

Temple University English Placement Test

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Sample Essay Topic

Periodically, certain fixtures in American society need to be re-evaluated. The eight semesters for the attainment of a baccalaureate degree is one of those traditional fixtures that has now become archaic. That time allotment for undergraduate higher education may have been sufficient for the decade of the 1930s, perhaps even for the middle 1950s, but it is demonstrably inadequate for the challenges of the new millennium. The world has changed, an enormous amount of knowledge has been discovered in the last 50 years, and the time necessary to acquire the learning necessary to function as an intelligent professional requires a radical revision --- and extension --- of the entire academic curriculum. Young men and women cannot meet the increased challenges of the sciences, business and the humanities without a more sophisticated preparation, particularly when it is realized that for the majority of these students the bachelor's degree will be the terminal point of their formal education.

(Adapted from an editorial by Eugene Fitzgerald)

Sample Passing Essay

Eugene Fitzgerald believes that four years of undergraduate study is insufficient time to earn a bachelor's degree. Because of the "enormous amount of knowledge" discovered in recent years, he feels that the American educational system is in need of a radical change, one that would expand the amount of time spent in class. Fitzgerald asserts that by increasing the time allotted to earn a bachelor's degree, students are more likely to become successful, knowledgeable, and productive members of society.

Fitzgerald focuses only on our need to change the quantity of time spent studying; he fails to recognize that the quality of study time is even more important. Higher education of the 2000s cannot be compared with that of the 1930s. Although the number of semesters required to earn a bachelor's degree has remained the same, the quality of learning during those eight semesters is much higher. The use of computers has enlightened and taught students more than was ever thought possible in the 1930s. Science laboratories are much more advanced, and other modern learning devices are being employed to help students gain as much knowledge as possible. Fitzgerald seems to think that American students should study more to be able to handle the challenges of the modern world and become "intelligent professionals." Perhaps this is partly true, but each student has the right to decide for him/herself how much time should be spent on learning. If a student feels his undergraduate learning experience was inadequate, he may choose to attend graduate school. The American educational system always welcomes any citizen with the desire to learn.

Lastly, the tradition of the American educational system has been fixed in our minds for decades, and the majority of Americans feel comfortable with its familiarity. There is a proverb that states, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Fitzgerald is trying to "fix" our higher learning system when there is no real proof that it is inadequate for our citizens' needs. Instead of concentrating on expanding time spent in classrooms and lecture halls, Fitzgerald should perhaps focus on creating methods to make the time already spent in classrooms more productive.

Passing Essay Explanation

The essay passes because it clearly meets the exam requirements to explain the writer's position and to argue your own position on what the writer has said. The opening summary is in the student's own words (except for a few words quoted from the passage), and it explains Fitzgerald's point of view concerning the time needed to earn a college degree. The student next states a position on Fitzgerald's argument ("[Fitzgerald] fails to recognize that the quality of study time is even more important"), and supports the statement with specific reasons for taking such a stand. The student also refers back to the exam passage in the course of the essay, pointing to Fitzgerald's idea that more learning time is needed to produce "intelligent professionals," and suggesting that this may not always be true. The essay demonstrates both a full comprehension of the exam passage and the ability to take a stand on another writer's argument in an organized, logical fashion.

Sample Failing Essay

In his editorial, Eugene Fitzgerald maintains the position that an enormous amount of knowledge has been discovered in the last 50 years, and the entire academic curriculum requires a radical revision. He points out that the time allotment for undergraduate higher education may have been sufficient in the past decades, but it is inadequate for the challenges of the 2000s. He suggests young men and women cannot meet the increased challenges of the sciences, business and the humanities without a more sophisticated preparation in college.

I agree with Fitzgerald that undergraduate courses should be updated. I feel as though the undergraduate curriculum should be more related to the individual's field of study and that the curriculum should be updated annually. Many mandatory undergraduate courses are not related to your field of study. I believe this is a waste of time and money, because you could be concentrating more on courses that are related to your major.

Undergraduate courses should be updated annually so that students can stay informed about what is going on in their field. Changes take place every year concerning undergraduate fields of study, but many students are uninformed of the changes. Updated material concerning undergraduates should be taken seriously. Undergraduates are the future of America, and someone at the appointed universities should be responsible for seeing that students receive information annually concerning their field.

Undergraduate courses should be made to relate more closely to one's desired field of study. Courses should be updated annually so that our leaders of tomorrow can stay on top of their fields and so that they do not waste their time studying things that will not be important in their careers.

Failing Essay Explanation

The essay does not pass for several important reasons. To begin, the student writer does not follow the exam directions to summarize the passage in your own words. The student instead uses Fitzgerald's words, and the opening paragraph of the essay is little more than a rearrangement of lines from the passage. The aim in requiring students to summarize is to see how competently you can read and explain a text. A summary that is not in your own words fails to demonstrate your real understanding of the passage. In addition, the student's own argument is not relevant to the passage. The student misinterprets the passage to mean that college courses should be "updated," and then discusses how colleges can improve the undergraduate curriculum. However, this is not what Fitzgerald has said in the passage. Once again, the student does not follow the exam instruction. Students must state a position on the writer's position, and discuss their own ideas on the argument presented in the passage. Since the essay is off the subject, the student has failed to present a focused argument directly tied to Fitzgerald's passage.