Writer's Statement about "Written in the Stars: Advocating for an Astronomical Literacy"

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"There will only be three 'Tasks' that you are graded on this semester," Dr. Roozen emphasized in one of the first ENC 1102H classes. "Man," I thought. "What am I getting myself into? I have *never* written a research paper before." I did not know what to write about and was lost; I believed that this level of effort was going to be difficult and punishing, coming with little joy. However, I soon found out that each "task" respectively became less like the laborious assignments I imagined, and more of a pleasure. This was especially true after I identified a topic in a subject that I am passionate about—astronomy.

To provide some background for these tasks, our final assignment was to discuss in detail a form of writing that we actively participate in *outside* of school. Ultimately, we were to find links to ideas mentioned in Deborah Brandt's book, *The Rise of Writing.* Specifically, we had to identify how our unique writing-based literacy, which ranged from computer coding to online posts on Reddit, mirroring Brandt's ideas such as transmodality and multimodality. I chose to turn to astronomy, seeking to discover direct links to Brandt's study. I soon found that this was no easy task.

Having never written a detailed report prior, I initially had some difficulty finding a place to begin. Namely, I was struggling to find links between astronomy writing and "typical," or more traditional writing, such as blog posts or journal keeping. For example, I did not see how Greenstein's "writing to learn" strategy in English classes (which is exactly what it sounds like: writing more frequently to learn the practice) applied to astronomy writing. Further, I did not even consider analyzing one of my many astronomy doodles until I realized something: astronomical literacy is *not* like a more general writing-based literacy, as I had been struggling to prove. I was trying so hard to force myself to travel a specific research route that I missed the signs in front of me. Instead, I defined an astronomical literacy as a completely unique entity with rare assets that can add to a writers' "toolbox," complimenting skills already acquired from a general writing-based literacy. Thus, I finally reached the heart of the discussion: how an astronomical literacy *differs* from a general writing-based literacy, such as the one mentioned by Brandt. In doing so, I was able to take an autoethnographic approach to my personal experiences with astronomical literacy, and advocate for its growth inside and outside of the classroom.

After identifying my thesis and audience—a group of researchers like Brandt—the paper came together quite nicely. My analysis contrasted with some articles, while reinforcing ideas in others. Further, peer feedback was very useful; my peers were able to provide a student perspective on how my paper could be improved. They brought up key points of how my argument could be strengthened, which images reflected my thesis well and which did not, and what grammatical mistakes needed to be corrected. Dr. Roozen, being an accomplished writer himself, was an asset as well; he knew what a literacy researcher wants to hear, see, and know, keying in on

that "so what?" notion. Without these resources, my argument would not be as driving as it turned out to be.

As I walked out of the first class of Dr. Roozen's ENC 1102H class, I had *no* idea what I would be writing about, or what a writing-based literacy even was. The thought of three tasks as the only grading criteria was foreign to me, and frankly a bit nerve-wracking. However, as the year progressed, I discovered that these tasks were not graded in a specific, defined manner; like an astronomical literacy, Dr. Roozen provided the *freedom* for the topic itself to take the writer to whatever boundaries they encountered.