

I thought I would choose one final thought-provoking class to complete my AS degree at SLCC. I received my reading materials late due to the disruption of mail services caused by the pandemic. I began to panic a little bit, but the teacher reassured me I would do fine in the class. With confidence, I completed each module and gained valuable lessons as I explored the world of drugs.

I thought my personal experience with common legal drugs like alcohol and cigarettes would place me ahead of the learning curve. Little did I know, I would be learning beyond my expectations. I was introduced to an in-depth history of how each drug became to have its own reputation in the drug world. I was mostly surprised to learn about how other countries differed from the US in culture, perspective, and legislation which also plays an impact on the ratio of drug abusers in certain populations. I became more knowledgeable on how weather conditions, location of crops, as well as economics and government also play a big role on the survival and adaptation of drug-related industries. The first few readings and videos on illicit drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl opened my eyes to a world of substances which were very informative. I found the text reading very interesting as it explored the origins of cocaine and opium and how each drug became a "public nuisance" in various populations and cultures which inevitably led towards strict legislation to curb addiction to these substances. I am able to see the commonality in modern times as I recall watching news reports during the crack epidemic, investigative journal reports of the bloodshed on the US/Mexico border as well as the current celebrity news pertaining to heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl overdoses.

As I learned about each classification of drugs, I noticed a similar pattern of popularity, dependency, and a push for substance awareness and decriminalization as a form of harm reduction occurring with each drug. The cycle is visible in the history of substances like nicotine and alcohol with laws passed to restrict cigarette and alcohol advertising and then smoking cessation tools and organizations like AA show up accordingly to aid in individuals who wish to stop using tobacco and alcohol, respectively. It seems societies adapt to the growing perspective that substance abuse is here to stay, but the push for awareness and prevention should also be a top priority among these societies as research has proven that substance abuse really has no positive effects within a society.

Another important pattern I noticed that keeps the drug trade alive is the privilege factor. A plentiful country like the United States focuses a lot now on harm reduction passing legislation to keep certain

substances away from youth, as well as easier access to many resources like rehab facilities and other prevention services which are available to individuals who can actually afford it. Comparatively, this is not the case for struggling South American countries who depend on the drug trade for their basic survival. While I am very grateful to be part of a more privileged society, I cannot help but to empathize with cultures who have no choice or outlet to escape the risk and dangers of drug cultivation, production, and distribution.

The model structure of learning about drugs, behavior, and society through discussion boards and interactive article writing also enabled me to observe the pattern that college educated individuals tend to think along the same lines when it comes to the subject of drugs in general. This once again leads to the privilege factor that proves easier access to higher education can result in higher numbers of drug awareness.

Last but not least, the book report assignment was the most influential material. Reading the Wolf Boys by Dan Slater brought back nostalgic events and iconic references from the past which I was able to deeply relate to. The journalistic writing was in depth, and it introduced me to the mind of a cold-blooded gangster while understanding why similar lifestyles still thrive in other countries today. Overall, I am very appreciative of all my virtual classmates and professor who put in the time and effort to make the class interesting, engaging, and worthwhile. I could not have asked for a better thought-provoking class to end my semester. I will graduate with my Associate in Science this summer and I'm happy to say it was all worth it. The information I gained in this class will only help me in the future as I pursue my goals of working in a scientific-based industry, wearing a white lab coat, and doing research on who knows what, maybe drugs.