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Biography: I am a sophomore, am from Springfield, and am majoring in Spanish and Communication.

Part of the theme I am addressing: I am focusing on what it means for community to be a “body,” and how to create that environment. The word count of the essay is 844 words.

Charity that I would like to receive the cash prize, if I should win: Convoy of Hope Feed One

A Healthy Community: Building the Body

Growing up in an individualistic culture, it is sometimes easy to forget - or fail to recognize – that we are lost without community. As a child, I never would have been able to thrive if my family community had not been healthy. As students of Missouri State, the health of the university community is vital to creating a positive environment conducive to learning. Also, the reality of a global community solidifies as the abilities of the internet increase, and having a healthy world-wide community is imperative for peaceful relations among nations.

A community can be healthy intellectually and spiritually only if the body of the community as a whole is healthy, because the cohesiveness of the group is what takes a mess of individuals and turns it into a community. In order to have a healthy community here at Missouri State (or in Springfield, or anywhere else), it is vital that we be healthy as a body. In order to accomplish this, we must be unified as a whole but at the same time celebrate each other's differences, and we must create an environment of mutual respect.

The throng of students at Missouri State can become more unified as a body. It is unfortunate that, in many cases, ethnicity and cultural differences stand as an obstacle that hinders us students from reaching our fullest potential as a community. According to Patrick Parnell, the director of MSU's International Services Department, there are over 80 different countries represented at Missouri State (personal communication, February 27, 2016). There is also diversity among students who call the United States home. Often, though, the student body is not as inclusive or cohesive as it could be. How do we build up our community and make it stronger? By rallying around a common goal. As students, we are each here to learn - not just how to solve complicated math problems or how to write a solid research paper, but also what it means to be human, how to think through complicated issues, and how to become better at

valuing and understanding each other. The learning experience at Missouri State is not limited to academics; it is also a journey of morality. Missouri State tries to promote this encompassing learning experience through the Public Affairs mission and through Public Affairs activities in the classroom. It is time, though, that we students took up the commission ourselves and rallied around the goal of creating an inclusive environment that promotes learning in every area.

How do we become unified as a community but at the same time preserve cultural aspects that are specific to each ethnicity or sub-culture? The body of community is like the human body. There are different parts, and each part is not the same. The nose is different than the mouth, and the face is different than the arm. Each component has unique aspects and functions in a different way, but they each work together to create a healthy body. In the same way, different groups of the Missouri State community work together, not in spite of their differences but because of their differences, to create a healthy, whole body. I see this kind of community body in my campus ministry's international organization, where we know how to fellowship around the things we have in common, and how to celebrate each other's differences. For instance, even though we are not all from China, a couple of weeks ago we had a party celebrating Chinese New Year. There is the old, perhaps clichéd saying, "Don't cut off your nose to spite your face." We as a student body need to recognize that each group has a unique flavor and serves a unique purpose, but at the same time the student body as a whole is a cohesive unit with the same goal.

When groups with different opinions or cultures mix, it can be difficult to find a way to fellowship together while still being loyal to the opinions and cultures that each of us come from. What really serves as a glue that brings diverse groups together is respect. Without mutual respect, it is impossible for society to move forward, or for any community to act as a

community. Respect is the foundation for friendship, and it is the foundation for an inclusive environment. I know that racial relations in the United States is a complicated issue, and I also know that I cannot fully understand the issue from my one perspective. I know that there is no “easy fix” to racial tension. What helps, though, is to not lose sight of the vision of an inclusive future, and to rally around that vision. It is my desire that all students, no matter what their ethnicity, would strive toward that goal, and that we would start with our own campus community. As we strive to create a healthy community body, I believe that Missouri State can pave the way for racial reconciliation, and can set an example for other campuses across the nation.