

Program Evaluation Essay

University of Lancaster Exchange

Jeffrey P. Johnson
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Five letters home, September 1986 to June 1987, typeset from the original typescript. The text is as typed.

September 22, 1986

Dear Mom and Dad,

Greetings from the United Kingdom. I'm writing you from my room at the University of Lancaster -- yes, I made it here just fine. The flight was a bit long, but bearable. On the plane I met a girl who was on her way to another university in England -- I guess it's the thing to do.

I've been here for four days now. Those of us who rode the train from London arrived Tuesday evening. I'm glad I got to London a day early, because some of the Americans who flew in that day had a heck of a time trying to make it to the train on time. Besides, it was fun to wander around London for a day.

As soon as we arrived on campus we were shown to our rooms and informed there would be a "free beer do" starting at eight. I had just enough time to throw my bags into my room and take a quick shower before it started. I guess I look (and sound) very American, because the English students kept coming up to me and asking me why I would want to come to Lancaster (most of them want to go to the states).

Being that I haven't lived in a dorm before, I wasn't really prepared for my room -- it's so small and so orange. (After talking to some other Americans, I've found that the rooms we have here are actually quite large compared to some in the states. It's still too orange though -- I wonder if I could paint it?) The window in my room is huge, which is nice, and one of the two kitchens on our hall is directly across from my room, so I won't have far to go for food.

Did I tell you about the way the university is split into colleges? Well, there are eight different colleges that make up the university (I'm in Cartmel college). While each college houses a number of majors, you aren't necessarily a member of the college that your major is. Each college houses the offices and classrooms for its major subjects and the students in the college who are living on campus. (Second year English students live off campus, while most first and third year students live on campus.) Also, each college has its own bar.

This first week has been basically an orientation for the first year students and us overseas students. We've had lectures, tours, dinners, etc. On Thursday they had what is called the Societies Bazaar, where all the different clubs and societies set up booths and allow the students to browse around and ask questions. I may have gone a bit overboard, but I joined six of them (the Philosophical Society, the Photography Society, the Film Society, the Martial Arts Club, the Ski Club and the Rugby Union Club). I figure clubs are a good way to meet and become friends with a number of English students with interests similar to mine.

We also registered for our courses this week. I'm taking three courses this term, three courses next term, and doing two independent study projects in the Summer term. The North American reps and the academic advisors were very helpful in arranging my schedule. I'm looking forward to the classes I've chosen.

There's another social tonight and I have to get ready so I'll close for now and write again soon. Bye.

December 7, 1986

Dear Mum and Dad,

The first term is almost finished and I'm starting to get excited about the four weeks of holiday that is coming up. I don't have too much work left to finish, actually I really didn't have to do a great deal of work this entire term. This is due to the fact that a lot of the work for this term isn't due until next term and you know how I procrastinate.

As I mentioned in a previous letter, I'm taking three courses this term, Computer Graphics (CS 307), Artificial Intelligence (CS 308), and Data Structures (CS 201a). English students taking these courses take exams for them in the summer term. However, being that the exams are combined with those of other courses that I haven't taken, I worked out special assignments with each of the professors, which I will do instead of the exams.

This quarter has been very different to what I am used to. We've had no tests, no midquarters or finals, and only a minimum of assignments to be handed in. The lectures have been pretty intense though, and I've taken quite a few notes. This is especially true of Computer Graphics. I didn't realize the course would be as technical as it is -- even though I have a strong math background, it's going to take some work to understand all the concepts he's lectured about. Artificial Intelligence covers a very broad area of research going on in computing, so it tends to be a bit general. I got interested in machine learning, so in order to pursue it more, I'm doing an independent study project with the professor. Data Structures is a pretty straight forward introduction to the implementation of different structures in Pascal.

As far as seeing the country goes, I went to Scotland by train with some friends for a weekend, I hitched a ride with an English student who was going home to London for a weekend (I rode back with him too), and I've been to Liverpool and Manchester, among others, with the Rugby Union Club.

I've been very busy with lectures, rugby training, yoga, and the other clubs I'm involved with. I made the mistake of joining the inboard dining scheme this term. The inboard serves dinner from 5:00 to 6:15 (breakfast and lunch are still on your own). While the food isn't all

that bad (sometimes), with my schedule, it's been really hard for me to get there on time. If I had it to do again, I wouldn't bother with it, because I end up making my own dinner 2-3 nights a week anyway (and it turns out that cooking with the other guys on my hall is good fun). Next term I won't be on the inboard.

As I mentioned, I'm looking forward to the coming holiday. I bought an Interail card which gives me unlimited travel on most all of the trains in Europe, so I'm planning on seeing many countries and cities.

I guess that's all for now -- hope all is well at home.

February 5, 1987

Dear Mum and Dad,

Just a short letter to let you know how things are going.

You know I'm taking three courses this term; Cognitive Psychology (Psy 201), Comparative Languages (CS 201b), and Database Systems (CS 303). The two computer courses are formatted much like the ones I took last term -- a few assignments and no tests for now. Database Systems is very organized -- each day before the lecture, a complete set of notes for it is handed out. The lecture (and notes) are very thorough and the assignments are all straight forward. Comparative Languages is an introduction to a number of different programming languages; it covers the language design principles well, which leads to a better understanding of each languages limitations.

The psychology course I'm taking is quite different the other courses I've taken. (Actually, I think this course may be more indicative of the non-technical courses here in general). The lecture is very loosely structured and very difficult to take notes from. The lecturer goes over the major topics, citing references a mile a minute, and it is up to the student to read up on the finer details. Because so many JYA students are taking this term of the course, they have a special exam that we will take the second week of the next term. Besides the exam, there is an essay due at the end of this term, and a tutorial every other week.

We're still playing rugby games all term so I'm keeping very busy and traveling to different towns and cities all the time.

I have to get going, so take care and I'll write again soon.

May 2, 1987

Dear Mum and Dad,

I'm back from the spring holiday and I guess it's time to get to work as I have a lot to get finished this term. My break was really great. I spent the first week skiing in the French Alps with the Ski Club, the second week exploring London, the next week I stayed at a friends house in Yorkshire, and finished up my holiday by flying to an island off the coast of Spain to lie in the sun for a week. There is just so much to do over here, I could do with another week or two of holiday.

But, I am back to work. This term I don't have lectures -- I'm doing two independent studies, so I just meet with the professors once in a while and do most of the work on my own. One of my independent studies is a long philosophical essay and one is a computer program, but I have friends who are doing research and experiments in many other areas. The independent studies, as well as the final assignments I arranged are all due at the end of this term, so I'll certainly be busy.

This is the big term for the English students too, so no socials (extended bar hours, etc.) are allowed until the end of all the exams. That leaves one week at the end of the term, which from what I've heard, is filled with some very major parties.

That's about it for now -- bye.

June 13, 1987

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well, I've finally finished everything. I guess it wasn't such a good idea to leave so much for the last few weeks, but I got it all done with some time to spare. I'm leaving here in a few days, so I guess the majority of my remaining time will be spent saying good-bye.

This year has been a great experience in many ways -- I would do it again in an instant. I like the way courses are run here in general; a good deal of responsibility is left to the student, but I really think that I learned more having the time to look into the areas I found most interesting. Also, I think essays (whether in tests or as assignments) are a much better assessment of my knowledge than multiple choice tests. (I definitely wrote more essays per term here than I ever did at the University of Minnesota).

Of course I'll be sad to leave, but I'm also looking forward to getting back to the states. I'll see you all soon.