic research. These methods include utilized interviews in order to gain a first hand understanding of the culture and its components, as well as to deepen my own understanding of a culture I identify as being a part of. Secondly, I will be utilizing literary analysis techniques to glean a better understanding of the literary elements of *Magic* that already exist, as well as provide some insight into new areas of literary exploration an understanding. In addition to these, I will be doing some content analysis of works that have already been completed by both myself and other academic sources, in order to better understand the scope of the literary and cultural elements of my chosen subject. Lastly, I will be utilizing ethnographic field work methods as well as my own ethnographic work in order to generate a

more in depth understanding of this field, as well as to situate myself in a more capable but also more abstract position in order to properly understand my findings.

As for what Program Learning Outcomes I expect will apply, there are several that can be justified as inclusions for this project. The most relevant of the listed Program Learning Outcomes that can be most readily explained is PLO1- Self-Directed Learning. I am personally involved in the culture surrounding *Magic: the Gathering*, and as such I have a personal wealth of knowledge and experience with both the game itself as well as its multitude of cultural aspects. As such, I have felt the personal need to widen my knowledge base and incorporate more styles of learning and knowledge into my already existing pool of understanding. As such, I have utilized all three of my previous tutorials as an opportunity to enrich my understanding of the different elements of *Magic*, and have focused all of my previous tutorial projects on different aspects of the game. As a part of this, I utilized these opportunities to explain and generate a discourse with my professors about the game itself, as well as its cultural aspects. Due to their lack of experience in the area, a large portion of this discourse was loaded on my end of the conversation; a fact that I really appreciated, as it forced me to articulate my thoughts and experiences in both a professional and universal way so as to generate a dialogue that was more readily understandable. I also appreciated my professor's lack of knowledge in the area, as it forced me to go into further detail and more explanation that I would have normally had to do with an individual who was familiar with my subject matter. This proved to be an extremely valuable resource, as it helped myself and my professors realize the depth of content in this subject. Secondly, I would say that the PLO2- Knowledge is very applicable, as I mentioned previously that I wish to incorporate my personal knowledge into my project, as well as apply different academic methods and modes of thinking into one project in order to better understand

my subject. Lastly, I would consider PLO6- Communication to be a fairly obvious inclusion. I want this project to be widely understandable, and not restrict it to either individuals who already have a familiarity with *Magic: the Gathering*, or to an audience who is familiar with academic research styles and methods of thinking. I want this project to be widely readable and understandable as I believe that it is a core principal for research to not be restrictive in its application, but rather holistic and open in nature.

As for pre-existing bodies of work for me to draw upon when it comes to academic research, there is a surprising number of different sources to utilize in regard to *Magic*. Thankfully through the work I have already done for my previous tutorial projects, I already have several sources saved and set aside for me to work with. These range from literary analysis and its application to non-traditional bodies of work, specifically to that of board and card games, to that of anthropological case studies surrounding the historical and contemporary perception of the culture surrounding *Magic: the Gathering* and some of the backlash it has experienced in the past due to its misconception. These will help generate an in-depth backdrop for the modern understanding of game culture, as well as illuminate some of the social and cultural stigmas surrounding both the game and its literary elements. Additionally, I have several sources from different academic backgrounds, including one from an educational standpoint which discusses the literary and educational aspects of the game of *Magic*.

First among these resources is Joseph Laycock's article, "Dangerous games: what the moral panic over role-playing games says about play, religion, and imagined worlds", in which he describes and illustrates the different moral panics and social interactions with "fringe" cultures such as *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Magic: the Gathering* groups, as well as their larger cultural and societal impacts. Coupled with this article is Micheal H. Eversman's and Jason D. P.

Bird's article, "Moral Panic and Social Justice: A Guide for Analyzing Social Problems", which takes a much more straightforward and anthropological look at moral panics as a whole and their settings and surroundings in which they are born, which is particularly useful when analyzing the early years of *Magic*.

Next, I will be utilizing Felipe Zilio's work, "Neural Networks Models for Analyzing Magic: The Gathering Cards" for a strictly psychological look at the card design and implications of the physical side of *Magic: the Gathering* cards, as well as their significance for both those that are involved in the game already, and the wider public domain. Coupled with this is Aaron Trammell's article titled "Magic Modders: Alter Art, Ambiguity, and the Ethics of Prosumption", in which they dive into the world of intellectual property and the boundaries of what is legally belonging to a company, and what belongs to the imagination or collective of individuals who consume a product, in this case the artwork and story elements of *Magic* cards and their influence and nature of their consumption among their fanbase.

In a more technical and real-world scope, I will be utilizing De Sousa Filho, Raimundo Nonato, and Lêda Maria Braga Tomitch's piece on "The Use of the Game Magic: The Gathering in the Teaching of L2 Reading", which covers how some education systems are adopting the use and teaching style of *Magic: the Gathering* as a tool for educational purposes, which highlights my theories about the literary validity of *Magic* as a whole. Additionally, I will be considering Joannie M. Schrof's article on "Magic Obsession" which covers the consumerist nature of collectibles and trading card games, specifically that of *Magic: the Gathering* collectors.

On a more tangential side, I will be considering Stian Sundell Torjussen's "'Release the Kraken!' - The Recontextualization of the Kraken in Popular Culture, from Clash of the Titans to

Magic: The Gathering”, as it pertains to both my content, and that of popular culture as a whole in a much more unique but broad sense. In a similarly broad style, I will be encompassing Scott Shackford’s “Magic: The Gathering” article for *Reason Magazine*, as it talks on a multitude of aspects of the game of *Magic*, all of which can have an impact on the work that I plan to do.

As a whole, I believe this project will be both challenging, as well as incredibly rewarding and interesting to work on. I have learned through my tutorials with professor Crowther, professor Bracewell, and professor Mahood that this subject of *Magic: the Gathering* is incredibly diverse and so multi-faceted that it warranted a much larger project than I was capable of doing through our tutorials together. As such, I felt the need to give it the appropriate amount of work and weight that it deserves, hence my choice of using it as my graduation project. I think that it can lead to some very intriguing findings, and it will hopefully bring some new light on both the cultural elements surrounding the game itself, as well as the academic and literary applications of non-traditional sources such as *Magic*.

Works Referenced:

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