

Freedom within Clear Boundaries

Designing an Integrated Assignment in an Hour!

Business and Society

Friday, November 11, 2005

The Situation

Winter quarter, you will spend ten weeks exploring a topic relevant to business and society that is interesting to you, or to you and a small cohort of peers. Since part of what we do here at Evergreen is help students articulate their own learning and communicate effectively, we think it is appropriate that you propose your own interesting problem, theme, or question about an issue that YOU deem important to this program. This problem or question could require a combination of library or field research, art work, movement, theater, and your own analytical skills to answer. We encourage creativity and thinking outside the box.

During the first week of winter quarter, you will submit a proposal. Then you will actually design and carry out your project, or paper. The quality of your final product will depend on the quality of your initial problem, theme, or question. You could deepen your understanding of a topic we will cover, or explore a topic that you feel we won't have time to discuss. The arena of choice is large.

Today we will spend about an hour brainstorming possibilities for these winter quarter projects with the goal of discovering what is *doable*. We would really like to create an enriched learning opportunity for winter quarter. So, to begin – get into groups of 3.

1. Personally engaging learning

Take a moment to reflect on your own *powerful experiences of learning* at any age, either inside or outside school. Based on an experience that first comes to mind, do a 'quick write' on an index card, noting what you learned. Share brief accounts of these experiences with your peers; identify key points/common threads and write these on poster paper and post around the room. Circulate and read colleagues' posters. Choose three points from among those posted around the room that you would like to emphasize in designing your learning opportunity for winter. Write these down!

2. Passions and aspirations for your learning

In the context of our program, what questions, issues, inquiry, and/or learning do you care deeply about? What *enduring learning* do you want to gain from studying and working with Glenn, Steve, and Cynthia? Imagine your life, three or more years from now, in multiple contexts (further education, workplace, community, family, another country, etc.). *What do you want to know and be able to do as a result of your participation in this program?* Write each of your responses to this question on a sticky-note (one point per note). Treat this as a brainstorming activity, getting down as many responses as you can (try to avoid single word responses).

3. Integration of expectations for learning

Compare sticky-notes with your potential group members; share expectations and make new sticky-notes if new expectations come to mind during your conversation. Cluster and chunk sticky-notes on a sheet of poster paper and look for meaningful connections (related themes, issues, concepts, expected understanding, habits of mind, abilities, skill sets, attitudes, etc.). Move sticky-notes around until the clusters make sense to everyone. Label clusters using additional sticky-notes or markers; take time to find the appropriate words that best describe the expectation for learning that is common to the cluster. Set sticky-notes to the side which do not represent genuine common ground. You will be using this poster paper as a working diagram for designing your project/assignment so make sure it is clear and well organized.

4. Create the project/assignment

Here is your chance to develop a meaningful assignment that can really support your personal and intellectual development. We are expecting this project to be a significant chunk of your learning next quarter. Imagine a project which could earn you 4 or even 8 credits. Such a project would allow you between 12 and 24 hours of time to work with it each week.

In the context of the work you like to do and your passions and aspirations for learning, what stands out as a good assignment and why? What's been your experience of unsuccessful assignments? Do a 'quick write' on an index card and share your insights with your partner(s). Pairing with another team, discuss this question: *what are the characteristics of good assignments?* Identify five essential characteristics. Write these down!

With the sticky-note diagram of shared expectations for learning in group members' view, brainstorm possibilities for integrated student learning using the diagram as a common reference. After generating a number of project ideas, choose one to work with that is appropriate for the time you have available. Invent an assignment where you will be able to provide evidence of learning, where you can 'use what you know.' Consider these questions: Does the assignment foster personal engagement (see exercise 1)? Is the assignment designed with the characteristics of 'good' assignments in mind? Is what you care deeply about at present?

5. Make a summary poster of your work and post

Now, distill out and summarize some of the key ideas or activities in your project that might be underpinnings for a real project winter quarter. Make sure your poster includes some of the following;

- A title that portrays a theme

- Major concepts and learning activities (what will you be doing??)

- Key learnings