

Students as Ambassadors of Liberal Education
Society for Values in Higher Education

Eric Bain-Selbo (Indiana University Kokomo) D. Gregory Sapp (Stetson University)
 Katherine Jo (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

Seminar Guiding Questions:

1. What do we mean by the “American Dream” and how does that notion shape our teaching and curriculum?
2. How can we form our courses—in specific majors or in general education—in ways that help students connect their learning to broader aims (beyond the acquisition of course-specific knowledge and skills)?
3. How can we align our teaching and curriculum to these aims and support the students’ personal, professional, and civic development?

Small group discussion questions:

1. To what extent do you or does your institution help students to understand the value (e.g., personal, professional, and civic development) of a liberal education?
2. How do you do this, and at what levels of practice (i.e., pedagogy, course and program curriculum, institution)?

Level / Aims	Personal & Intellectual	Professional	Civic
Pedagogy			
Course curriculum			
Program curriculum			
Institution			

Other practices/ideas?

Sample Reflective Assignments

(Assignments 1-3 are from a course on the philosophical, social, and historical foundations of American education)

1. Weekly (or less frequent but regular/periodic) response papers

Purpose: Give students regular opportunities to practice discipline-based intellectual skills and to articulate how course materials are influencing their thinking. Emphasizes engaging in a dialogue with the ideas/questions raised by course material rather than only demonstrating skills or reading comprehension.

Sample prompt: Please offer a 300- to 500-word response to one of the readings from the week. Your response papers are an opportunity for you to reflect on, think through, and engage in dialogue with some aspect of the reading that you found thought-provoking. For example, did some concept, ideal, or fact intrigue/puzzle/resonate with you? Did you disagree with or would you modify the author's position? Did the reading challenge your own views? Why and/or how? You must have at least one textual citation, and your response must demonstrate a good faith effort to understand the author's main concern and thesis. You may relate the reading to your personal experience.

2. Final (end-of-semester) reflection on a course

Purpose: Help students integrate what they learned/experienced in the course (that they saw as worthwhile) into their overall self-understanding as an individual, future professional, community member/citizen. Emphasizes significant changes in perspective and holistic, personal reflection.

Sample prompt: For this final response paper, I invite you to offer your reflections (no citations necessary) on what you are taking away from any and/or all aspects of this course (such as course materials, lectures, discussion, your peers, assignments, etc.). Please respond to the following questions:

1. What is the most important or valuable thing you feel you have learned through this course?
2. In what ways, if any, has this course affected
 - how you understand your own education/schooling?
 - how you think about your future work as a professional?
 - how you understand yourself as a citizen?
3. Taking the approach of this course to be an example of liberal learning, what value, if any, do you see in this kind of education?

3. Educational autobiography

Purpose: To help students develop a personal connection to their education and/or the material and develop a sense of agency with regard to their education by giving them an opportunity try to make sense of what their education means to them, how it has shaped them (negatively and/or positively), and what they would like their education to be like. Also, for educators to get to know their students' prior experiences with and perspectives on their education and/or with a particular discipline. Could be useful in first-year seminars, for seniors, for students who have struggled academically.

Sample Prompt (the most relevant part of the assignment): Describe how your education—both your schooling and life beyond school—has shaped you (such as your interests, goals, beliefs, values, character, abilities, relationships, etc.). How have these formal and non-formal elements become integrated into who you are today?

4. Structured, brief narrative

Purpose: Help students articulate specific skills they used/developed and important lessons learned through an experience that can be applied in the future. Often used in career counseling for interview prep. Could be useful in service-learning courses but could be adapted for broader application.

Structure: SARA—Situation (What was the situation?); Actions (What actions did you take in response?); Results (What were the results of your actions?); Application (What did you learn from this experience that could be applied in the future?)