

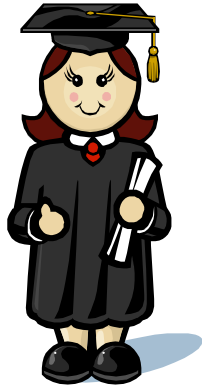
Synthesis

When I walked into the first day of class, I had no expectations. I was signed up for the class at the last minute, and I did not even have time to look at what the course was about before I walked into class. Before I knew it, I had been thrown into an academic experience I know I will never forget. Not only did I learn about recycling, e-waste, and alternative energy resources, I also learned about what Elmhurst College is all about. From our activities in and out of class, I quickly felt comfortable walking around campus and knew where everything was. I considered myself at an advantage to those who did not take the First Year Seminar and had to figure everything out on their own. Although I did not plan to take the First Year Seminar, I was impressed with the information it offered and how it made me quickly feel as if I was a part of the Elmhurst College community.

When I applied to Elmhurst College, I kept hearing people tell me it was a liberal arts school. I had heard the term mentioned various times before, especially during the college application process. When I asked what the term 'liberal arts' meant, my mom's quick answer was "it was a school that makes you take a lot of courses in a wide variety of areas to give you a more well-rounded education". I felt this was an acceptable answer to my question; after all, my mom was an Elmhurst College graduate and she must know.

However, when we were handed our first articles on what a liberal education meant, I realized my mom's previous answer was not even a small fraction of what a liberal education actually meant. I learned it meant more than taking a wide range of different or 'gen ed' courses. Liberal learning was also about professional preparation, developing tolerance, learning through experience, asking questions, connecting broadly, and expanding critical thinking skills. It is

about learning to become an active and informed member of a community and being a person who wants to make positive changes in their world.



The article “Reclaiming the Distinctiveness of American Higher Education” by William G. Durden, the “A Strategic Vision of Elmhurst College” article, and “The Statement on Liberal Learning and Professional Preparation” article really helped identify what a liberal education was and how Elmhurst College was trying to accomplish it. I felt that reading those articles made me set a mental set of goals for the Elmhurst College as well as myself. I

will look at this list of goals when I graduate and ask myself if they were fulfilled. I now expect

Elmhurst College to have those goals in mind when I am sitting in my classes, learning about science or philosophy.

When I graduate, I want to know I made the right decision. I want to know I got what I came here for.

I know the responsibility of the accomplishment of these goals will not only be on the shoulders of Elmhurst College. I will have to play my part as well. I know I have to be open to learning

about different things and I will have to put in a lot of work in order to truly have a liberal education when I graduate. Part of this work included taking the assignments we were given seriously throughout the semester. To some, the assignments we were given may have seemed insignificant, but I now understand their purpose and role of fulfilling the goals of the course.

The academic dishonesty, time management, Wikipedia, and three campus events assignments helped me visualize how Elmhurst College was promoting a liberal education. As a first year student, I found all of these assignments extremely important to my journey of finding my way around the mindset of Elmhurst College. I felt the three campus events assignment was a great way to get students to support different groups on campus as well as expose them to

different activities they could be involved in. I also like how we wrote blog posts where we had to connect back to our class topic or to the large group topics. I felt this helped me think critically and connect to our class in a way I had never thought possible. It made the events seem more meaningful than just going to a sporting event and cheering on the team.

Learning through experience, which is a large part of a liberal education, was an important part of our First Year Seminar class. Not only did we learn through our experiences during the field trips, but we also learned through our experiences during our presentations. I feel so much more comfortable speaking in front of people now because of our group presentations. I think public speaking is a skill that I will use throughout my life, especially as someone who is going into business. I also feel it was a great skill to learn early on in my college career since I will no doubt be doing many more presentations.

Our field trip and presentation experiences also helped me become more culturally aware



of what is going on in our world in regards to waste, sustainability, and energy deficiencies and alternatives.

Before I came to college, I recycled but I never thought about the big picture of waste and recycling and how it was affecting people in and out of the United States. I now look

at waste and energy usage as a big problem and I think

about it whenever I go to throw anything away. I believe it is something we should be getting our whole campus to look at, not just our class. I think learning to look at domestic issues at a global level, as well as finding out if other countries are experiencing the same problem is the

key to figuring out how the world can solve these

problems together.

I learned e-waste and trash is a huge problem. I never knew the severity of it and how much we were polluting the world. This class opened my eyes to that.

Through learning about recycling and waste management, we also learned valuable research and presentation skills. Researching skills are very important to learn because it shows us how to find credible information which will be useful when doing any sort of research in the future. Giving the presentations allowed us to show various faculty and administrative members that we knew how to present the information we gathered in an organized and creative way. As these presentations went on, we were better able to connect with our audiences and engage them by presenting each of them with information they will be able to take away and actually use. I feel this is an extremely important skill to have because it generates more interest and urgency when you can show your audience how the problem affects them directly.



After taking the First Year Seminar course, I feel I am prepared for anything Elmhurst College can throw at me. I encountered different problems throughout the semester when doing our presentations and researching, but I feel as if now I know how to handle those problems if they were to ever arise again. I understand what Elmhurst College has planned for me and I am ready to get a liberal education. My expectations as to what kind of education I receive from Elmhurst College are high, and I hope Elmhurst's expectations of me are high as well. I feel comfortable here and I feel my advantage over the other first year students are higher than ever. I learned skills I can take with me to my other courses as well as into my college community. My aspirations are high, and I am ready to get started.

Giving presentations was what made the class so interesting. I was nervous for it at first and I didn't know if we could make a difference. But we did make a difference. We got people to think about the important problem we were learning about.