

Last Day Reflections

On the last day of class, I asked students to write an informal reflection on two things. First, I asked them to identify the most important thing they'd learned in the course. Then, I asked them to use a narrative journal technique to explain how they had learned. The prompt asks students to begin by completing the statement "At first," explainin how they saw things initially. "And then," they should continue, describing as many turning points or significant experiences as they wished. The entry finishes with "and now," with students explaining their current view of things.

This method has both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, the approach encouraged students to reflect on the process, and I was then able to use coding to identify patterns, without having to give them a limited set of possible answers. I could also correlate students' responses with their course performance, which was useful. On the other hand, because this – like the opening day questionnaire and the ungraded midterm – was not anonymous, students may have written what they wanted me to hear.

Out of 22 last day reflections, 13 commented on the interdisciplinary aspect of the course and/or the three-assignment sequence specifically, suggesting that students found this aspect of the course important and effective. Here is a sampling of their comments:

Allison: "Each project you presented us with was increasingly more involved and intense. Each project aw a completely different task. I leaned interdisciplinary, starting to at least. This was a first. This allowed me to try different things and expected me to work harder."

Erin: "The most significant thing I learned in this course is to pull from all sources to integrate a fuller understanding. The idea that history, sociology, English, and geography all interweave into a complex understanding of our culture."

Nicole: "The projects incorporated what we were reading and our prior knowledge of our environment. The projects were at times difficult and confusing. But when everything came together, it was like a light bulb went on! Oh! Now I get it! The projects built on one another and we learned something new from each project. . . . And now, what I like most about this course was our interdisciplinary assignment(s)."

Athena: "Even though we were working so hard with the meaning of interdisciplinary I honestly didn't understand that very well either. To say the least, I was very confused at the beginning of the course and that confusion angered me. The only thing that really made me feel better about it was the statement 'it's good to be confused.'

. . . And then we began writing papers. I will admit this class was one of my biggest challenges this semester. Everything I wrote seemed to be just a little off. I had a hard time finding ideas and putting them together. Nothing really seemed to work for me and it was hard to get through that.

. . . And finally I think I have come full circle with this course. Relating work in Youngstown to

my own experiences with my family history has really helped me to come to terms with this class. I think that family history paper has really helped me link up everything that we did throughout the course. I can bring everything from the poems and stories in the anthology, to the movies, to the maps, and oral histories, and computer images together and see how they all relate and work together to strengthen my understanding."

Justin: "Initially I wondered what the various assignments had to do with each other. It was like laying the foundations for a house. You have to start slow to begin with, you don't start this class with a great deal of knowledge as to what work is. Although still confused into the third assignment, I had an idea of where I was going.

Now, it all makes sense, generally. There was a 'method to the madness'!"

Janet: "As we worked with the different artifacts, things started to make sense. I don't know if I could explain it to someone else, but when I looked at things, it was differently that the way I a few months ago. (Even the scenery on the drive home became more significant.)"

Deena: "As the class moved on I became very frustrated with the first two projects that we did, because it was so hard to put into practice a concept that I knew very little about.

Connecting the several different texts was a bit hard for me.

After this point, I was probably frustrated for a few weeks, until we did the history project, which I loved. After that point, I found myself really getting into all of the class discussions and making more sense out of what I was reading and what I was writing."

Amy: "I would have to say that the most important thing that I learned from this class is that history is not only present in book. In fact, it is often better to use other forms of information to get a very clear picture of an incident. . . . Right now, I feel that whenever I need to do research, I am not confined. In turn, this will allow me to have more fun with the learning process, as well as be more open to different ways of getting my viewpoints across to somewhere besides through the use of just words."

Matt: "The most important thing that I learned in the class was the interconnectedness of texts to other texts, events, people, etc. In the beginning, we analyzed maps and pictures, trying to interpret hidden meanings. For example, the location of particular types of buildings and homes said much about its significance within the community. We read many texts and wrote our own analysis of a particular text. From that point, we tried to connect other texts to the original text. For me, this was a very thought-provoking and creative task; every time I would sit down to write more about their connections, I would discover another connection. Placing these texts within a historical framework shed light upon an even larger realm of possibilities."

Steven: "I learned that Youngstown must be viewed collectively. If you only look at one text and make an analysis, it wouldn't be complete without looking at the other events surrounding the area."

Joe: "At first, I really felt work, and its relation to society was the most important thing I learned. However, after I learned how to do the connect texts project, in which we created a graphic, this really showed me what the course was about. I really understood how objects and texts all connected to the other, and symbolized the hard work that my family has

performed."

Jennifer: "The most significant thing that I learned in this course is to analyze several texts from many different fields in reference to a specific question or time period. I really enjoyed doing the text within history assignment because it brought my attention to the interaction between the two."

Jamie: "These projects called for time and research on many different areas of media, and created many difficulties for me at times.

At the end I feel I have developed an opened mind into realizing that there are many sources out there to find into, and the more you search, the deeper you get into the truth."