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ENGL 1106: Freshmen English

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Coffee 101

Sitting in the corner of the maroon-laced room, I find myself in a serene and almost euphoric state, watching as a constant stream of students enter and leave. The smell of brewing coffee stains the air at Deet's Place, welcoming the morning scholars who so tiredly await their chance for artificial awakening. They pile in from the chilled morning air, scuttling for just a bit of warmth to comfort them. Without hesitation, they attach to the end of the line, which is by now a little past the entrance doors. A sigh of relief can be seen as they gain a moment to pause, knowing that the frigid breeze cannot reach them now. Eyes begin to widen as they breathe in the warm air. The smell of fresh pastries entices their noses, sending a signal that seems to scream, "Good morning! It's time to wake up!"

As a small amount of energy begins to surface, most simply look around. They admire the morning scene, watching through the big windows that form the opposite wall. They can see the sun before them as it shines so shallow on the horizon. As bodies shuffle around, their eyes scan the room, trying to catch a glimpse of a familiar face as if to assure them that they are in good company. Successful or not, they do not talk; any extraneous movement at such an hour is hardly coveted. They stare ahead, waiting to move forward, knowing they are on their way to getting that well-needed cup of heavenly brew. Those that find the strength to utter a word or two do so at such a soft tone that those who are listening cannot respond for they are so soothed. A simple nod conveys their acknowledgement, and that is all that is needed. Halfway toward the

counter, the fresh pastries on the left greet them from behind the glass. So many pastries populate their vision, luring their empty stomachs, tempting them to consume just one. The scents of cheese Danishes, lemon bars, and blueberry scones now waft among the students. As they inch closer to the counter, they prepare themselves for service, digging deep within their coat pockets for their Hokie passports. They now stand anxious, knowing that they must now muster the words to get what they require. The girl at the counter greets them all the same. “Hi, what can I get for ya?” The smile and warm tone gently wakes even the most jaded of faces.

One by one, each person asks for his or her own unique blend of coffee. Some order the usual coffee, some go for a flavored cappuccino, and others are more in need of a latte. Most get theirs in the small, twelve-ounce size, but you certainly get your fair share of needy students whose bodies demand that larger cup of java. The possibilities are practically unlimited for them, and it is apparent they take advantage of this. Every so often one will ask for a fresh pastry that enticed them all too well. The blueberry muffin appears to be the favorite – a hand reaching to grab one every few minutes. With a remark of gratitude, well wishes, and satisfaction clearly shown on their faces, they walk to the sugars and creams to complete their steaming elixirs. A couple sugars here and a cream or two there and they are all on their way. The feeling of readiness for the day ahead of them begins to appear in their step. Coffee in hand like a weapon of choice, they hold their heads up higher in the wind.

I look around me now. Those who have a little more time on their hands enjoy their breakfast inside. They populate the booths that line the open side of the room, four on each side of the entrance doors. Here the sun strikes the tables, making them glisten like a bright smile to those who sit along them. The giant windows provide more than just an opening for the sun’s rays, however. A vivid scene lies just past these transparent panes. The concrete walkway

catches the eyes first. Cold and gray, the pavement complements the dreariness of winter. It reminds me of the cold that beats upon the glass beside me. It prompts me to sense the absence of life. This concrete acts as a symbol to me, though I only brush the surface of what it could represent. Past this dismal pathway lies a more appealing setting. A field here depicts a better side of winter. Snow has covered most of the area, leaving only a few spots of green poking out across the grass. The few trees that dwell here display a little more of themselves. The snow has only lightly covered them like a gentle brush of frosting. Pritchard Hall and the east wing of Ambler-Johnson Hall are situated on each side of the field. They narrow your vision, focusing your eyes toward the horizon. There beyond the field rests Cassell Coliseum. Built as a replacement for the much smaller War Memorial Gymnasium, the home for the men's and women's basketball teams was built in 1961. Next to the Coliseum stands Lane Stadium, one of the hallmarks of the campus. Its sheer size captures your vision, forcing you to admire its presence. It stands proud as it flaunts its neo-gothic architecture. An eerie glow seems to surround the rock that makes up the building, reflecting the sunlight that just grazes its stone.

The snow is falling gently now. The wrath of winter appears to have weakened in the last few minutes, providing consolation for the students who walk past. Hoods up, gloves on, and coats bundled tight, these students trek on to their first classes, showing a disdain for the world outside their dorm yet a stern persistence in their responsibilities. It is evident that not everyone was expectant of the current weather, however. Ignorant and overly proud students alike walk past with short-sleeved shirts, short pants, or sometimes even both. Perhaps the brutal conditions do not affect them so easily, but it is clear they feel the harsh winds as their shirts tremble violently around their arms. A few leaves tumble past on the ground, picking up speed with every gust. The sun is now breaking past the roofs of the tall campus buildings. The clouds blow

past like a white river in the sky. Spots of blue are beginning to pop up toward the south, giving the impression that the snow will soon be gone.

I turn back around to take note of the new crowd that has come in. The room is now full of students who were obviously more fortunate in their amount of sleep. A murmur can be heard from every direction. News about last night's crazy party, the exam that is soon to be taken, and the plans for the coming spring break can be heard floating around. Students occupy every corner of the room, making the best of the small area between the tables and counters. In the middle of the room stretches a counter for the creams and sugars. On the entrance side of the counter, however, stools line up for a little extra seating. On the outside of each counter, students make use of the Macintosh computers that are conveniently placed there, searching the daily news or catching up on one of their favorite online comics. Students who sit in between watch the crowd that impatiently waits to be served. The line has not gotten any shorter since before, but the customers have acquired a bit more energy. It is getting harder for them to stand for more than a minute without moving, evident by their fidgeting. The workers are plainly fatigued from all the morning rush, but they push on, still greeting each and every customer. A coffee here, a pastry there, and the line keeps moving on. I look down at my watch to see that nearly an hour has passed since those first students dragged in from the chilled night air. Slowly, the line dwindles down as the sun rises higher in the sky. The wind settles down and the air heats up, assuring everyone that the day is now in full swing.

The coffee shop craze has indeed swept through the Virginia Tech campus. Since its opening in April of 1993, Deet's Place has provided students with a study haven and social hideaway. Resembling a soda shop straight out of the '50s, Deet's is envisioned as a way to enhance community life for students, faculty, and guests. Students will agree that the place has

that off-campus feel, yet is conveniently still on campus. In addition to the vibe students get, Deet's Place is the first campus coffee shop to have its own coffee roaster, giving customers some of the freshest tasting coffee available, with seventeen different varieties available in more than fifteen flavors. Don Harvey, the unit manager at Deet's, admits that they test the coffee with lab equipment to insure perfection. The students' appreciation of the coffee shop is well placed, giving Deet's Place several awards for its excellence, including the Golden Cup award, an award presented by the Specialty Coffee Association of America, which recognizes excellence in brewed coffee. Deet's is the only coffee shop in Virginia that has won this prestigious award. Apart from the everyday coffee shop, Deet's also offers a course on coffee taught by the former Deet's Place assistant manager turned local coffee brewer. The class, Coffee 101, has students learn about the history and processes that go into coffee making, which is one of the fastest growing food industries in the world. Upon completing the class, students even receive a certificate. This opportunity certainly does not present itself at other college coffee shops.

One of the most noted features from students about Deet's Place is its cozy atmosphere. Whether coming in for a breakfast muffin or a late night milkshake, the atmosphere seems to be the defining characteristic that makes Deet's the site to socialize. The food and coffee may play a large role in the success of Deet's, but the overall feeling while inside is what really catches the customers into returning again and again. Students like Ryan Marlow sometimes enjoy "just going there with my friends" and not getting anything at all. They simply savor the comforting environment that allows them to relax with friends outside of the classroom. During the week, some students put a trip to Deet's in their daily routines, never going a day without their bagel or mocha. Others will stop in once or twice a week. Regardless, they all agree that Deet's is a great place to go. It is the late evening and night scene that seems to appeal to the majority of students,

however. I figured a visit after sundown was a necessary trek to gain a broader observation of Deet's Place.

It is nine-thirty at night and I return to Virginia Tech's premier coffee shop. Approaching the doors, it is evident that the popularity of Deet's Place is best noticed in the late hours of the evening. Crowds gather outside the doors, ice cream or hot chocolate in hand, enjoying the fresh air outside their cramped dorm rooms. A constant flux of people enters and exits the doors, showing no change in the colorful panorama of people inside. Walking nearer, I can now separate those who await their late-night treat and those who are happily in paradise. The small room tends to blend the two together without careful observation as the lines inside bend and curve to accommodate the lack of space. Entering, a sudden wave of noise overcomes me, removing me from the peaceful serenity of the outside. A whirl of orange and maroon laps by as the "Hokie proud" community walks amid the room. Students occupy every spot of the brown and maroon checkered floor, some lucky to have found an open table and some left waiting. Those waiting do not seem to mind so much, however. They are lost in their own conversations and socialization. Those sitting down do not hasten, though, either. They clearly take advantage of their luck, relaxing among friends in an environment that almost naturally puts a smile on one's face.

Realizing I have no opportunity for sitting, I enter the new line that has since opened from the morning – the ice cream line. Not surprisingly, this line appears to be the favorite among the nightly crowd. An abundance of delights lies just behind the front counter – ice cream cones, milkshakes, sundaes, and more. The popularity of Deet's ice cream treats is apparent in its noticeably longer line compared to the line for coffee and pastries. The flavors of ice cream are both numerous and varied, satisfying any sweet tooth. The milkshake takes the crown for the

most popular treat, which also happens to be the longest treat to make. Students do not seem to mind once again, however, for once they take the first drink of their milkshake, the wait will have simply become forgotten. Those who care for more of a traditional ice cream cone are certainly not missing anything, though. Unlike most ice cream shops, one can expect a generous scoop or two of ice cream in their cone. Cookie-dough appears to be the winning ice cream flavor as evident by its quickly depleting tub in the freezer. Admittedly, this also happens to be my favorite treat. It is never a surprise to find out that the cookie-dough ice cream has run out on these busy nights. Fortunately, however, enough remains for me upon reaching the counter.

Getting my ice cream, I notice that the student employees are no less friendly than in the morning. They seem genuinely glad to be behind the counter, working hard to serve the wants of everyone else, giving up their own time of being on the other side of the counter. As I watch the interactions between the customers and workers, however, it becomes quite apparent why these student employees show no scorn. The students who pass through here really do epitomize what it means to be a community. A smile quickly appears on the customers' faces as they ask for their ice cream, knowing that they are truly among friends. This detail alone reminds me of what separates Deet's Place from all the other coffee shops. When I return home for spring break and walk into my local Starbucks, I will doubtlessly notice the lack of conversation from every direction, the collage of orange and maroon that screams "Hokie pride", and the lost smile from the customer as he or she orders a coffee. There is something special about Deet's Place that cannot be found elsewhere. This place that I am standing in is unique. I have four years left here at Virginia Tech and I have already found its hidden treasure.

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