

St. Ursula Academy Sophomore Wins First Prize in Foreign Policy Research Institute Essay Contest

A St. Ursula Academy sophomore has won first prize in an essay contest sponsored by the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a Philadelphia think tank.

Megan Bodie won \$1,000 writing an essay on “the top 5 innovations developed in the U.S. since 1945.” Megan’s was the sole individual entry. Two other teams, one from Minnesota and one from Illinois, received similar prizes in the nationwide contest sponsored by the Wachman Center, an educational arm of FPRI, established to “help teachers teach.”

Megan found out about the essay competition from her Advanced Placement U.S. History teacher, Susan Gray, who says she encourages students to enter such contests because “even if they don’t win, they still stand out from the crowds of college applicants because they can say they participated.”

Consulting a PBS website with a list of innovations, Megan chose those she thought were most important, and ranked them from #1 to #5.

She organized her top five innovations according to “how well they met Maslow’s hierarchy of needs,” a concept she learned about in another teacher’s class. “I was looking for a way to prioritize them and Maslow’s hierarchy worked,” Megan said.

Suzanne Martinko briefly introduces Maslow’s hierarchy to her Health class students because “he looks at things in a positive way. He shows how people can reach their full potential.” Although Martinko didn’t know about the essay contest until after Megan won, she was surprised at how well it worked in choosing priorities.

Megan’s number one innovation was the polio vaccine, which satisfies the basic need for health, followed by the microwave oven, which assists humans in their need for food, and the barcode, ranked number three for helping “keep products safe wherever they travel,” according to her essay.

The Internet and the Hubble Space Telescope ranked four and five on Megan’s list of top innovations, for satisfying “a person’s need for love and belonging,” and for satisfying “society’s need for knowledge.”

“Once she decided to use Maslow’s hierarchy, ranking the top five was easy for her,” Gray said. “Being in AP U.S. History also worked to her advantage,” Gray continued. “Students in that course learn to write succinctly, develop and support a thesis, yet stay within the parameters of a contest.”

Megan is still feeling “surreal.” When asked about her choices, she said that Maslow’s hierarchy prompted her not to choose some other innovations listed, such as nuclear weapons or windshield wipers. “It made it clear which were most helpful to humans.” Megan says she’ll bank the prize money for college.

Trudy Kuehner, Wachman Center spokesperson, says that about 200 students entered the competition, the Center’s first such contest. According to the FPRI website, the Wachman Center was established to “help teachers teach” by “advancing teachers’ knowledge of world affairs” and helping them incorporate this knowledge into the classroom.