

Students as Ambassadors of Liberal Education

Society for Values in Higher Education

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Students' Final Reflection Samples

Sophomore, Transferred from Engineering to English

Honestly, when I signed up for this class, it was as a last resort because EDUC 201 was full, but luckily, this course was open and fulfilled the credit as well. I wasn't expecting much from the course. I was told it was all about the basic philosophies of education. As a sophomore engineering transfer, the idea of a class where all the questions are answers, sounded pretty obnoxious. At the start of the course I allowed myself to be convinced that the class was annoying and whiny. But ironically enough, this course was without a doubt my favorite this semester. No matter how badly my engineering side wanted to hate the course, it was the only class where I actually thought about the material outside of the classroom. I just couldn't fathom the simple truths that were all around me and I had always accepted.

I used to think education was sitting in a lecture hall, packed in like sardines until a bunch of old rich guys in suits told me I checked all my boxes, and they would certify that I could go earn a paycheck. Prior to this class, I never considered why I received all my formal education sitting down, facing a chalkboard. I never questioned why I was going to college. I was going because I was told that it was the only way I could make decent money. I never questioned why I took a science class so I could become an English teacher. This course opened my eyes and showed me the absurdity of the "grammar of schooling". Why should we accept all these norms that have been established on education as the best and only method?

Most of the time, I could hardly comprehend the scope of the issues we were looking at. Despite that, I still tried to understand because this "obnoxious philosophy class" was after something big. Maybe philosophy doesn't answer all the questions or put as much bread on the table, but it sure as heck makes me wonder why people are so concerned with bread on the table. Why bread? Was I raised to think that bread on the table was a symbol of success, or is it an inherent sign of success? Why on the table? Who's to say anyone without a table to eat on is any less of a successful person for that reason? But I digress. This class really opened my eyes to philosophy, particularly in regards to education, and I'd like to thank you and Dr. Higgins personally for a great semester.

Sophomore, Undeclared

At the beginning of this class, I told you that my goals were to "learn how to clearly articulate an argument," and throughout the class I sought to achieve that goal. Learning about different philosophical perspectives, and ultimately having differing, arguable opinions from my peers, helped me learn a lot about both what is worth arguing, and how to argue what I believe in clearly.

Upon reflection, something that I realized I have developed through this class is a voice within a crowd. Usually, I am very uncomfortable talking aloud in class. I tend to sit in the back of the room, not ask questions, and only present my opinion when asked. I cannot pinpoint it, but something changed through taking this class. For the most part, except for days when I was not in a good mood, I would sit in the front of the room, listening to every word of Dr. Higgins. I feel I did a good job opening up my opinions to criticism in class, and instead of fearing it, I appreciated when people would offer up their counter-opinions. This is probably the most important thing I took away from the class, that it is okay to have an opinion and for others to disagree with it.

Overall, I am very glad to have taken this class. I never thought philosophy would be my cup of tea, and to be honest, I had no idea what to expect going into this class. I did not realize the class was centered around philosophy, but I am glad it was. This experience has made me want to dive deeper into

the field of education, along with philosophy, and these are areas I had never considered before. I am really thankful I made the random decision to sign up for this class.

Junior, Transferred from Biology to Education

Although this class was one of the most demanding work-wise, it was the best. I have grown so much and learned a lot through this class.

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This may sound a bit dramatic but, through this class, I've gained (or maybe regained?) a whole new perspective on life; I learned what it means to be a human being. I've been so worn out as a student since high school, and I stopped enjoying school at some point. But through this class, I regained the sense of joy I feel when I learn something new or discover something amazing about myself, other people, God, or the world. Through this class, I learned that before I am a "student" I *am* a human being, with a soul that longs to be fed, and that before I am a human being or even a "Christian" (nominally; I am proud and thankful to be a Christian!☺) I *am* a beloved child of God. Even though this class physically tired me out, my heart and soul were always happy and full of life. I don't know what it is about teaching, but it's so exciting!! I am thrilled to see what the future has in store for me. I know it won't be a perfect picture of what I imagine, but I am hopeful and encouraged that it's possible, and I know it because I saw a glimpse of it through this class.

One of the most inspiring readings of this course was the one which we discussed in class last week by Greene. At first, it was really confusing, but as we discussed with Prof. Higgins in class, what it was actually saying became much clearer to me. It was very exciting, especially when I could finally decipher one of the quotes that were most confusing to me. It was the part she wrote, "It is...incompleteness—the open question, perhaps—that summons us to the task of knowledge and action." It is the sense of incompleteness that makes me hopeful of continuous growth. I think the reason I was so discouraged in the past was because I had a picture in my mind of what "adulthood" should look like. And when people around me would say, "You're practically an adult now," I was so scared, because I felt so far from it. I thought I had failed as a person. But through this reading I have realized that there is no end to my growth, and that gives me so much hope. Instead of thinking "Wow, I am so far from the end," I can say, "Wow! Look at how much more potential I have!" This has liberated me from my depression and rotting as a mindless student and propelled me into a more purposeful direction. I hope to inspire my future students in the same way!

Sophomore, Finance major

I think the most important thing I have learned in this class is to have a more open mind. I have taken some other classes that touched on this more liberal style of thinking (Hist100 and afro100) but, I don't believe I really understood the meaning and purpose of this concept prior to this course. It was very impressive to me to hear Prof. Higgins as well as my TA, Katherine Jo, talk about things in such critical ways that I couldn't help but start to attempt this style of thinking on my own. With that, comes a deeper and more analytic understanding of different people of whom I may have mislabeled or misunderstood prior to this class.

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I can't think of a way that this class has made me change my future thoughts on my profession. Maybe this is because my future professions are probably not similar to most of my peers in this class. My goal is still to become wealthy without exploiting anyone throughout the journey. I am still interested in the same things. I do think maybe though that this class has helped me to better analyze people. I have

been told before, “Everyone has a story” and don’t think I have understood this to its full meaning prior to this class. I think the stories we have read and the lectures we have been given, as well as the close interaction with my peers during discussion, have helped me to consider the trillions of different paths that a person may wind up on.

This class has made me realize that as a middle-class citizen it is not a legal duty but certainly a moral duty of sorts to “stick up” for the at times underprivileged, working class. It has made me more aware of the struggles that thousands of people face daily and unfortunately, these struggles are often lifelong, and can extend for generations. With my future occupation I am not sure what I as a citizen can do to help fix these wrongs, but, one thing that comes to mind is to become more active in the world of education. I now believe that schools with high poverty rates, violence, poor teachers, etc., need to be assisted. I think my best bet at aiding in this process is to pay more attention to political figures and vote accordingly.

The value of liberal learning is enormous. Many people are great at punching numbers but, without a person who is more learned in the critical thinking both morally and in a business setting, a company will not be likely to flourish. It is a kind of thinking that meshes well with many other disciplines as the liberal teaching itself doesn’t necessarily teach material, but teaches one how to think. A kind of critical thinking that many do not possess without the assistance of higher education.

Junior, Speech and Hearing Science major

As a non-education major, this class was an elective I took because it seemed relevant to current societal issues and intriguing. It proved to be both of those, but even more beneficial than I anticipated. EPS 202 was the first class I have taken in college that approached learning with the techniques it uses. I used to just associate liberal learning with the college of liberal arts, and maybe freedom, but indecisiveness. I was able to form a better understanding of liberal education without the negative context that usually surrounds it. I was exposed to ways of thinking and analyzing untouched since high school. In speech and hearing science, we rarely have small classes or discussions. If so, we do not actually discuss ideas, but merely more information. I think having a class along the lines of EPS 202 would be beneficial for all majors. One that really ties the field to the real world and the impact of what students are studying.

On some level, especially with the new influential figures with the recent election, I think everyone knows there are flaws within our educational system. This elective provided the material and ways of thinking to start a dialogue with peers. It enables people to think of possible positive changes through concepts and information. Sometimes ignorance can be bliss, but sometimes knowledge is power. This knowledge causes reflection on the education me and my friends and family received. It was interesting to learn about society and people’s individual experiences. I think this information will stay with me when I am working, a mother, or involved in society in any way. It makes me want to stay educated and proactive on this topic. I think the most valuable thing I have learned is that is important to look at a situation from different perspectives than your own. It is a difficult task to acknowledge and respect other opinions and experiences, but vital.

Senior, Music Education major

This was probably one of my favorite classes this semester. Although I struggled with writing my papers, I felt as though I learned a lot about education and it helped me understand more how I feel about education and how I want to be effective as an educator. The most valuable thing I learned this semester was how important it was to be aware of how other people live, learn, and what their backgrounds are.

This can affect your classroom, your teaching style, and even your relationship with your students. Being understanding and accommodating to your students' needs could make or break who they are and what they become. This mentality is important not only in the classroom, but also in the 'real world' with your coworkers, or even random people in the street. I want to say that you're almost, more likeable when you're understanding, and not judging people based on where they came from, or if they figure problems out a different way, or if they think differently than you.

This course has shaped me in a lot of ways. It has made me think of my own education growing up, and thinking about how it has shaped me. I feel privileged that I had the opportunity to go to a private school, even though it wasn't the greatest experience for me, and that I was able to go to a decently funded public school system where I had some fantastic opportunities in education, travel, and especially music. My education, especially in high school, helped me decide who I want to be and what I want to do. This class affected my goals as a future teacher, especially being in music education. I want to be able to reach out to kids and inspire them, no matter where they come from. I want to go that extra mile, to help students understand concepts, or explore an aspect of music that they're interested in, because it could be big! I want to be the class that they look forward to, not because it's band class, but because they enjoy learning. I want to provide a safe environment for growth and understanding. I want to help students become better individuals.

As for liberal education as a whole, I think it is very important to help students understand what else is out there in the world. Students should have the opportunity to explore things they're interested in, along with learning things that are essential to growth and individuality. Some say that the only person you can depend on is yourself. So why not make yourself the best you can be? Students should have the opportunity to learn and grow to become the best versions of themselves, not just for the sake of society, but for the sake of themselves. They should be able to understand what goes on outside of their little school bubble and have the opportunity to explore the world in any sort of medium that they choose. Whether that's art, music, chemistry, travel, engineering, car mechanics, or construction workers. Each student should have the freedom to choose their own path to discover themselves.