Distance Learning Literacy

The Student's Guide to Success in the Online Education Environment

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Acknowledgment to the Future

In our attempt at profoundness we have little to say other than it is our life's mission to be here for those who want to achieve and have little time for those who do not. The former head of Chrysler Motors once stated,

> In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have.
> -- Lee Iacocca

Part of what we attempt to do is ask questions and hope that you the student will respond after very careful thought and deliberation. That does not mean that after a moment or two you say, "I think. . ." or "In my opinion" . . because without a plethora of worldly experience regarding the matter you have nothing to say unless you state, "according to" or "based on." Because you see "Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire"

--W. B. Yeats

Overview and Introduction

It's probably been some time since you have been enrolled in school and as a consequence, you may be a little out of practice. The goal of this is to reacquaint you with the educational processes and requirements that you'll need to master in order to succeed in your classes and graduate with your degree.

Keep in mind that the goal of collegiate level education isn't simply awarding a degree to people who have the stamina to complete each and every course in the prescribed sequence, but rather to change who those people are. That's right, one of the overriding goals of higher learning is to reshape each and every student enrolled in the program by exposing them to a prescribed program of instruction that provides them with insights into a wide variety of topics, as well as specialized education within their chosen major, thereby improving their ability to think and reason, and elevate their capability to express themselves in writing and verbal forms of communication. It's not only about providing instruction in a specific discipline, but rather, higher education is also about

changing who you are and assuring that the person that graduates maintains the set of skills and knowledge that affords them equity with those who've gone before them. If your goal is simply to get a degree, then you've come to the wrong place. Most distance education programs will change who you are, how you think about things, and improve your ability to communicate your thoughts.

I hope you enjoy this text and that you find it helpful in preparing you to succeed. The faculty look forward to not only providing you with a world-class educational experience as you strive to complete your degree and more importantly, as you work to become a member of the family of college educated men and women.

Student Preparation

Probably the first thing we should talk about with regard to surviving the higher education process is preparation. As mentioned previously, some of you haven't been in school for quite some time and your reading comprehension skills, your ability to write effectively, and even your reasoning skills are a little rusty. We all possess deficiencies. Each and every one of us has shortcomings that we need to fix and

most likely, we know what those deficiencies are, whether we admit them to ourselves or not. College demands your attention, self-discipline, self-reliance, a demonstrative degree of open mindedness and receptivity to new ideas, and most importantly, an objective review of who it is you are now and what deficiencies you have in the areas of reading, writing, self-expression, and reasoning.

It has been my experience throughout a long career in higher education that the students who do well are those who aren't full of themselves and recognize that there are things that need to be improved. Stop and think about it. We can spend the next four years teaching you all of the facts and theories about your chosen discipline and when you graduate you'll be able to cite specifics, quote major authorities on the subject, and even espouse the nuances of the contemporary theories, but If you can't think, reason, write, and verbalize those things you've learned in school, then you've missed a great deal that you should have attained as a result of going to college. What you will have missed is the opportunity to correct major deficiencies, which collectively account for who you are at the core of your being.

As I mentioned, all of us have deficiencies. Some of us weren't able to master simple mathematics when we were in high school so we intend to avoid any college major that requires math skills. Others of us can't read very well, so we skim over the assignments or don't even bother to read the materials the professor assigned and hope we can bluff our way through it in the discussions. Still others of us haven't spent enough time working toward mastering the concept of argument construction and reasoning. That is, being able to think through a problem, identifying factors that contribute to the situation, and then formulating a conclusion based on our analysis of the premises supporting the decision. If all of those words sounded foreign to you, then you have a serious deficiency in critical thinking and reasoning.

Remember when I mentioned that college is going to change who you are and the way you think about things? Well, that's exactly what I was talking about. In order for you to succeed at this level of higher education it is critical that you not only recognize and accept your deficiencies, but that you take aggressive action to correct them. If you can't read well, fix it by reading. If you can't write well, fix it by

learning to write. If your vocabulary is limited, fix it by learning a new word each day and then using it within your normal vocabulary. Finally, if you can't reason well, learn how by asking your professors and reading books that concentrate of critical thinking and reasoning.

If you were already an expert in all of these things, then you wouldn't need a college degree. But chances are, you're not, and accepting that fact is the first step in changing who you are and repairing those deficiencies so that you can attain your goal of successfully navigating the demands of college. Failure to accept your deficiencies or thinking that you'll bluff your way through it isn't going to work out well for you at this level. You may pass some of the classes with a marginal grade, but then you'll get to the more advanced classes and realize that those deficiencies we have been talking about are now overwhelming and serve as an insurmountable obstacle to your success. So, the answer is simple. Take an inventory of those things we talked about. Assess the areas (objectively) and come to a conclusion about your weaknesses. Then do something to fix them. You learn to read by reading, so read. You learn to write by writing, so write and

study how others write. Begin your own self-help program by researching critical thinking and reasoning so that you understand the basic tenants of logic and decision making. Don't wait for your professor to point these deficiencies out to you. They're busy teaching you and your student colleagues all of the information about the subject that you've chosen to study. They expect that you've taken the necessary steps to be prepared before you sign up for the class. Are you prepared? If not, now is the time to fix it.

Instruction Sequence

Now that we have discussed preparation and correcting deficiencies, it's time to share with you some secrets about the "pedagogical" approach used within the online curriculum. That's an interesting word, pedagogy, but it essentially means the strategy that faculty have determined is the best at communicating the information they need to share with you, but also the instructional sequence that will be employed to bring you along in your learning, in a stepwise fashion, so you don't get lost or fail. Most of the students that I have seen fail, do so because they chose not to do the work necessary

before they posted to the discussion board, wrote their paper, or took the quiz. Essentially, they ignored the required work necessary to garner the required information before participating in the activities that measure their knowledge. Contrary to what you may have heard, you can't acquire a degree at any online or traditional university by bluffing your way through it or posting your opinion on a discussion board. This isn't Blog University and quite honestly, the faculty doesn't put much stock in your uninformed opinion.

Now that may sound harsh, but college is all about learning and communicating what you've learned. If you haven't taken the necessary steps to read the chapter in the book, listen to the lecture, and conduct some research into the subject before you start writing your discussion board post or authoring your paper, it's going to be obvious to the professor teaching the class. They may be nice about it in the criticism they offer in response to your discussion post or in the grade book comments they leave for you after they review your submission, but trust me when I say that if you haven't read the material, listened to the lectures, and conducted your own research into the subject before submitting, every

faculty member on the staff is going to notice and they will have no alternative but to award you a lesser grade.

It makes sense when you think about it. Online learning isn't that much different from traditional higher education. Faculty members prepare lectures, prescribe readings, offer insights and clarification through their commentary in the discussions within the class, and then evaluate student performance based on the homework assignments, student interaction, and quizzes. If a student doesn't perform, then the faculty member has no choice but to award a lesser grade. Those students who took the time to read the book, listen to the lectures, and ask questions of the professor probably are going to receive a much better score than someone who showed up at the discussion board unprepared. As you would imagine, it is obvious to faculty when students fail to prepare themselves before engaging in the discussions, team assignments, and homework activities.

To avoid the possibility of this happening to you, all you have to do is follow the sequence of events that are laid out in each instructional unit of most online

classes. Read or listen to the entire lecture, read and digest the assigned reading materials, and then conduct some research on your own into each of the principles put forth in the lecture and reading so that you haven't merely been exposed to the idea, but took the initiative to master the topic before you offer your position.

Every semester I observe students in a big hurry to be the first to post to the discussion board with some uninformed position on the issues. I can tell they haven't done the necessary preparation because each member of the faculty has access to user activity log that tells them exactly how many minutes each student spent in the lecture, whether they even looked at the reading assignment, and all of the other features inside the online classroom. Every faculty member has this capability and even though they may not tell you that they noticed that you didn't do the work of reading the materials before you posted, they know you didn't and most likely your grade for that unit will show that you didn't.

To make sure that your submissions are commensurate with faculty expectations for student performance, take the time each week to listen to the lecture, read the chapters of the book that pertain to the subject, and conduct some independent research into the subject before you offer your main post or other assignments. Then, take a day and think about what you've read and how this information relates to the questions being asked before crafting your responses to these assignments. This simple approach will assure that you are not only informed, but that you are also adequately prepared to engage in discussions about the subject with your professor and student colleagues. Also, avoid the temptation to be too brief in your writings on the topic. That means, don't just post a couple of sentences or a one paragraph synthesis of the information. Take your time and prepare a comprehensive three to four paragraph treatment of the subject that expresses what you've learned, the major theories or issues associated with the topic, and an argument that leads to a conclusion. Substantiating your position and offering sufficient premises in support of your conclusion is a critical component of expression.

This is often what differentiates an uninformed opinion from one that is based on thorough research and deliberation. Simply posting a few lines that tell what year Columbus sailed the ocean blue doesn't address the issues of why he left in search of the new world, who paid for the trip, what challenges he faced during the voyage, and the outcome of the enterprise. But if you take the time to read the material, conduct your research, and then deliberate over the issues before your write your findings, you'll stand a far better chance of being favorably rewarded for your efforts by the professor.

Research

I've mentioned the word research a few times in this discussion and it's probably time to talk in depth about what I mean by this term. First, I should mention that it doesn't mean looking something up on Google or Bing. That's the last place you should go when conducting academic research. You probably don't know this, but both of those sites are based on an "auction" style business plan, which means whoever pays the most per hit, gets moved to the top of the list in a search. If you and I are

competing for web visits and we both have a website devoted to the same thing, and I submit a bid to Google of 50 cents, which beats your bid of 49 cents per click, then my site is placed above yours in the listing and we both pay Google for showing our website in their results page as soon as someone clicks on our link. Is that really the type of research results you're looking for or were expecting? Not me. You'd be surprised how many students don't know that Google and the other major commercial search engines make their money by auctioning off placement, based on a fee. Also, most of these sites don't have deep level access to scholarly sources or if they do, they list them on page 234 of their search results listing, which you'll likely never see.

As a senior member of the faculty, my expectation of you is that you will access meaningful research sites like www.scirus.com to conduct your research and endeavor to locate journal articles about the subject, to support your review. Now we be a good time to take a minute and visit SCIRUS and you'll see for yourself the difference between this site, which is devoted to researching scientific journals and publications to find meaningful articles, as opposed to the stuff Google finds.

In addition to SCIRUS, you should also examine the professional publications of your discipline and academic journals. For example, in the criminal justice discipline, one excellent source of information is www.criminology.com. This is the web address for Criminology.com, which provides a series of scholarly articles dealing with the subject. Another excellent alternative to Google is http://www.asc41.com/. This website is the home of the American Society of Criminology. Under their publications tab, you can find every past issue of the association's monthly journal. In those articles, which by the way are written by leading scholars in the discipline, you'll find a host of meaningful and relevant information about the subject of criminology.

No matter your chosen academic major, each discipline has websites that offer insightful, peer reviewed, articles dealing with just about every aspect of the subject. These are the sources you should use as opposed to Wikipedia or Google. Never, ever, use inferior sources of information to support your research. It leads to you learning inaccurate information and accepting it as truth. Always aim your searches in the direction of

recognized sources of excellence like professional journals, monthly and quarterly scholarly publications, or scientifically oriented search engines such as SCIRUS. That assures you of reading information written by experts.

Another important thing to remember about conducting research is that it's not just looking for filler for your papers that makes it appear that you've researched something. Your goal in researching is to identify relevant theories and findings that support the preparation of your response. If you are engaged in researching the factors associated with criminality, then you need to be structuring your keyword searches so that they isolate those factors associated with the issue. Probably in your book the author talked about sociological, psychological, environmental, and situational factors that influence behavior. That's exactly what you should be placing within you search strings when you visit places like SCIRUS and don't just cut and paste pertinent paragraphs, but digest the information and then interpret its relevance within your own original composition.

The Importance of Questioning

Many of us have been annoyed to our wits end by the constant questioning of small children, who habitually ask, WHY? No matter our answer to their previous question, they follow up with another shriek of, WHY? Finally, when we cannot take it for a moment longer, we resort to the age-old adage and respond, "Because I Said So", which usually means that we do not know the answer, but it serves to quell their exclamations. We are a naturally inquisitive species from birth and it is during our formative years, where there are no social expectations for us to know the answer to any question, and during these times that we feel most comfortable asking the question, why. It is not until later in life that we seem to lose the passion for exclaiming this simplistic inquiry of others when engaged in conversation. What a shame.

There are undoubtedly a plethora of social influences that curb our use of this word [why]. Some explanations are probably relative to the expectation that, by a certain age, we should know the answer. Yet others are based on the fact that we encountered people who told us that asking [why]

was annoying and to be socially acceptable we stopped asking, but the fact of the matter is that we should never stop asking. Within this discussion, we most certainly need to examine the importance of questioning relative to uncovering the truth and gaining knowledge. Questioning of one's own views about things is also important. So is questioning the logic offered in support of the premises and conclusions proclaimed by others as they express their positions. Without questioning we are relegated to the distinct possibility that we might sheepishly accept assertions that are unsubstantiated or even worse, accept arguments that lead us to a false conclusion. Likewise, failure to question our own beliefs, and those reasoning processes that we used to arrive at our point of view, is equally ill advised because it opens the door to delusion. You probably heard it said that the only stupid question is the question that wasn't asked. Well that's not exactly true, but questioning is an important part of the education process, and no one on the faculty will criticize you or judge you for asking a question. That's after all one of the reasons we are here, to answer your questions.

Questioning is a healthy component of the critical thinking and reasoning process. We should never lose sight of its value in the search for truth. We are obligated to question the logic of a premise in an argument, the relevance of a proven truth to the conclusion, and whether or not the argument presented is factual, relevant, and correct.

In a simple argument (one that involves only one premise and only one conclusion), it is a relatively simple matter to assess the proof of a premise and its relevance to the conclusion. Deductive reasoning frequently relies heavily on limited or simplistic logic to arrive at a conclusion. Inferential logic on the other hand can typically involve a larger number of premises that require scientific testing, and then arrangement in an order to form a basis for the conclusion. In such complex logic efforts, it is essential to question the basis for each premise, the merits of its inclusion within the equation, the truth or fallacy of its assertion, and then finally its individual and aggregate relevance to the conclusion.

Questioning is simply a critical and key component of the logic process. We should question our own

beliefs, departure points, motives, bias, and intentions as well as subjecting another's argument to the same process of critique in order to assure that we have illuminated all of the pertinent factors in our decision making process. As scientists, we should not reject attempts to question our logic by others, but instead see it as an opportunity for us to present our research and logic to the scientific community for scrutiny. From this scrutiny, we will either be rewarded with validation of our ideas or we could receive insights relative to shortcomings of our methodologies. Either way, we are better positioned to attain the truth, which is, after all, the ultimate goal of our endeavor.

Let me provide a practical example of the importance of questioning in making a medical diagnosis. Several levels of questioning occur during the process of diagnosis and treatment. The purpose of such questioning is not only to narrow down the plethora of possible medical afflictions in order to properly treat the patient, but also to assure that the physicians diagnosis is validated through objective peer review in order to confirm initial suspicions.

When a patient first arrives at a medical facility, the doctors begin the process of questioning by eliciting from the patient a description of the problem. They ask them to describe the problem and articulate the symptoms. From the information they receive, they begin the process of narrowing the broad range of possibilities contributing to their affliction. If, for example, a patient complains of chest pain, shortness of breath, and fatigue then the preliminary indications could be related to the cardiovascular system. It could also however be related to a problem in the respiratory system or a combination of several systems. More information is needed before a specific diagnosis can be formulated. Information relative to the patient's age, prior history, family history, weight, medicines taken, illicit drug use, whether the pain is periodic or constant, whether it is more acute during exercise and other factors are also obtained through questioning. If for example, the patient is a male, sixty-five years old, with a history of family heart disease, who is overweight, not physically active, and who smokes two packs of cigarettes a day, the process of questioning tends to provide overwhelming evidence of a potential cardiac event.

The diagnostic process continues and with each new piece of evidence obtained through questioning the list of all potential maladies is reduced to the most probable affliction. It's important to recognize however that despite the physician's presumption as to potential causes of the problem, they do not treat the patient (typically) based on a suspicion. To assure their accuracy a series of tests are ordered for the expressed purpose of validating suspicions (or confirming the hypotheses) as to what might be causing the symptoms. Following the diagnostic process and formulation of a 'best guess' that is based on observation, questioning, and testing, a treatment is prescribed.

Questioning, as you can see, is used to illuminate factual specifics and often leads to the eventual attainment of the truth. Without in-depth questioning, we limit our ability to discern important factors, ponder relevant considerations, and formulate the most probable conclusion. As stated earlier, questioning is an essential element of the critical thinking and reasoning process. We should embrace it as a valuable commodity that furthers the likelihood of the accuracy of our conclusions. Questions lead to suspicions and hypotheses, which

can and should be scientifically tested to discern their accuracy. The combination of these two approaches (questioning and scientific testing) can provide validation of the truth, which as we see in the medical example, leads to a diagnosis that guides treatment options.

Perspective

Throughout human history (perspective) has played a significant role in shaping ideology, influencing social beliefs, guiding scientific discovery, and determining our value systems. Perspective is a complex issue because each of us develops our individual perspectives based on a wide variety of factors, which are predicated upon a lifetime of experiences, and perceived knowledge. Perspective is shaped by aggregating all of the facts and discoveries that we possess about a particular issue and then forming conclusions based on the information and understanding that we have amassed since our birth. We (hopefully) then integrate this knowledge within a decision making process to derive conclusions and beliefs. The result is our perspective on the issue.

What is important to recognize about perspective is not that it is an ending point, but rather, that our perspective also serves as a point of departure for all of our subsequent decisions and judgments about future issues. We use perspective as an anchor point for our beliefs about the world and gauge each new fact or discovery relative to its pertinence and impact upon our existing core beliefs (or perspective). Unfortunately, perspective (or the lack thereof) can be a contaminating influence in the search for truth. People who firmly believed that the earth was flat made subsequent judgments about our importance within the universe, religion, and political beliefs based on this fallacy. Values were formed that placed the earth in a special position within the universe. Religious dogma was shaped to reinforce the belief that since the stars revolved around the earth then our planet must be the center of all things, and extrapolated this to mean that we humans were exceptional creatures in comparison to all others and as such, merited a position of supreme importance. Obviously, later discoveries by Copernicus and Galileo altered this view of the universe, resulting in a need to reassess everything we knew to be true and absolute one minute prior

to their discoveries. Many however simply could not accept these revelations and rejected their implications because the significance of this new information stood in direct conflict with their long held perspective. For many, delusion was preferable to enlightenment.

Needless to say, perspective matters in the search for truth and not just by those that seek scientific discovery, but also in all forms of deliberation by those who must integrate new discoveries within their own belief systems. Social values and belief systems of all kinds are shaped by perspective. In fact, many of the atrocities perpetuated by one civilization upon another have been directly influenced by perspective, or the lack of perspective. Demonization of an entire culture based on misunderstanding and intolerance for differing social values is not an uncommon event and has resulted in a significant number of conflicts and atrocities throughout human history. Judgments of all kinds are influenced by perspective. These include determinations about right from wrong, good versus evil, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and even the inherent value of scientific discoveries versus a perception of insignificant

relevance based upon the failed recognition of the importance of new information. Every judgment we make is reached (at least in part) based on our perspective about the issue and the value that we perceive that the new information has relative to the core values that we presently embrace. Not until a thorough examination of these influences is conducted and assimilated, can we reassess our conclusion about a specific phenomenon, which in turn becomes our new perspective for the next evolution in the never-ending process of discovering the truth.

Determining beliefs about what is truth and what is fallacy is a much easier process for those who have not yet formed an opinion or perspective about an issue, provided they are open minded. Students who are learning information for the first time about a specific topic are probably more empowered than the rest of us, because they lack the impediments to learning possessed by those of us who have been studying the subject for years. The reason for this is based, in part, on the previously mentioned statement about perspective serving as a point of departure in the assessment process. It makes sense that if you have not yet formed an opinion about a

topic, then you are less likely to bring a preconceived notion or perspective about the issue. Subsequently, your judgments about the issue are less likely to be contaminated by bias or fallacious insights. You can see evidence of this notion all around where students of a subject are less likely to present obstacles to learning and more readily accept the relevance of new discoveries, as opposed to scientists who have been studying the subject for years. Imagine the difference in the process of accepting the implications of a new found discovery between a new student and a professor of that subject. If the discovery is so significant that it serves to mitigate many of the conclusions previously accepted as gospel by the scholarly community, then resistance is automatic by many of those seasoned people who must contend with re-evaluating the implications of new information as it relates to the beliefs that were previously held, based on that misunderstanding. In contrast, a new student of the subject can more easily embrace the discovery and its significance without the requirement for a total reconsideration of everything they knew to be true one minute before the revelation. It is no wonder that some of the

greatest scientific minds chronicled in the history books were either put to death or banished from society because of the impact their discoveries had on unraveling the fabric of social beliefs and values.

This same process happens today as new discoveries are made that force us to reconsider just how misinformed and incorrect we have been about things for most of our lives. The good news is that we are less prone to be put to death for the merits and impact of our scientific discoveries. The bad news is that there are a plethora of suppositions and presumptions that are untrue flowing through our civilization at the speed of electrons and it is difficult, if not impossible, for most people to differentiate truth from fallacy. An excellent demonstration of the importance of perspective can be found in the question, “how many directions are you moving, this very minute”. I have used this question for decades to profile the importance of perspective in critical thinking and invariably, when I ask this question of a classroom full of students, I get a plethora of responses. Mostly the students simply guess and shout out a number that they hope is correct, but when I challenge their assertion by saying, “you’re not moving at all are you, because

you're sitting in this classroom", they unanimously agree that it cannot be possible to be moving while sitting still. This is the same group mindset and group dynamic that has caused countless cultures to form inaccurate conclusions and values about the world, since the dawn of humanity. As I explain that their perspective of sitting still and motionless is wrong, and in fact, they are moving in four distinctly different directions at once, they begin to notice a fracture in their collective perspective. I start by reminding them that they are moving in an arc around the planet as it orbits its axis at about nine hundred miles per hour, as well as moving around the Sun as the earth travels in its orbital path at nineteen miles per second. To make matters more complicated, the Sun is traveling around the spiral arm of the Milky Way galaxy and travels about one million miles a day, while the galaxy itself travels away from the center of the big bang. Therefore, essentially, each of us is moving in four different directions at the same time, while sitting perfectly still. Our perspective however is limited by our failure to sense any of these motions and it's not hard to imagine how it is that people conclude

(falsely) that they are anchored firmly to their seat and sitting perfectly still.

The importance of this exercise can be found in pointing out that false conclusions are an easy thing to fall victim to and all too often, many of our perspectives are found to be based on previously inaccurate premises. As scientists however, it is important for us to remember that perspective matters in determining absolute truth and we need to be careful to avoid falling victim to haphazard acceptance of prior beliefs, as we endeavor to extend the reach of human knowledge. Nothing should be taken for granted and everything that we think we know for certain should be reassessed within the confines of our experiments. Simply having our eyes open does not assure the attainment of truth, especially if our minds are closed because of limited perspective. If we fail to fully understand the point of departure we occupy before we search for new discoveries, and if that point of departure is predicated on a fallacy that we have accepted as true, then our perspective is inaccurate and everything we build on top of it is contaminated and incorrect. This is precisely why professors are bound by the covenant of never

telling a student something that they are not certain of themselves as factual. The consequence will likely be the acceptance of a fallacy into the knowledge base of that student, which will contaminate all future judgments because of the erroneous nature of the information.

Judgment

You have undoubtedly heard countless references to the importance of judgment in human endeavor. After all, it is a significant measure of one's ability to make rational decisions. Although a nebulous term that is not easily defined, it refers to a person's ability to render conclusions based on the objective review of pertinent information and then to render a decision that is commensurate with the conclusions they derived. Like everything else in the world, a person's ability to judge is a multivariate issue. In other words, it should be based upon a variety of factors that combine to influence their proficiency at forming accurate and sound conclusions. To make it even more complicated, a person's judgment is not static. It evolves and grows (hopefully) over time as they collect, synthesize, and

process new informational elements, experiences, and facts.

It is important (I believe) to call your attention to the notion that sound scientific practices for formulating hypotheses, collecting data, testing the merits of assertions, and then evaluating the results may NOT have direct relevance to judgment. Scientific protocols can serve to improve a person's decisions and chance of being correct, and sustained exposure to methodological processes can augment one's abilities to isolate potential factors that contribute to the outcome, but such familiarity and proficiencies do not necessarily mean that a person's judgment is better. Judgment (although related to this process) is an entirely different capability that is partially predicated on experience, mental health, wisdom, ego, outlook, setting, option identification, skill at assessing reaction, and the ability to foresee the consequences of action. Simply because someone is schooled in the scientific methods and can use these abilities effectively to produce an argument, it does not necessarily mean that they possess sound judgment, nor judgmental ability that is preferential to others.

Many institutions of our society such as the legislature, appellate and supreme courts, universities, federal, state, and local commissions, as well as corporate boards and others recognize that judgment is not within the exclusive purview of a select few, but is significantly enhanced through collective assemblies. The reason for this is not that one person cannot render an effective decision, but rather that a collective assembly of minds (hopefully that are all well schooled in decision sciences) enhances the probability that all relevant factors are considered and a judgment rendered that considers all germane variables and possible consequences. Ideally, consensus relative to the facts and the implications of the events would be a product of collegial review and the decision/s rendered would be seen by all as the best course of action. Moreover, the formation of review bodies only enhances the likelihood that one of the members of the commission will possess sufficient wisdom to see the truth and guide the others in the right direction. It doesn't guarantee it.

Arguments

Critical thinking and reasoning relies almost exclusively on argument structures to support the process of discovery. As you will recognize throughout this lesson, arguments are not mere disagreements between two people with opposing views, although that is often the most common synonymic explanation. Rather, as applied to critical thinking and scientific reasoning, arguments are expressed as a series of propositions that are fashioned into declarative statements (i.e., premises), which in turn, support a specific conclusion.

Whether you are engaged in formulating personal values and judgments about religion, politics, and social values, or whether you are venturing near the edge of scientific discovery and endeavoring to describe the most intricate interrelations of the universe, the same process of argument structuring should be invoked. That is to say, using a series of premises or statements of truth that possess independent accuracy and precision, and which (individually and collectively) lead to an objective conclusion. Stated differently, the argument structure is the mechanism that allows us to answer the question, [why] by isolating all of the relevant

factors that contribute to the reason for variation in the thing we are examining. The principle objective of logic rests in how the truth of independent premises, combine to support a particular conclusion. Essentially, arguments can be thought of as nothing more than a series of premises (or statements of truth) that lead to, and support, a specific conclusion. Arguments can be expressed verbally, in writing, or in an equation, but essentially the goal is the same and that is to identify those factors that contribute to the outcome of some specific area of interest in order to answer the question, why. As you will discover, arguments serve as the foundation for all reasoning and act as the building blocks for human understanding. The evolution of knowledge also depends, almost entirely, on the structure of our arguments, which disclose the discoveries made by previous generations and then help us to combine those truths with contemporary knowledge in order to form a greater level of understanding.

Although it sounds simple enough in theory, in practice it can be very a daunting task to fashion an effective argument that provides indisputable specificity of the premise and which also affords

irrefutable accuracy of the conclusion. The reason for this (I believe) is that almost nothing in the world is univariate. Generally speaking, when faced with complex questions about the interaction of phenomena or while searching for an explanation about the cause and effect of things upon one another, the vast majority of people tend to dissect and interpret how the world is put together from a rather univariate perspective. The temptation to oversimplify things and to seek to reduce a complex question to its simplest form is quite understandable really, due largely to the fact that contemplation of the multiple interrelationships that exists between variables is difficult to achieve, and as a consequence, most people naturally grab hold of the first reasonable explanation that occurs to them regarding how particular phenomena interact so that they can expediently articulate their conclusion.

The problem with this approach to problem solving is that people (once they have decided upon an explanation) tend to cling to their initial argument as though it were a reflection of their personal character, in spite of the introduction of new information that may either invalidate their

assertion or better explain the situation. The natural byproduct of such an approach to problem solving (especially if challenged by another during a debate over the issue) is that the dialog typically degenerates into nothing more than a contest of wills, and the truth of the matter is never fully isolated by anyone. After all, it is hard to think up all of the possible reasons that something happens and then prioritize the potentially contributive factors into a coherent argument. It is extremely difficult for people to change who they are, how they think about things and seemingly even more difficult for us to withhold judgment about something until all of the possible alternatives have been examined. We all know that who we are, our cognitive abilities to reason, the methods we employ to arrive at a particular conclusion, and the judgments we make about the world cannot possibly be flawed, because that would mean that we are flawed, and this is simply not acceptable to us.

The most demonstrative difference between people who are trained in the scientific approach to problem solving and those practices employed by “normal people” is the ability of the former to recognize the innate complexities and

interrelationships of the world and their conscious effort to employ a methodological structure to the problem solving process, which endeavors to assure that all potentially contributive factors are examined, prior to rendering a judgment. I think it is important to remember that Occam was wrong when he prescribed that all things being equal, the simplest explanation tends to be the right one. As you will recall, Occam also thought the world was flat. Yet, when people are at a loss to provide a specific (validated) explanation as to why something happens, they will occasionally invoke the concept of Occam's razor, as though paraphrasing an ancient philosopher somehow lends credence to their position that a simple explanation is correct. It is probably not at all simple and it is probably not at all accurate. We are well served to remember that there are a significant number of forces at work, at all times, exerting individual pressures and collective influence on the outcome of everything. Even for the most perceptively simplistic equation, the scientist must account for all the aggregated influences contributing to the outcome and withhold judgment until all the data are analyzed. Arguments are the mechanism that we use to

fashion this deconstructive process in order to isolate the variables responsible for exerting influence on the outcome. Arguments should specify the contentions and variables in our scientific equations and articulate the hypothesized relations that exist between the individual variables, as well as the eventual result. An easy way to visualize such an argument structure can be seen below, where statements of truth (premises) are presented and ordered by perceived importance, culminating in support of the conclusion.

Argument in Support of Guilt

Premise 1 - The suspect was in possession of the gun that was used to kill the victim.
Premise 2 - Witnesses to the crime identified the suspect
Premise 3 - Scientific tests indicated that the suspect had gunshot residue on his hands
Premise 4 - The suspect was involved in a fight with the victim an hour prior to the shooting.
Premise 5 - Blood spatters of the victim were found on the clothing of the suspect

Conclusion - The suspect killed the victim.

As you can discern, each factual premise in the example above is directly relative to the conclusion and the aggregate influence of all of the of the individual truths combine to support the overall conclusion that the suspect had motive, opportunity, and the means to commit the crime. Therefore, he is guilty of the crime. If only all criminal trials were this easy to prove, but you get the idea that without a clear delineation of the premises, the conclusion is left to doubt. Remove anyone of these truths and the case gets weaker. Disprove any of these premises and the jury has a more difficult time arriving at a determination of guilt that is beyond reasonable doubt. This is precisely why we require unanimous consensus by a jury for criminal trials. If all of the jurors do not come to the exact same conclusion, then the accused in set free. This avoids the possibility of wrongful conviction based on a flaw in the logic of the prosecution's case and assures that not merely a preponderance of evidence is provided, but that the measure of "beyond reasonable doubt" applies. You'll be interested to know that this is not the case for civil trials. There, only a preponderance of evidence is needed for the juror to render a verdict.

Even more fascinating is that civil trials do not require a unanimous verdict, which begs the question why not.

We could express an argument in a mathematical context as well, such as, P1 + P2 + P3 + P4 +P5 = C. Although no quantitative values are assigned in this theoretical presentation, such a consideration sets the stage for hypothesis formulation for each individual variable in the equation. In scientific research this is precisely how we derive an equation that contains the independent variables (or premises) that we hypothesize may influence the dependent variable (i.e., the conclusion). In such efforts, we construct a method for quantifying the data, and then test each premise individually to assure the truth of the speculation, followed by measurement of the individual and collective strength of all of the variables in affecting the value of the dependent variable.

You probably did not fully comprehend that explanation, but rest assured that by the time you complete your studies, you will have a better idea of how this process is accomplished. The point here is that there is no difference (structurally) in

formulating an argument in support of a legal decision or for a scientific discovery. They are all based on an argument that presents a series of truths that individually (and collectively) have relevance to the conclusion and prove beyond reasonable doubt, the assertion offered in the conclusion.

The final example that I will use to explain argument structures is predicated on a decision process that eventually becomes extremely important to most of us at some point in our lives, but which few of us rarely employ scientific reasoning to discern the right answer. This example involves the decision (or conclusion) about selecting the perfect spouse. One would think that this one decision (above all others) would be guided by our best efforts to make the right choice, but alas, it is not approached as a scientific equation by the vast majority of us. Instead, it is an emotionally charged decision where our EIQ comes into play and more often than not (as evidenced by the divorce rate) we fail to make the correct choice or even look at the relevant variables that might affect the outcome. Instead, we think with our heart instead of our mind, which is never a good idea.

This is an excellent example (I think), because we need to decide (what) constitutes “perfect”, and how it is that we quantify a measure for such an analysis. There are clearly a good number of possible alternatives, but let us assume that we choose whether the marriage ends in divorce as the ultimate empirical test of perfection.

Certainly, other measures could be used, but for purpose of explanation, divorce should suffice. When I use this example in a freshman college class, I normally start by seating the girls on one side of lecture hall and the boys on the other. It is a bit theatrical but it lends itself well to polarizing the group so there is a lesser probability of contaminating the experiment. Then, once that has been achieved, I asked the question. Okay ladies list for me the top three qualities of the perfect spouse. You can probably imagine the fervor that this question evokes and the qualities yelled forth in response from the crowd. Try it yourself before you read any further. What are your top three qualities?

After the ladies have spoken their mind, the men are asked the same question. Once again, we typically see an interesting litany of responses. Remember,

these are college freshman so there's not allot of critical thinking going on in the crowd. From the vantage point of the women (who were intentionally placed in a segregated and protected grouping, variables such as money, physique, and loyalty are the first variables to be expressed. From the men's vantage point qualities such as culinary ability, physical features of the women and submissiveness are often valued highest on the list. Did I mention that these were college freshmen?

What is interesting to note in this exercise in reasoning is that the decision about selecting the perfect spouse is not an easy one. There are, in fact, many critical level variables and qualities that should be assessed prior to making the final decision. Culinary skills, money, and physical features are all of value, but there are many more that significantly contribute to whether such a relationship would be perceived as perfect (as measured by whether the union ends in divorce) but which aren't often considered.

After the two groups have taken a deep breath from venting their hostility towards one another, I begin

to point out those factors not expressed by the crowd but which are germane to the decision.

They include;

Parenting Skill
Fidelity
Intelligence
Sense of Humor
Religious Beliefs
Social Status
Responsibility
Future Promise
Emotional Stability
Personal Habits

The list goes on and on, but as you can see, these factors, and the determination as to whether the qualities meet the minimum standards for acceptability between prospective mates, harbor a significant degree of influence in deciding the eventual outcome of the union. We can actually construct a scientific experiment to test the individual and collective influence of each of these variables. The survey would be based on an instrument that elicits responses from two groups of

people. One group constituting those who had experienced a divorce and the other group consisting of people who did not divorce their mate. Using scientific methods, we would use a statistical measure to prove the premise whether each variable possessed a statistically significant difference in determining group association. In other words, do the two groups of people have a distinctly different view as to whether their mate possessed each of the qualities hypothesized in the argument? Predicated on the results, we could then interpret the importance of each factor, as perceived by the respondents, in determining whether they believed that the quality was of importance to their decision to remain married to their spouse. We will revisit this example later in the book to explain vertical and perpendicular logic, but I think you get the idea that even something as perceptively non-scientific as selecting a spouse depends greatly upon a significant number of (typically) qualitative variables that can be measured and considered in the decision process. Within the initial paragraph of this chapter I alluded to the fact that an argument is not simply a disagreement between two people over an issue, but is also (within the educated community) a

formalized structure that's used to articulate the premises used in support of a conclusion.

Now that you are familiar with the concept of argument structures, I want to return to the former definition of an argument at this point (that it is also a disagreement) to call your attention to the fact that arguments (or disagreements if you prefer) are an important part of the exchange of ideas because of the sharing of opposing views about a particular issue and the justifications for seeing things differently. It is within these "arguments" where people have an opportunity to express the rationale behind their viewpoints on the matter. It is important also to remember that these disagreements are the perfect medium for eliciting (from the person that is expressing their viewpoint), those premises they have used to arrive at their conclusion and gauge the merits of their contentions as they apply to the conclusion.

We should be careful never to attack or demonize the person making the claim, but we have an inherent responsibility to critique the truth of their premises, as well as the relevance of such assertions toward justifying the conclusion they have

presented. We may just find, through this exchange of ideas, that they offer a variable that we have previously overlooked or that they possess a slightly different interpretation of the data that may affect our ultimate judgment regarding the issue.

In such instances, whether they involve debates over social, political, or scientific issues we can employ the techniques of listing each premise, evaluating its accuracy and its relevance, and then assess the collective merits of the premises expressed to the eventual conclusion. By decomposing someone's argument (i.e., P1 + P2 + P3 = C), the merits and accuracy of their assertion are more easily recognized and subsequently, their assertions or claims can be more accurately evaluated.

The process of argument decomposition is a particularly effective tool in getting at the truth of each premise and then, in turn, assessing the relevance of each individual premise to the conclusion. Without such a process, it is difficult to discern the point of view being expressed and even more difficult to accurately gauge the relevance of the assertions being made.

Reasoning

Over the years, it has been my experience that a striking commonality exists relative to many of the theoretical explanations provided for a wide range of academic disciplines used to explain why things happen. No matter which discipline you examine you will find that a significant number of the assertions offered to explain such things as human behavior, politics, economics, and even some matters relative to science fail to articulate all of the variability required to account for the value of the dependent variable. Expressed differently, a significant number of the authors of these contributions have put forth interesting notions (or theories) but which simply turn out to be nothing more than an unsubstantiated opinion about why things happen or why people behave in a certain manner. A significant number of authors never go to the trouble of conducting empirical studies to prove the truth of their speculations. Some of the reasons for this may be attributed to the scholar's lack of proficiency with empirical forms of analysis and scientific reasoning, or perhaps it is predicated on their reliance on purely intuitive methods of analysis. No matter the reason, the consequence is

the same in that the theories they prescribe (no matter how meritorious) often fail to succinctly account for the totality of influences of the factors involved, the relationship between the variables, or to offer conclusive evidence of their postulates. I could write for hours about the shortcomings of primary, secondary, and collegiate education in adequately preparing students to think scientifically or to recognize the complexities of the universe. Suffice it to say, that these institutions (often times) do not provide adequate coverage of this most important skill. Students should never accept (at face value) the truth of a postulate put forth in any textbook, simply because it is in writing. Rather, they should question (excessively) the merits of the arguments and theories prescribed in these texts and demand empirical proof of the accuracy and relevance of such assertions. Students should also subscribe to a protocol in order to help them to discern the accuracy and truthfulness of any postulate, verbal or in writing. A protocol that relies on multivariate theory seems most appropriate given the complexity of the issues we encounter most often in our search.

No matter the endeavor, it is important to assure the correctness of the approach, pertinence of the data to the analysis, and relevance of the research to actually [proving or disproving] the premises and conclusions of an argument. For now however, it is important that we concentrate on expanding your awareness and familiarity with reasoning principles and the structures associated with such deliberations. Toward this objective, I should relate that multivariate reasoning can be effectively defined as the examination of the interrelationships that exist between factors, in order to determine their effect upon one another. This form of analysis is commonly used to assess both the influence of a single factor upon another, or it can be used to assess the aggregate influence of multiple variables upon an isolated [dependent] variable. It is also important to point out that multivariate analysis is that mechanism in the scientific process where the truth or fallacy of an argument is tested.

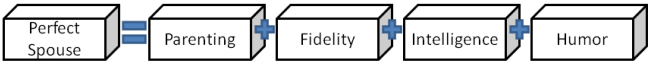
Put more simply, multivariate theory suggests that, at any given moment, there are a considerable number of factors that combine to influence and alter the state or condition of the [dependent] variable. This dependent variable can also be

thought of as the conclusion within an argument. By determining which variables (or premises) most strongly contribute to changes in the frequency of the dependent variable (i.e., the conclusion), the researcher is positioned to make judgments about the relationships that exist between these factors, and also which specific factors contribute to the outcome most influentially. Essentially, through multivariate reasoning and analysis, we are describing the evaluation criteria that will be used to evaluate the phenomenon. From this knowledge, judgments can also be made of how best to control and manage the fluctuations in the dependent variable. In other words, if the premises are represented as the independent variables in the equation and the dependent variable is the conclusion, multivariate analysis is the process where the individual and combined influences of these [independent] factors can be measured to discern their singular and collective impact. Earlier I spoke to the importance of the decision maker stepping back and seeing the entire board. Multivariate analysis helps facilitate this objective. It is a process of contemplation, where all of the factors that could possibly affect the outcome are

visualized and considered, as opposed to the ridiculous effort of trying to explain something complex (like criminal propensity or political disposition) based on a single theory.

From a multivariate deliberation, a decomposition diagram of the logic of an argument can be sketched out that specifies hypothesized interrelations for the multiple variables and factors involved in any phenomena. There are several steps in the process, but the end goals are to (1) visualize all of the possible influences ahead of the analysis, (2) to formulate hypotheses [i.e., premises] that support the inclusion of each factor within the equation, (3) which is followed by testing of each premise to discern their relative degree of influence. Once the truth of each individual premise is tested and confirmed, the final step is to discern the proportional influence of each factor in the aggregate equation and then derive a conclusion.

Multivariate Logic Equation



The diagram above illustrates a classic multivariate design using some of the variables that we spoke of earlier that represent factors that potentially contribute to the selection of a perfect spouse. I would have included all of them, but it is not practical on a small sheet of paper. As you can see from this example, using this multivariate approach, you immediately get an appreciation for the importance of "visualization" to the process of seeing the entire board. Through such a process it is a relatively simple course of action to contemplate and identify the dependent variable [or conclusion], as well as those factors that could [potentially] be

exerting substantial influence. Through this visualization process, you are empowered to take a step back, contemplate the problem and establish a set of criteria that can be used to support the analysis. This would naturally involve the deliberation over a number of factors, each [potentially] exerting a degree of individual influence, as well as the combination of these factors in asserting a collective influence over the outcome. As a side note I should relate that none of us should enter these types of analytical process with an objective in mind to prove one thought over another. By nature and design these are exploratory forms of analyses and as such we try to fervently avoid making prejudicial speculations about how the results are likely to turn out. Essentially we are engaged in a venture that relies on the process of elimination to accept those premises that might possess influence and reject others that appear not to exert influence over the outcome. Stepping back and theorizing as to all of the possible factors that could account for changes in the outcome and keeping an open mind so that we avoid prejudicing our interpretations is a key part of the process. Multivariate theory facilitates our examination of all

of the possible factors and helps us to remain objective, because we avoid the pitfall of favoring one explanation over another.

From the example provided (the perfect spouse) you can see that there are four hypothesized independent factors laid out horizontally and identified as (Fidelity-bX1, Intelligence-bX2, Age-bX3, and Promise-bX4) that are suspected to partially contribute to the dependent variable (the selection of the perfect spouse), which is designated as Y' (or the predicted value). Clearly (as we discovered earlier) there are many more "independent" variables or factors associated with such an equation, and as I also mentioned previously, as researchers we have a responsibility not to rush to judgment until we have accounted for all the variability in such an analysis. Stated differently, we must withhold judgment until we have confirmed the truth of each premise and then determined its proportional degree of influence within the argument, as well as identifying all of the factors that exert influence to account for the variability in the dependent variable.

Now I used allot of big words in the preceding paragraphs to get your attention, but as applied to your studies within the online university environment, this translate to mean, you as the student need to take everything you read and hear with a grain of salt and be on your guard not to readily accept something as true, simply because it was contained within a book. The faculty goes to great lengths never to say things that they aren't absolutely sure are true. This can't be said for authors of textbooks however, and as a college student you need to make very sure that before you embrace something as gospel, that you validate the truth of the assertion. This may require you to conduct some research to see if the point made by the author is backed up by other authors in the field or it may lead to a discussion post from you the professor asking them to evaluate the truth of the argument put forth by the author of your book. That is exactly the dialog that faculty are looking for in the classroom, so don't be afraid to ask the question, why.

Writing

Writing is a challenging enterprise to discuss with students because there isn't one correct answer or an absolute set of guidelines that I can provide to you about how to properly format your written communications. What I can tell you is that writing at the collegiate level should be thorough, comprehensive, and always be done in third-person plural and never in first-person singular. What did that mean?

Simple when you write your discussion posts or papers, never (well almost never) use the word I to communicate a point. Often when faculty review student's writings they note a sense of ownership in the writing and a constant reference to themselves through the use of the word, I.

In the collegiate form of writing, we never (well almost never) use that word and we approach the writing assignment or composition, as though we were writing a story to describe the events as a witness or storyteller, as opposed to a participant. That's the difference between first-person singular and third-person plural. First-person places you as a character in the story and third-person makes you the story teller, as though you were watching the

events unfold and describing what you've observed to other people.

This third-person approach gives you a better perspective in describing the phenomena or articulating the specifics and helps you to avoid ownership. Why avoid ownership? The answer is because you avoid placing yourself in a position of having to defend something. As a witness you are describing events and not living within those events and consequently, you have no ownership of those events. This approach gives you the perfect platform to maintain a critical thinking perspective over the events that unfold, as well as a dispassionate perspective to make judgments. As you recall in the earlier discussions, perspective and judgment matter a great deal to the dispassionate analysis of information and when you write in first-person singular, you can't maintain the distance necessary from the events to assure proper judgment and perspective.

Another critical element of effective writing is to layout your composition as though it were an argument. As we saw earlier in argument discussion, the idea is to string together statements of truth

that lead to a conclusion. We never (well almost never) start out with a conclusion and then spend the rest of the writing trying defend our conclusion. Rather, we start our compositions by illustrating the problem from a global set of observations, then we refine it to a manageable set of presumptions, followed by in-depth discussion of our research, and finally we offer a conclusion that is supported by the research we have conducted. Perspective and judgment play an important role, and so does argument construction. Collegiate writing isn't about filling up enough pages to get a good grade. Instead, it's about laying out a sequential argument in writing that takes into account all the factors that could be influencing the outcome, then discussing those factors (dispassionately), and finally rendering a conclusion that is supported by the research you conducted. Then the debate ensues. People read your paper and feel compelled to either agree with you, take objection to something you said, or point out that you've overlooked a few factors or variables that might be influencing the outcome. That's exactly why we never write in first-person and why we take a dispassionate view of things, so we don't find ourselves invested in defending something. As a

consequence, we maintain our objectivity throughout the process and we should never be hesitant to accept proven truths that relate to our arguments, simply because someone else pointed them out.

Above all else, we have to maintain our objectivity and judgment about things so that we can render accurate conclusions. Failing to consider all of the possible factors that could account for something, or setting out to prove a point and then using incorrectly interpreted research findings to support our position, and then crafting our writing to display a passionate position on the issues is a sure fire method of evoking criticism and more often than not, results in our being wrong. Instead, we avoid making judgments until after the research has been conducted and the data analyzed. In our writings we should qualify our statements, unless we hold absolute confirmation of the right answer (which again, almost never happens).

If you follow these simple guidelines, you'll find that your papers, discuss board posts, and other assignments will likely be well received by your student colleagues and professors alike. If on the

other hand, you write short, incomplete works that start out by putting forth your opinion and then set out to do nothing more than accentuate that opinion, you will likely find challenge at every turn and grades that don't meet your expectation.

Faculty Expectations

The term expectations, covers a broad range, but in this case the focus is on the expectations that faculty have for student performance in their classes. We need to address this from a general perspective because each faculty member has somewhat different expectations and each class has somewhat different expectations.

From a general perspective, each and every faculty member is hired because they possess a blend of academic achievement and professional experience. Consequently, they all have somewhat similar expectations from their students. They expect each student to approach the endeavor with an open mind. They expect each student to be serious and committed about learning. They expect students to thoroughly immerse themselves in the pursuit of knowledge. They expect each student to put forth a professional demeanor that is considerate of their

colleagues. And, they expect each student to produce works that clearly demonstrate scholarly achievement and understanding

Remember, colleges hold national and regional accreditation. This translates to mean that we are held to high standards for academic rigor, academic integrity, instructional competency, and student performance. The role of each faculty member is to not only to provide you with education and instruction, but to assure that the standards of the university are not compromised. Each faculty member is tasked with assuring that they not only provide excellent instruction, but also that they make sure that each submission provided by their students meets the standards for competency establish by the academic discipline, the college administration, and the U.S. Department of Education.

This expectation translates into a number of specific performance measures for each student. It means that showing up during the last day or two of the unit and posting isn't acceptable. It means that writing a one paragraph, opinion-based submission that provides no substantiation, no logical

argument, and no synthesis or relevant scholarly research isn't acceptable. It means that failing to go through the instructional sequence provided within each unit and fully reviewing the lecture, the reading, and independent research into the subject before writing your discussion board posts or papers isn't acceptable.

Also, the faculty expects students to be open minded. That means that they consider all of the possible theories and writings presented on a topic before they formulate their conclusion. It means that after careful deliberation over the facts and theories that they formulate a position on the issues and that they offer a defense of their position based on logic and reason. It means that each student not only strive to become more learned each and every day that they are affiliated with the college, but that they communicate that effort in their writings and interactions with their professors and student colleagues. Finally, it means that every student maintains the highest level of personal integrity throughout the educational process and that they religiously avoid violating the university's academic integrity policy.

As I mentioned, the faculty of the university are some of the most highly qualified professionals in the discipline. They didn't simply graduate from college before you and showed up at the door as a teacher. They were hand-picked because they possess a blend of academic achievement and professional qualification within their chosen discipline. Because of this, their expectation for your individual level of performance is high. They are committed to the task of providing you with an excellent college experience, that provides insight and knowledge, but in exchange, they expect you to take this learning experience seriously and that you make every effort to put forth an outstanding effort. Most importantly, they expect you to perform at a level equal to students at any other university before they award you a passing grade.

Discussions

In the previous section we talked about general expectations of student performance. In the next several sections, I want to provide you with some guidance that may help relative to specific types of instructional elements.

At most online universities, you will notice a similarity in approach that incorporates the use of discussion boards. The discussion board is a hybrid of the traditional classroom setting that can be found at most universities. The only difference is that the discussion and the lecture both happen simultaneously at a campus-based program, whereas in the online university, the discussion is a separate feature. Remember that instructional sequence I spoke of earlier? The discussion is one of the elements used to provide a forum for measuring student understanding of the information presented within the lectures and reading assignments. The discussion board is not a place where you simply put forth your views on things without having gone to the trouble of thoroughly completing all the preceding instructional requirements. Actually, it's just the opposite. The discussion board is where faculty starts everyone off with the same general question that seeks to measure the knowledge they acquired during the lecture and the reading assignments. Within the discussion you should avoid trying to be brief or over synthesizing the information you obtained as a result of watching the lectures, completing the reading assignment, and

conducting your individual research into the topic. Instead, the discussion board should be where you showcase your level of understanding.

You accomplish this by constructing a main post that is no less than 4-5 paragraphs in length and which lays out the vast majority of the issues or factors associated with the topic under discussion. A discussion question, for example, that asks you to formulate an opinion and provide justification for inclusion of the major factors associated with the success or failure of a small business enterprise, could result in a lengthy presentation where you integrate most of the major factors relative to business operations and success within a thoughtful presentation that attempts to articulate and prioritize each factor (independently) and then all of them as a collective influence in contributing to business success. You should layout an argument that is substantiated by scholarly reference and citation, of all the factors you encountered during your review of the lecture, reading, and independent research, in an organized articulation of the issues. After presenting the information and variables, you should then formulate a dispassionate

conclusion that is based on the observations you have made from the writings of scholarly authors.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of adequate preparation. As I mentioned earlier, the first people to post on the discussion board usually find themselves in the unenviable position of having to defend why they posted an opinion-based submission, that is devoid of facts, offers only unsubstantiated personal opinion, and usually which is incomplete in its articulation of the factors and influences pertinent to the topic. Instead, the faculty expectation is that after you've had time to review the lectures, read the reading assignment and take the time to digest what you've read, and then conducted some independent research into each of the variables, that you formulate a main post that expresses your findings and conclusions. This sequence doesn't guarantee that you will have addressed all of the pertinent issues, or correctly interpreted the information, but it improves the likelihood considerably.

From a practical standpoint I can also offer a suggestion in how you approach the composition of these assignments by pointing out that you should

never (and in this case I do mean never) draft your main post while inside the classroom. This is a sure fire way to be in a hurry, fail to think through all the pertinent factors and segments of a competent submission, or worse, lose your writings because of a system failure. The faculty cannot accept work for credit that doesn't exist and composing your main post inside the virtual campus discussion board is never recommended. Instead, use your word processor and save the writings throughout the authoring session. Then after you've had time to reflect on the composition that you prepared, go back and critique it to assure that it contains a treatment of all of the relevant variables, the majority of the relevant theories, provides a comprehensive treatment of the subject, and puts forth a argument that you can defend.

Remember, every one of your submissions to the class is compared against a grading rubric used by the professor. This means that your writings are measure for completeness, accuracy, style, originality, and most importantly whether they communicate a level of subject understanding that merits award of majority credit. In other words, did you simply recite a bunch of facts, or did you assert

the major theories, identify the problem, provide insightful deliberations, and demonstrate subject mastery, as opposed to mere familiarity. That is what distinguishes an A student from a C student. The demonstration of subject mastery, as opposed to having some familiarity with the topic, and your posts to the discussion board each week, along with your active involvement and provision of multiple (substantive) follow up posts is critical to providing sufficient evidence so that the professor can conclude that you know what you are talking about and not simply guessing.

Homework and Papers

Homework assignments and papers differ from class to class and also from discipline to discipline. In some cases the assignment will prescribe that you write on a particular subject, while in other situations, it will ask you to demonstrate proficiency with a particular skill. No matter the task, the goal is the same in that homework endeavors and writing assignments seek to measure your level of understanding of the subject and also to demonstrate proficiency with the process of acquiring and assimilating new information.

Online universities rely not only on multiple styles of information delivery, but also multiple opportunities for students to showcase their degree of subject understanding. Homework assignments are another form of measuring the depth and breadth of understanding each student has about a particular topic and providing a mechanism where the student can showcase that knowledge.

Homework assignments should be approached with the same level of intensity as any other assignment. You may have noticed that online university classes award credit across several different categories of work that include the discussion board performance, team work, examinations and quizzes, and homework assignments. As a result of this, failing to submit homework during the term can result in a significant loss of points and adversely affect the final grade you receive in the class. More importantly, failing to prepare comprehensive homework submissions constitutes a missed opportunity to further explore the intricacies of the subject and demonstrate that knowledge to your professor.

In the classes that I build, I always try to provide a comprehensive homework question that sets the stage for the assignment by providing an overview of the relevant information and then asking a probative question that affords each student with the opportunity to conduct independent research into the pertinent factors associated with the topic. This (unfortunately) isn't the case in all homework assignments, but no matter how comprehensive the question appears to be written, your approach in answering it should not only be thorough, but insightful. Take the time necessary to fully research the issue. Formulate a logical argument that takes into consideration the vast majority of relevant factors, and then provides thoughtful analysis of each factor before forming a conclusion.

If you use this simply approach to completing each homework assignment, you'll find that it will pay significant rewards as you progress through the degree program. Think of it as an investment in yourself. The more time and energy you spend on learning, the more well-versed you'll be in the next instructional unit. Knowledge gained through research in the homework assignment for unit one, will provide dividends in the discussion, team, and

examinations you encounter in unit two. Seeing or reading something only once gives you a mere familiarity with the subject, but contemplating the issues and preparing an assignment for submission can help you attain a higher level of understanding by forcing you to learn more about the topic in order to prepare a homework submission that will be reviewed by your professor. The feedback you receive on that assignment should point out the deficiencies noticed in your approach and your conclusions, and when it's over, and you move on to the next challenge, you should have more knowledge and a clearer understanding of the topic.

Team Assignments

Like all human endeavors, rarely, if ever, do we accomplish anything by ourselves. Most enterprises require a team of skilled people to achieve the objective. In hospitals there are a team of doctors, nurses, assistants, technicians, and support staff required to provide medical care. At universities there are faculty who provide the instruction, administrators who support the faculty and students, librarians who provide resources, advisers who deliver counseling and guidance, and a cadre of

people behind the scenes who make sure that everything is working properly so that the process of education can happen.

In the online classroom, it's important that each student function as a member of a team dedicated to learning and exploring the subjects being presented in the class. Many students who enroll in online classes do so as though it is an independent endeavor, like a correspondence course. Well it's not. Online learning is an interactive process that not only provides a chance for independent learning, but also a forum to teach students how to interact with others. Consequently, it is important that students embrace team work as an important component of the learning process and actively participate in the team assignments in order to assure that they make a significant contribution to the team's effort to complete the work.

Team work demands that each student make a significant showing by providing comprehensive submissions, early in the process and that can be evaluated and used by the other members of the team in order to compose the final product. As you know, there will be some on the team who show up

late, some who make only marginal contributions to the effort, some who elect to be a problem instead of a solution, and a few who are more trouble than they are worth. Don't you be one of them. The faculty members of the university understand the importance of team work and collaborative endeavors. We spend each and every day of our lives involved in team oriented enterprises. The class itself, from the faculty member's perspective, is one gigantic team assignment. They have the expectation that you will perform all of the specifically assigned team assignments in a professional, courteous, capable, and thorough fashion, as a valuable member of the team. You have the right to expect that your team mates perform at the same level of intensity and if all goes well, the collective products produced by the team effort will be greater than the sum of its parts.

Quiz and Examinations

I've never been a big fan of quizzes, especially those which ask silly questions like in what year did Columbus sail the ocean blue? Who cares!!!!!

Why did Columbus sail from Spain to America?
Why did the King and Queen of Spain pay for the trip?

After all Columbus was an Italian, not Spanish.
Why did Columbus use three ships instead of just one?
What challenges did Columbus encounter along the way?
And, what were the benefits of the voyage?

These are the types of questions that really measure student understanding. Well, in a perfect world, all of the quizzes and examinations you encounter would be essay based questions that require thought, research, and deliberation. But we don't live in a perfect world and you are likely to be challenged by a significant number of true/false and multiple choice questions. Oh wait, those have a purpose too. They measure whether you did the assigned reading and listened to the lecture materials from an active learning vantage point or whether you simply went through the experience in passive mode. Did you take notes? Did you differentiate meaningful points of knowledge from authorial elaborations? Did you pay attention to the variables the author was trying to accentuate or did you just fly right by trying to get the reading over with as soon as possible? Did you even take the time to read the assignment?

Examinations and quizzes endeavor to provide an answer to these and other questions and because of

that we use a combination of question types and formats to measure student understanding. Sometimes we use a quiz to force you to actually read the material. Sometimes we want to measure whether you were really paying attention to the important points expressed in the lecture. Still other times, we want to know whether you are able to formulate thoughts on the subject beyond the mere recitation of facts. So, faculty should use all sorts of approaches to provide the level of measure they feel, as faculty, are necessary to help make that determination.

The best advice that I can give you is to be ready to take the test. Don't hope that you'll pass the quiz; know that you'll pass it, because you've prepared for the challenge. Read everything assigned and anything you can find that isn't assigned. Don't just read it once, but go back and read it again a day or so later so that you get the full meaning of the material. Ever see a movie and then watch again at a later date and realize that you didn't remember seeing something the first time around? Of course you have. We all have. Well that's exactly why you should review assigned materials, multiple times, in

order to gain the greatest level of subject understanding.

Some students are happy just getting by and earning a degree. Other students take the privilege of education more seriously and devote the majority of the energy to the task of not simply going through the process, but actively engaging in the learning experience so that they didn't just get a piece of paper at the end of the experience, but actually acquired valuable knowledge and understanding. A degree might open the door to a new opportunity and a job, but understanding and ability are those things that help you keep the job. It's very obvious to everyone when they encounter someone who took the easy way out and did just enough to pass the class from those who devoted themselves to the endeavor of higher learning.

Plagiarism

It's really important that all students understand the tools that are available to faculty to check for originality. Because the first obligation of every member of the university faculty is to protect the academic reputation and integrity of the institution, every professor is provided with access to

Turnitin.com or some other tool that they can use to assure original writing. They use these sites to check the papers submitted by students for originality and plagiarism violations. So that you as the student are aware of the capability of this resource, please visit the link below and take a minute to go through the tutorial. This will show you exactly why you should avoid the practice of plagiarism and how vulnerable you are to being detected, should you choose to take the easy way out and simply cut and paste someone else's work as your own.....

Turnitin.com can be found at:
http://cdn.turnitin.com/resources/multimedia/training/turnitin/instructor/view_report/view_report.htm

The consequences of getting caught will be a zero for the assignment, placement on the department's database of plagiarism violators, followed by a failing grade for the class in the second instance, and finally expulsion from the college for the third violation. It simply isn't worth the risk.

The Protocol for Student Behavior

Higher Education is a privilege not a right and as such there are Student Codes of Conduct at every

institution of higher education in the world. The more common issues promulgated in those Student Codes of Conduct are:

- Academic Duplicity-using the same paper or project in two or more classes. The relevance of this particular conduct issue is the fact that each course has a requisite number of credit hours assigned to it. Within each credit hour, credit is given for such things as lecture or seminar time, assignments, exams, quizzes, and the major written project (more commonly referred to as the "Term Paper") and other items. Because each course is separate and distinct, each has its own general and subtopics incorporated within it. Using the same paper in two or more courses reduces the research time, review of new literature, and writing time. While it would make perfect sense to the student, it is nonetheless improper and a code of conduct violation. All accreditation agencies are in agreement with policy, be it national accreditation or regional accreditation.

- Collaboration-is the unauthorized team approach to quizzes, exams, assignments, and term papers unless the particular project is designated as a team or group project. Institutions of higher education

have specific guidelines and rules governing such team or group projects.

- "Unoriginal" work or Plagiarism- is the offering of student work as their own without crediting or giving credit through proper citation and referencing to the copyright holder or author. Let me be clear that there is nothing wrong with using the work of another author or authors; however, you must provide in-text citation credit (in the body of the paper or discussion board) and it must be referenced at the end of the work. As a general rule, direct quotes (exact wording from another source not the writer) should be in quotation marks when the student is using between one and forty words. When the writer uses from forth words to four-hundred-fifty words that material is considered a block quote and does not require quotation marks, but is blocked off. Blocked off means that the first line of the quote is indented five to seven spaces and each subsequent line is indented five spaces from the left margin. In either case "direct quotes" or "block quotes" you must cite the author that was the source of the information. By way of example, if I were writing a paper on Leadership and one of my

areas of concentration was **Target Level of Leadership,** and I found something so profound or important that I wanted to use that sentence or paragraph it would look like the following:

Leadership is most often thought of when discussing groups, organizations, or institutions. "True organizational leaders have a board impact; their decisions can affect thousands of lives" (Clawson, 2009, pp.29-30). Personally, there is nothing that makes the quote really worth quoting and I offer this just as a simple example. Many would argue that the exact words would not be necessary and the quoted sentence could and should have been paraphrased for there is nothing profound or extraordinary about the quoted sentence and therefore not worthy of a direct quote. If that were in fact what I would have done, then the way to cite a paraphrase is (Clawson, 2009). In fact in my example, the first sentence is in fact a paraphrase of Clawson's work.

As a matter of Federal Copyright Law, it is illegal to use more than four-hundred-fifty words of a work in any one quote without express written permission

of the copyright holder, unless the document is protected under the Fair-Use Act.

"One of the rights accorded to the owner of copyright is the right to reproduce or to authorize others to reproduce the work in copies or phonograph records. This right is subject to certain limitations found in sections 107 through 118 of the copyright law (title 17, U. S. Code). One of the more important limitations is the doctrine of "fair use." The doctrine of fair use has developed through a substantial number of court decisions over the years and has been codified in section 107 of the copyright law.

Section 107 contains a list of the various purposes for which the reproduction of a particular work may be considered fair, such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. Section 107 also sets out four factors to be considered in determining whether or not a particular use is fair:

1. The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes
2. The nature of the copyrighted work
3. The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole

4. The effect of the use upon the potential market for, or value of, the copyrighted work

The distinction between fair use and infringement may be unclear and not easily defined. There is no specific number of words, lines, or notes that may safely be taken without permission.

Acknowledging the source of the copyrighted material does not substitute for obtaining permission.

The 1961 Report of the Register of Copyrights on the General Revision of the U.S. Copyright Law cites examples of activities that courts have regarded as fair use: "quotation of excerpts in a review or criticism for purposes of illustration or comment; quotation of short passages in a scholarly or technical work, for illustration or clarification of the author's observations; use in a parody of some of the content of the work parodied; summary of an address or article, with brief quotations, in a news report; reproduction by a library of a portion of a work to replace part of a damaged copy; reproduction by a teacher or student of a small part of a work to illustrate a lesson; reproduction of a work in legislative or judicial proceedings or reports; incidental and fortuitous reproduction, in a newsreel or broadcast, of a work located in the scene of an event being reported."

Copyright protects the particular way an author has expressed himself. It does not extend to any ideas, systems, or factual information conveyed in the work.

The safest course is always to get permission from the copyright owner before using copyrighted material. The Copyright Office cannot give this permission.

When it is impracticable to obtain permission, use of copyrighted material should be avoided unless the doctrine of fair use would clearly apply to the situation. The Copyright Office can neither determine if a certain use may be considered fair nor advise on possible copyright violations. If there is any doubt, it is advisable to consult an attorney."

FL-102, Revised May 2009

(http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html)

Racist, Sexist, Vulgar, and Inflammatory Language

This refers to the use of words, phrases, epithets, and other language oral or in writing that offends or intends to invoke unreasonable excitement and or passion. There is never any reason to use such language in an institution of Higher Learning. In the

online environment of Higher Learning it is easy to type quickly, without thinking about the repercussion of one's words or post and this type behavior can be legal, just cause for dismissal of the student from the college or university.

Finally it is incumbent upon every student to act professionally and like a mature person. There is never any reason to be sarcastic, unprofessional, or dishonorably with your colleagues or your professor, associate professor, assistant professor, or instructor. Professional educators should always remain dispassionate about students, grades, grading, and interaction with students. Those who do not conduct themselves professionally (Professional Educators) should leave the profession and find some other line of work. Always remember, students do have a right to be treated as mature individuals and with respect.

Our goal as professional educators is to provide the best education possible to those students who qualify for a seat in the class (virtual or ground) and who can abide by the Student Code of Conduct and the norms of civility.

Protocol for Student Grievances

In any organization be it education, a corporation, small business, or other entity disputes and grievances or disagreements will surface. In Higher Education those grievances usually surface for the following reasons:

- Professor refuses to allow make-up work as per his or her policy
- Professor refuses to accept unreasonable and untimely absence excuses
- Professor gives the student a grade that the student does not feel he or she deserves
- Professor gives the student a grade that the student does not feel he or she deserves, but at the same time the student did not follow written or verbal instructions.
- Student is frustrated because he or she is not prepared academically at that point in time for the level of work required in Higher Education and complains that the Professor is picking on them
- Student feels as though he or she is being treated unfairly and not the same as other students

There may be any number of other reasons that a student may feel that they have a grievance against

the professor or school and because these type matters occur often there must be a stated policy or protocol for handling them in a dispassionate, fair, and impartial way with equality for all students as the major principle. Due Process and Equal Process and Protection must be the hallmark for any institution of Higher Learning. In most Distance Education Colleges and Universities, especially in Proprietary Education there exists a framework that includes the following Chain of Command and or Responsibility in inverse order:

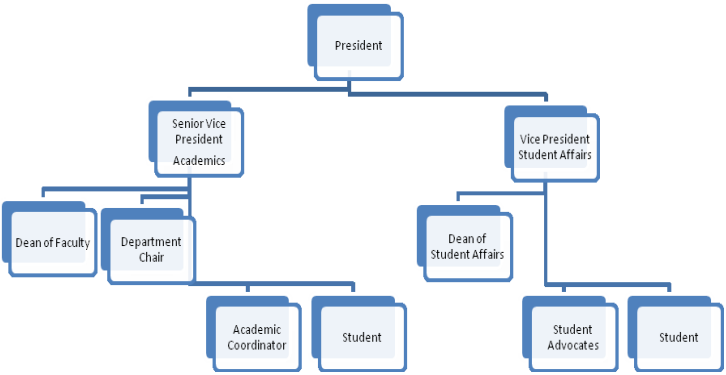
- Student
- Student Advisor
- Academic Coordinator
- Department Chair

In the event that the matter or issue cannot be resolved within this framework there is another channel or path that the student can take after the above chain has been attempted. The following process is again in inverse order:

- Student
- Student Advisor
- Dean of Students

At this point in the resolution of the student grievance the Dean of Students will meet with the Dean of Faculty who will both request that all investigative material (i.e. grade book, papers, assignments, emails, phone logs, TurnItIn.com report, etc.) be produced along with a written investigative report by the Department Chair. The evolution of the process in this instance usually involves issues of academic honesty and violation of the Student Code of Conduct and has resulted in the student failing the course. Once the evidence has been digested by all the parties, the Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs then renders his or her decision in the grievance. The matter is usually disposed of without litigation.

It is important that the student follow the Chain of Command and Responsibility in order to have the matter resolved in a timely fashion.


President
Senior Vice President Academics
Vice President Student Affairs
Dean of Faculty
Department Chair
Dean of Student Affairs
Academic Coordinator
Student
Student Advocates
Student

Computer Proficiency and Training

I am certain that you've probably heard the expression of the Socratic Method of learning. If you haven't, welcome to the club of higher learning. Socrates developed a practice and process of teaching that essentially put the responsibility of learning on the student. It makes sense really when you think about it. The professor can stand at the front of the room for hour upon hour providing insightful theories and observations, but if a student isn't willing to stay actively involved in the process, then they learn far less than those who are actively involved.

The Socratic Method also applies to learning enterprises where the professor gives advice as to where and how to learn something. The student learns more if they go through the process themselves, as opposed to simply writing down what the professor says. Simply writing something down provides facts, whereas going through the learning process and discovering things for yourself, translates into knowledge.

Since you have chosen to attain your degree online, there comes with that decision a responsibility to

make sure that you can operate the tool you'll use to access your classes and attend the university. That tool is the very computer you are using right now. Remember I spoke earlier of deficiencies and overcoming shortcomings? Well, this also applies to computer literacy and making sure that you are sufficiently fluent in how to operate and use your computer. At most traditional colleges and university, computer literacy is a required class, as is library and information literacy. At online institutions we conduct classes in these subjects, but they are generally not required for graduation (yet).

Instead we expect that every student who attends the university will take the initiative required to assure that they fully understand how to operate their computer and that they are fluent in the variety of software they will need to use to complete their assignments. I am about to give you the best advice you've ever received in regards to a source that you can use to overcome a deficiency you might have in computer literacy. It's called www.vtc.com and it is the very best online instruction program in the world (in my opinion) for people who need education and instruction in software and computer basics. If it were up to me,

every student at the online university would be required to complete a course of instruction in Microsoft Word, Excel, Power-point, Access, and several other critical software programs along with a few training programs in computer fundamentals, networking, and Internet navigation. But since, it's not up to me, I can only suggest that you visit VTC and consider the merits of using this resource to assure that you know everything you need to about computers so that you can use them properly.

Assuring that you minimize deficiencies is critical to achieving success. Computer proficiency is as important to modern day success as pencils and slide rules were a hundred years ago. VTC can help you in this area and I strongly encourage that each of you consider expanding your understanding of computers by going through some of the more relevant training programs offered by this company. The cost is nominal (about $30 dollars a month) for unlimited access to the training programs with no obligation or subscription required. It just doesn't get any better than that.

Late Work and Absence

There is one final area that we should discuss and it involves absence and late work. You might not understand it or have an appreciation for it, but teachers hate it when students submit late work. Online learning is a privilege, and university professors expect students to treat it as such. Every class you'll take has a syllabus that prescribes the assignment that are due and when they are due. Students who elect not to turn in work on time create a huge problem for the faculty, because it requires extra time and effort to go back and grade thee submissions. I actually do not accept late work without a physician's excuse because the process of accepting and grading late work is a huge distraction from the cadence of the class and takes time away from the students who chose to meet the demands of the curriculum. It's amazing how many students are of the opinion that their excuse matters to the teacher and that the professor is obligated to accept late work. You would also be equally surprised at some of the lame excuses given by students for missing the class. My all time favorite is that their computer broke and it took them several weeks to get it fixed. If your portal to your education is

broken, perhaps a day or two is understandable in getting it repaired, but I've actually had students show up four or five weeks later claiming that a computer virus prevented them from completing the work and that I should somehow allow them to submit all the past due assignments. Policies for accepting late work vary at each university, but if you want to stay in the professor's good graces, don't be one of those who shows up late with extra work and think the professor will simply overlook your absence. It's not fair to the professor and it's not fair to the others in the class who elected to stay on track and meet the deadlines imposed.

Conclusion

We trust that you have enjoyed this series of discussions and that you will make the choices necessary to not just acquire a college degree, but walking away from this experience as a full member of the educated community of men and women. We are inspired by online faculty and find them to be some of the most capable and committed professionals in higher education. They have devoted themselves to providing an excellent program of instruction and assisting you while you

attend the university. As we mentioned earlier in the presentation the faculty and staff have every expectation that you'll not only acquire a substantial level of subject knowledge while you're here, but that you will evolve into a different person as a result of this experience. We can't do it alone, but with your help and persistence, we can transform who you are now, into who you can become. Don't be afraid to evolve into a more informed, more highly refined, more articulate, and more, well rounded person, by devoting yourself to the collegiate experience. After all, that's why you're here.