

Local Choices, Global Effects

FYS SYNTHESIS

December 10, 2007

Local Choices, Global Effects has most definitely fulfilled its course goals. Its first goal was to articulate the value of a liberal arts education (which promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, intercultural awareness, and so forth) and its synergy with professional preparation. This was accomplished through liberal arts education articles and discussions, through learning effective communication skills by talking to Elmhurst administrators, and the presentation of three topics, which broadened our knowledge. Its second purpose was to allow us to react ethically to varied perspectives and experiences, which stimulate intellectual curiosity and expand cultural awareness. This was fulfilled by our response to attendance of three Elmhurst events and our response to Mark Hertzgaard and his book, *The Eagle's Shadow*. The third goal was to demonstrate our understanding of the ethical gathering, synthesizing, and sharing of information from a wide variety of sources. This was accomplished through our research, reading and discussing about academic dishonesty, and the evaluation of Wikipedia and Encyclopedia Britannica. The fourth course objective was to allow the students to respond critically to varied texts, which was fulfilled through our online course blogs. And the final course goal was to have it's students contribute to the campus and beyond through civic engagement, which was accomplished through our exploration of three topics and our presentations.

What consists of a liberal arts education? This question was presented to our class during the first week of our fall semester. Honestly, our class was unaware of what liberal learning really was, but we were all given articles and soon we became experts on the subject. My article, by William G. Durden, spoke about Benjamin Rush, who was one of the most fervent advocates for liberal education. Durden stated, "an American liberal arts education was to be, above all, useful—useful to oneself, but also to society. This education was to accomplish nothing less than preparation of those citizens and leaders who would shape the economy, government, and social structures of the young democracy. Rush adamantly believed that students must be engaged with their society in order to prepare them to lead in it." After reading this article, I began to ask myself, how can I be useful for myself and for my society? Professor Gopal and Professor Smith soon gave me the ideas that encouraged me to live out my liberal education. The professors provided me with an array of assignments to investigate and analyze. One of our first assignments was to learn about electronic waste and it's effects on our environment. Before this class, I was not educated on how improper disposal of plastics and electronics would soon lead to the depletion of our environment. This information became useful in my life because I changed my behavior; I began to recycle, limited my use of plastics, and began to influence my peers to do

the same. This became useful for my society because I helped to implement a new recycling program at my local Park District, where I work. In addition, I became an informed voter. With the upcoming 2008 presidential election, I had not thought about whom I was planning to vote for. However, after learning about the threats of our environment I will not consider the candidate's platforms on these subjects; E-Waste, Sustainable Living, and Energy. In addition, part of a liberal education promotes effective communication. Through this class, I have talked to several Elmhurst professors and facility managers about our three topics. I learned to address these people with respect and gained several interview skills.

How did our class react ethically to varied perspectives and experiences, which stimulated our intellectual curiosity and expanded our cultural awareness? During this semester, I was assigned to attend three Elmhurst events and report on my experiences. As a commuter, I only planned to attend a few, and they would have probably only been sports events. However, through this class, I have attended one lecture about Abraham Lincoln, one movie, the Laramie Project, and one play, the Heartbreak House. I reacted ethically to all three experiences; all stimulated my intellectual curiosity and expanded my cultural awareness. The Laramie Project really expanded my cultural knowledge. My heart was touched during the movie as I learned about how a person was treated simply because of their sexual orientation. I could not imagine so much hate surrounding a culture of homosexuality. I realized this prejudice and hatred was still alive today and that since I now know about it I must be not discriminate against this culture and these people. They deserve just as much respect as heterosexuals. In addition, my educational interest increased as I listened to the lecture on Abraham Lincoln. I had previously known a little about Abe Lincoln, but after this lecture, I chose to write a research paper on him in another class. In addition, I reacted ethically to these experiences by writing a page or two on each event and posting it on my online blog. Also, our class was able to respond morally to *An Eagle's Shadow*, which enthused our academic inquisitiveness and extended our cultural attentiveness. During our discussions of the book, it was evident that we had all never thought about Hertzgaard's perspectives and maybe some of us did not agree with his opinions or his research, but we respected it and appreciated it. The third course goal, was achieved though our tremendous amount of research done for each of our presentations. Each individual had several objectives to accomplish in order to gather enough information for each presentation. We learned early on that Wikipedia was not a reliable and credible source for our information because it is created by average people, who do not have Ph. Ds in the topics they are posting about. Instead, I relied on scholarly journal articles and government websites for the gathering of my research. In congruence with this, we were assigned an online blog assignment from our course librarian in which we

were to compare Wikipedia and Encyclopedia Britannica online. We learned quickly that Wikipedia may have given us the information faster, but it was less reliable and Encyclopedia Britannica was more credible and better to use for academic purposes. In addition, we learned to ethically synthesize and share information by learning about and writing a paper on Academic Dishonesty. All four FYS classes, read articles on “cheating” and had a group discussion about what we consider academic dishonesty and how we deal with it in schools, including Elmhurst. We concluded that it was probably much easier to just complete our assignments on our own, without relying on others, than to cheat on our assignments by plagiarizing or copying another students’ work.

This course was all about responding critically to several texts. Almost all of our assignments required us to write about them on our online course blogs. After we attended each of our three events we had to write a one-two page response on our experience. This was a great assignment because we were not given specific guidelines, which allowed us to get creative and express our true feelings about the events. We were also required to write about each field trip, which required us to think about our experiences and how they affected our opinions on the topics presented. In addition, we also wrote about our opinion and what we took away from *The Eagle’s Shadow*, which was especially important because Hertzgaard had very much to say about our society and his ideas influenced us all to rethink our actions because they are being watched by our surrounding countries.

The fifth course goal was fulfilled through our class’ presentations. Each month we presented to Elmhurst’s “top dogs” as Professor Gopal would say, about three different topics we found to be very important to our environment and life. Each time we explored the information on a topic, we found certain things (like water bottles, plastic ware, organic foods, creating a college garden, greening up the Business and Economics department, and turning the lights off) that we decided to dedicate ourselves to and help make changes around campus. Personally, as I said before, I helped to implement a recycling program at my place of employment, and I changed the behavior of my friends, who do not go to Elmhurst, and my parents. Something special we did in our third presentation, was explore our presidential candidates’ platforms on the topics we discussed. This impacted us all because we became informed voters, able to make educated decisions on who we will vote for in the upcoming 2008 elections.

This course has fulfilled its goals in an exceptionable manner. These objectives were accomplished efficiently by combining several assignments to complete one purpose. All five goals were achieved and Local Choices, Global Effects’ students can now say they have experienced a liberal arts education, have learned to respect and embrace different opinions and cultures, have learned to gather and respond to information in an ethical way, have replied significantly to several texts, and contributed to their society.