These sample essays were successful in previous classes. Note where improvements can be made.

Essay 1. Note how the student supported their claims and was able to provide four approaches to the issue.

Harrisburg’s Crumbling Infrastructure: Bad Tidings and Tough Choices

With many recent occurrences of water main breaks and sinkholes, inhabitants of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania are realizing the city is just as historic underground as it is above ground. “Grandma's grandma was but a wee lass, and the quickest way to get from here to there had four legs when many of Harrisburg's water and sewer pipes were put in” (Gilliland 1). Because the State Capital’s infrastructure has long been neglected, underground issues pose a threat to the environment, jeopardize the safety and security of city residents, and increase the debt of a city already in the throes of a financial crisis. Swift action needs to be taken in order to repair the foundation of the city before it caves in on itself.

Considering Harrisburg’s financial dilemma, many other issues have been pushed to the wayside, including the ancient water and sewer system. Cate McKissick, writer for the Patriot News, notes that “there are currently over 40 sinkholes in the city of Harrisburg” (1). These sinkholes are believed to be the product of water main pipes that were made from clay and installed in the 1800’s, making them over 100 years old (“Harrisburg Public Works” 1). Throughout the years, these clay pipes have been dependable, but within the last twenty years, the city, “hasn’t had enough money to keep up with repairs” (“Harrisburg Public Works” 1). As these pipes age, cracks form and weaken the integrity of the pipes. The pipe system has withstood much over the years, such as seismic activity, powerful super storms, and massive flooding (Gilliland 2). Because of age and weather trauma, it would stand to reason that the pipe system would eventually deteriorate.

The December 31, 2012 collapse on the 2100 block of North Fourth Street was the result of the deteriorating pipes, creating a sinkhole that measured thirty feet long by twelve feet deep (“Harrisburg Public Works” 1). As these pipes weaken and crack, they leak water into the surrounding soil, effectively eroding away the ground that also helps to support the structures and roadways above. With nothing to support the above ground, the road eventually caves in, creating the sinkhole (“Harrisburg Public Works” 1). This occurrence can cause anything from a pot hole to a street long trench. The North Fourth Street disaster is one of two major sinkholes that have arisen within recent years. The other being the sinkhole that formed on Cameron Street where the water main ruptured. The very pipe that burst was laid in 1884 (Gilliland 2). Sheer age caused these underground pipes to erode and cause not only a nuisance, but a danger as well.
The main concern with all of these problems is finding the money to fund the repairs the city water and sewer system so desperately needs. The cost of repairing North Fourth Street alone is estimated to be around $550,000 to $600,000 ("Harrisburg City Council" 1). Where is this money supposed to come from? One option could be to increase taxes for the Harrisburg residents. This would make the burden the responsibility of a small group of tax payers ("Our View" 1). “We can ask for a federal government bailout or wait for the government to act… Harrisburg’s aging water system is breaking apart with each passing week” ("Our View” 1). However, waiting may only cause more issues as other sinkholes may have developed by the time federal government pitches in.

There is a fund for the sewer system that has been laid aside for repairs; however this money does not seem to be available. “If it wasn’t for past experience, where money in the sewer fund was, shall we say inappropriately placed in the general fund, rather than going into sewer and infrastructure, we wouldn’t have been so concerned about doing it so precisely correctly”(McKissick 1). It would seem that $4 million was removed from the sewer fund and was used to make payroll and other operating expenses (McKissick 1). According to Eric Veronikis, writer for the Patriot News, “Harrisburg has long neglected its underground infrastructure, only making repairs when absolutely necessary during the last two decades, because it didn’t have enough money or it wasn’t a priority” (“Harrisburg’s Neglected Infrastructure”1). It would be hopeful that this money would be put to better use, but with the city on the verge of bankruptcy, many necessities are being put off or evaluated as to whether they are a primary concern, or if they should be postponed until other more pressing matters are attended to.

Aside from the city’s financial decay made worse by the street craters, the problem of sink holes in Harrisburg is a huge issue to the populous of the city. The sinkholes of North Fourth Street caused 29 people to evacuate their homes for an entire week beginning on New Year’s Eve. This departure was not only in part to the danger of the large chasms, but loss of water, sewer, and gas services, too (March 1). Some residents, having nowhere to go, were forced to remain in their homes, but were not advised of the situation, except for flyers on their doors (March 1). “Police also reported two homes were burglarized, and some residents returned home to water damage” (March 1). With a crisis such as this, it is a shame occupants of the 2100 block were not better informed about the events occurring around them.

As if having to vacate one’s house is not enough of an inconvenience, sinkholes are threatening other streets in Harrisburg on which people live and drive upon. “The city is plagued with at least 40 sinkholes, including the two large ones that swallowed much of the 2100 block of North Fourth Street earlier this month” (Marx 1). This is a huge problem residentially because water and sewer lines not only run underneath the streets of a borough, but the houses lining the streets as well. Just imagine the danger of a sinkhole erupting underneath one’s home or vehicle. Officials fear that if Harrisburg’s sinkholes are not made a priority, they will expand and cause serious injury or death (“Harrisburg’s Neglected Infrastructure” 1). Unfortunately, if something like this were to occur, the city would have much more than fiscal concerns to worry about.
Furthermore, Harrisburg sinkholes may also have an imminent environmental impact on the city, as well as other surrounding areas. The incident on North Fourth Street caused a chain reaction of events through the ancient sewer system, eventually leading to an overflow of raw sewage into the Susquehanna River. According to Amanda Whitman, spokeswoman for the Department of Environmental Protection, “silt and mud from the sinkhole on North 4th Street created a clog in a sewage overflow chamber, which resulted in a spill of 1,913 gallons on January 1st and a second overflow of 574 gallons on January 3rd” (qtd. in “Raw Sewage Leaked” 1). Although these numbers were reported to be small in terms of water flow, this could certainly happen again considering the amount of sinkholes forming in the area.

If enough raw sewage spilled over into the Susquehanna River, it would pollute and poison the water supply. Contents in the sewer system include human waste, household chemicals, personal hygiene products, pharmaceuticals, etc. These things carry bacteria, diseases, parasites, and harmful carcinogens (“Contaminate Facts” 1). Not only would a sewage spill spoil the water supply, it would make it impossible to swim in the Susquehanna as well, which is bad news for the many residents and visitors who participate in water sports during the summer months. “The Susquehanna River ranks annually in the top 15 of America’s Most Endangered Rivers list” (“Water Quality” 1). With such a ranking, the Susquehanna and Central Pennsylvania’s residents could certainly live without more pollution caused by a manmade issue.

With long term neglect of city infrastructure and the “only take action when absolutely necessary” attitude of Harrisburg officials, it is no wonder so many problems are arising in the area. Being the State Capital comes with a responsibility to set a standard for the many other towns and cities of Pennsylvania. Ignoring clear issues with the foundation of the city and not taking measures to repair its structure not only risks the health and well-being of area residents and their environment, but degrades the city’s reputation as well.

There is no excuse to borrow from city funds that are clearly set up for structural repair purposes in order to cover other debts. And there is certainly no excuse to neglect a historical landmark and the safety of the people who pay taxes to support such a place. Governing officials of Harrisburg need to get their financial affairs in order and the crumbling foundation of city streets needs to take precedence; otherwise the city may as well dig its own grave.

Works Cited
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Essay 2. Here, note how the student had a persuasive point demonstrated by looking at the issue through several approaches.

Doctors need to stay

Pennsylvania is one of 11 states facing the burden of physicians moving elsewhere due to soaring medical malpractice insurance premiums (Raupe). Because this problem has only been festering for two years, there are plenty of doctors still remaining. However, if allowed to run
rampant, there will be numerous problems in the years to come for doctors and their patients. The Pennsylvania Medical Society reports that in the last two years, over 900 doctors have left the state due to high insurance premiums (Bender). Investigation into the matter points to two reasons for such an increase. The first reason is revenue problems for insurance companies and secondly rising medical malpractice jury awards (Raupe). To reduce the number of doctors leaving Pennsylvania, jury awards in malpractice lawsuits need to be reduced to values that are not excessive.

Pennsylvania doctors pay a large sum for their insurance costs. Simple medical malpractice insurance, which is required, cost them $100,000.00 a year, not to mention optional packages such as the Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error Fund which is another $100,000.00 annually (Raupe). No doctor in their right mind would stay and pay more when they can go elsewhere and pay less. As a result of such high costs for insurance, Governor Rendell has already sent legislation to the state General Assembly to reduce these costs by half (Raupe).

The costs in Pennsylvania are also rising due to the stranglehold attorneys have on the U.S. Justice System. This forces doctors to pay higher premiums on their malpractice insurance. Studies conducted show that lawyers are searching for the top courts in terms of jury award amounts to file the claims for their clients (Lewis). Consequently, the physicians must increase the costs on their services just to pay for the increase in insurance premiums. Ultimately, all the added costs fall on the shoulders of the patients who rely on medical care from their trained professional. For some this is not such a burden because their own insurance will pay for most of their medical costs. The patients hit the hardest by this are those with no insurance, which pay out of their pocket with each visit. Congresswoman Melissa Hart stated "insurance premium rates where they are now are hazardous to Pennsylvanians health" (Bender).

The doctors are not the only players in this game closing up shop in Pennsylvania. Insurance companies are as well (Smith). Since 2000, nine companies have stopped selling insurance in Pennsylvania, forcing doctors to buy from the state's Joint Underwriting Association (Smith). It just so happens to be that this is the most expensive insurance a physician can purchase (Smith). The doctors are impacted directly by this situation but they are not alone.

A spokesman for previous Governor Mark Sweiker stated the obvious in 2002: "there are a lot of people out there who are scared and concerned about the availability of their doctor" (Smith). With the numbers of practicing doctors dwindling, they are much more dispersed throughout the state. Having to change doctors can not be a good thing and it is even worse when the same doctor has been used for many years. Over time there are bonds formed between a doctor and their patients. With doctors leaving, it forces those dependent on doctors to find a new one and go through the entire process again. When asked about these circumstances, Dr. John Williams commented "it is an unfortunate situation because the trustfulness that is formed is the most important aspect to a patient." (interview) The only way to form this trust is through many years of service from the same physician, something that would be missing in this situation.

As malpractice lawsuits continue to mount around the country, they continue to mount with the medical specialists as well. In fact, over half of the lawsuits are brought against surgeons (Raupe). Therefore, fewer and fewer medical students are willing to study to become a specialist (Smith). Who can blame them? There is plenty of money to be made as a family physician. As a result of fewer specialists, patients in need of their services are required to travel
further distances. This increase in distance traveled and less competition in the field falls yet again on the patients in the form of higher costs.

The solution proposed here goes beyond that proposed by President Bush. The way to stop this matter is to put a cap on the highest monetary values a jury can award, with a committee overseeing all lawsuits brought against certain physicians. This cap needs to rest at the amount at which the doctor pays for his insurance. Only those doctors who pay for additional insurance policies should have the pleasure of the established committee to oversee any lawsuit brought against them. If the committee deems the lawsuit "frivolous" and carrying little merit, then it never goes to trial and the doctor does not have to pay for a settlement outside of court. In Pennsylvania, the minimum a jury can award is $100,000.00. This would prevent the lawyers from requesting jury awards that are excessive. The main reason behind this is the lawyers receive a percentage of their client's winnings in legal fees. This results in higher jury awards which raise insurance premiums. With this cap, this would not be permitted.

Opposing such a reform would be the American Trial Lawyers Association who believes a cap would not cause insurance premiums to drop (Howe). When President Bush raised the idea of a cap, Mary Alexander, the president of the American Trial Lawyers Association, stated "it appears President Bush trusts politicians in Washington, not American juries, to decide what is fair compensation" (Howe). How do members on a jury know more than a politician in Washington? They do not; members of a jury are selected by each side's lawyers from normal everyday folks. The committee proposed here would be composed of lawyers, judges and doctors. Such a committee would be ruling on whether a files lawsuit should make it all the way to a trial or be thrown out. This would keep doctors at their practices and not in the courtroom battling frivolous lawsuits.

It is clear that the only way to keep doctors in Pennsylvania is to place a cap on jury awards in malpractice lawsuits. This would not only eliminate frivolous lawsuits but prevent trial lawyers from achieving excessive rewards for their clients just so they can make more money as well. A similar cap was put into practice in California 25 years ago and California is not on the list of states that have doctors leaving in droves (Howe). If it can work in California, it can work in Pennsylvania.

Essay 3. In the essay below, the student built his case by not only showing the many reasons why battlefields should be preserved, but by challenging the points of view of those on the opposite side of the issue. In addition, he looked at the issue from a range of perspectives including historical, economic, and educational. Note both his introduction and conclusion where his passion for the topic was clear without adding wordy first person phrases to state his opinions.

Be careful--this student did very well integrating a local approach into a more national issue. Make sure your papers are as Pennsylvania specific as possible and don't try to take a more general concern and merely plug in occasional references to local situations.

The Fight for Preservation

From 1861 to 1865, the Civil War raged primarily in what is now the eastern United States. This war defined us as a nation, set millions of slaves free, settled the question of states rights, and claimed the
lives of roughly 600,000 American soldiers out of the three million that fought ("Impact"). It echoed through the decades and centuries, from US presidents to new technology to better weapons and tactics to racism and minority rights. The war's effects can still be felt today. While the generation that was nearly cleared from the face of the earth has changed our nation forever, the sites where they shed their blood are disappearing fast. Development and suburban sprawl have taken their toll, and now defensive positions are becoming freeways, forts are becoming residential neighborhoods, fields that saw enormous assaults are becoming Wal-Marts, and places where great leaders fell are becoming Pizza Huts. While there are national parks and battlefields in place to preserve these hallowed grounds, there are far too few of them, and they incorporate too small a percentage of the ground fought over. When these sacred spaces are being lost at an alarming rate, it is important to continue the fight, the fight to preserve our nations battlefields (Greene 8).

Presently, about 30 acres of civil war battlefields are lost each day to development (Greene 8). The problem lies in that much of the fighting centered around important cities, crossroads, and rail junctions, all of which are now expanding with suburban sprawl. With the national park service holding only a small portion of battlefield land, many significant historic sights are being lost to business ("No Stopping"). For example, in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, the spot where General Jackson accepted the largest surrender of US forces until the fall of Battan is now the site of a 7-11. The site where General Clayborne was killed at the battle of Franklin is now a Pizza Hut. Where brigade after brigade of Federal troops were mowed down at Fredericksburg now stands blocks and blocks of additional building onto the city itself. Where Union troops retreated during the first day of Gettysburg sits a car dealership ("No Stopping"). Examples such as these can be found on nearly every civil war battlefield in the country. While Walmarts and Pizza Huts can be built anywhere, once a battlefield is paved over, it is gone forever. While these places should be preserved, they are still being destroyed in the name of progress. As the song goes, "they paved paradise, and put up a parking lot." (Mitchell)
Many will argue that history is already written in books, that the National Park Service already has enough land, that the soldiers are already in our memories, and that it's not worth preserving battlefields and hindering business. This is partially true. Of course, many battlefields surround growing cities. Large businesses could use these spaces to stay close to the residences of their employees. Likewise, people would like to live on what is now battlegrounds to stay close to developing cities and shopping centers ("Reasons"). While these arguments have valid points, in reality well preserved battlefields produce millions of dollars in revenue each year. The tourist industry benefits greatly from battlefields. Visitors to many battlefields spend around $75 dollars a day per person, and tourist to the Gettysburg battlefield alone spent $120 million (Osbourne 1). This is just one battlefield around one town of about 7,000. Figures in this range are the norm for many other battlefields, many of which are also around small towns. When it comes to business, having a well preserved battlefield draws in large sums of money to the local communities (and in tax revenue). In addition, once a park is protected, it takes little money to keep up, which results in large profits (Osbourne 5). Because of this, business isn't harmed because of the protected land. Aside from the economical benefits of battlefield preservation, there are larger and more important reasons. Protected battlefields serve as a monument and tribute to those who served. A common saying goes "freedom isn't free." The Civil War remains an enduring example of this truth, where our very existence as a nation was in doubt. It is therefore proper and fitting that we preserve the grounds where many men gave their lives to keep our nation strong and free. Beyond honoring veterans, civil war battlefields are also high in historical significance. On these fields, our nation was strengthened, great leaders rose and fell, weapons and tactics were advanced to mirror the fighting that would come in World War I (Jacks 3). Also, new technology such as the hot air balloon was tested as well as advancements in the medical field, industry, etc. In preserving battlefields we also preserve the story of how our society advanced, and not just the battles themselves (Jacks 4). Battlefield preservation gives students of history a chance to stand in the same place that many important people in US history were, to see what they saw, and to better understand why
they did what they did. These places give a better feel and understanding of historical events, which helps us and future generations understand how we got to where we are today. By knowing where we came from, we can better understand where we are going, and better learn from the mistakes of the past. Finally, preserving battlefields gives an advantage to our modern military. Places such as Antietam, Gettysburg, Fredericksburg, Bull Run, Harpers Ferry, and Shiloh give a unique look at military history, text book military history. Granted, while our army no longer lines up shoulder to shoulder and charges with fixed bayonets, the basic principles of fire support, maneuver, flanking, exploiting, scouting, and logistics remain the same (Jacks 5). Battlefields offer soldiers a unique look at historical scenarios. Preserved battlefields also allow soldiers to see the terrain as the generals did, and in so allow them to see why decisions were made. By bringing units to battlefields for military analysis, the leaders and soldiers of these units directly learn from the mistakes of the past, and benefit from it (Jacks 6). There are few better ways to explain why it is important to tie in with the flanks of neighboring units as can be shown on the first day's battlefield at Gettysburg. There are few better ways to show why reserves should be kept, and why interior lines are helpful than the West woods at Antietam, and there are few better ways to stress how important artillery support and reinforcements are than Pickets charge. Battlefields can be a great training tool for today's military, and can help in keeping the price of our freedom as bloodless as possible. Clearly, battlefields serve many purposes for contemporary and future generations. They honor those who died for our nation. They serve as a training tool for the military. They preserve our nation's history, and they supplement local incomes by tens of millions of dollars a year. By helping civil war preservation groups, and not destroying monuments and topographical features in National Battlefields and Military Parks, these benefits can endure for centuries, and continue to educate future generations while providing a place to relax in the middle of nature. The benefits of battlefield preservation greatly outweigh the negatives of making business build in other areas. For these purposes,
battlefields should be preserved as best as they can be.

("Works Cited" deleted here. Source names were altered.)