

Addressing CAP Student Learning Outcomes in Class

“Vocation in English 200”

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Readings

Readings for the course are drawn from a wide range of disciplines including philosophy, religious studies, literary studies, education, and psychology. First, through close analysis and discussion, students work through a set of readings that serve as the primary texts for their first two formal essays. For the last two papers, students collect source material on their own through library-based research and interviews.

A sampling of the readings I’ve used in the course can be found here:

http://www.udayton.edu/provost/resources/cap/docs/Sample%20Readings%20for%20English%20200_Vocation_Wilhoit.pdf

Writing Assignments

Through a series of four sequenced formal writing assignments, students define “calling,” “vocation,” and “career”; examine the roles chance and design may play in their life decisions; explore a career and produce a compelling argument that it best matches their skills, interests, and sense of calling; and explore a service organization they would like to join because it best matches their vocation.

Along with the formal essays, students also complete about a dozen informal journal assignments, each one asking them to reflect on a key aspect of the course. For example, early in the class students may identify and describe a time in their lives when they felt “called” or “impelled” to act in a particular way; to identify their unique gifts, skills, and talents with specific examples of each; to reflect on how serving others has impacted them; to respond to a reading, film, or guest speaker; or to imagine the future course of their lives.

Sample formal writing assignments can be found here:

http://www.udayton.edu/provost/resources/cap/docs/Sample%20Formal%20Writing%20Assignments%20for%20English%20200_Vocation_Wilhoit.pdf

Sample informal writing assignments can be found here:

http://www.udayton.edu/provost/resources/cap/docs/Sample%20Informal%20Writing%20Assignment%20for%20English%20200_Vocation_Wilhoit.pdf

Ancillary Material

When teaching this course, I call on colleagues for help. For example, I always ask a librarian to teach my students how best to research careers and service organizations and to offer instruction on effective research practices. In addition, someone from career services addresses the students

at least once to discuss the results of personality and/or career assessment instruments the students have completed and to describe the resources Career Services provides that are relevant to the essays they are writing.

I also routinely incorporate relevant YouTube videos and film clips in the class and show films outside of class related to the course themes. These films have included *The Adjustment Bureau*, *Good Will Hunting*, and *Little Buddha*.

Results

As judged by their comments on course evaluations, student reaction to the class has been overwhelming positive. Most comment that they had never before explored their calling or vocation, and many observe that for the first time they seriously considered what they want to do with their lives, not what others expect them to do. While some students are moved to reconsider their majors, others leave the class more certain about the career path they have chosen. Students also frequently become actively engaged in the service organization they researched or indicate that service will play a more important role in their future lives.

Because they are reading and writing about topics that interest and motivate them, most students devote the amount of time and attention to class projects needed to produce good writing. They are more interested in revising their work to improve it than students have been in other composition classes I've taught and more thoroughly research the topics they address. In short, vocation has turned out to be a very successful theme for the English 200 classes I teach.