Writing Prompt on William Cronon’s “Only Connect”
(2 pages double-spaced; approx. 650 words)

In “Only Connect: The Goals of a Liberal Education,” William Cronon explores the meaning of the liberal arts, pointing out that the term’s origins link it to ideas of freedom and growth. At the center of the essay is a list: a list of the ten qualities Cronon thinks are most embodied by liberally educated people—although he notes that these are not qualities anyone can definitively embody. Their cultivation is a lifelong process.

Here at the beginning of your college journey, we’d like to invite you to use Cronon’s essay as a jumping-off point for thinking about your own intellectual values, where they come from, and how you hope your education at OWU will help you to further cultivate them.

Specifically, we’d like you to write a short “Intellectual Autobiography” (2 double-spaced pages, approximately 650 words), exploring the influences and life experiences that have molded you into the person you are today. What are your enduring interests and passions? How have your family, community, and education shaped your life? Pay special attention to how your life experiences have informed your intellectual values. Has your upbringing led you to especially value curiosity? Logic? Empathy? Beauty? Finally, consider Cronon’s list of ten qualities. Which of these qualities do you think your life has cultivated in you most strongly? In which of these qualities are you weakest? (Nobody’s perfect.) Do you think Cronon left anything important off of his list—would your list be any different? As a postscript to your essay, let us know anything you are especially interested in exploring at OWU. Is there anything you’d like to find out more about in UC 160?

These essays are important because your instructor will use them to get a better sense of your 160 section as a whole and to identify potential activities and outings for your class. Like all writing done for 160, this assignment will also count toward your final grade. But unlike with most writing you’ll do in college, beyond baseline considerations of clarity and coherence your 160 instructor will not be especially concerned with the quality of your prose. He or she is primarily interested in the thoughtfulness of your writing—how seriously you take the assignment and how authentically you reflect on your life. So take this as an opportunity to “write to learn” without the pressure of being evaluated on grammar, syntax, and so on.

To assist you in wrapping your head around the assignment, I have posted two sample essays on the UC 160 website. They are actually written by professors who are channeling their 17-year-old selves and applying their life experiences to that point to the Cronon essay. They may be a little longer than you’re finished assignment; don’t feel like you have to write quite that much – follow the guidelines of about 2 pages double-spaced or about 650 words.

Note: If there is anything in your Intellectual Autobiography that you would like to remain private from other students in the course, please let your UC 160 instructor know.

Instructions for submitting your response are on the UC 160 website under “Summer Assignment.” If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to email your instructor or me (Dr. Lynda Hall, Associate Dean for Academic Performance) at lkhall@owu.edu. I look forward to meeting and working with you in UC 160!