

## **Fostering Reflective Learning**

Each student is required to track in a journal, their thoughts about, their reactions to, and their 'reflections' on the weekly readings (the ideas, themes or concepts introduced) and the seminar discussions held each week. Students are also encouraged to incorporate their knowledge from other sources, such as life experience and other courses.

The process of reflective thinking is vital to critical thinking and assessment of information, and one that requires commitment and time. Thus, journal entries are more than overviews or descriptions of readings or lectures; they include observations and insights from many sources of information, especially individual assessment, values, experience and knowledge.

The journal is also a place to think about, and comment upon, the process, and progress, of your own learning as you move through the course. You can think of it as a running commentary on not only *what* you are learning, but also how that learning connects and adds to previous knowledge and experience, and how it may 'transform' your thinking about issues, and about your own learning.

The process of journaling will be discussed several times in the course, and students are encouraged to ask questions / see me if they are unsure about how they should be using their learning journals.

### **What should I use for my journal?**

This is really up to you, but it should not be the same notebook that you use to record notes from seminar or from your reading. The journal is a separate place where you discuss the ideas/concepts/issues raised in the course and what you think about them/what issues they raise in your mind/what questions are generated that you can bring to the seminar for discussion.

Previously, students have successfully used blank hardcover journals/diaries, binders with printed or handwritten entries, or simple notebooks. Some people have kept their journal on their computers and then printed everything at the end and put it in a duo tang or 3-ring binder. The important thing is that it is neat and organized, big enough, and easy to keep updated.

### **Who will see my journal?**

Only the instructor will see your completed journal, unless you chose to do otherwise. You decide what you wish to share in the seminar from your observations and reflections as recorded in the journal.

**Is there a minimum entry length?**

No. However, very brief entries (under 1 page) will likely not have the kind of assessment and reflection called for in this type of learning tool.

**Do I get the journal back?**

YES. I will collect them at the end of term to grade, but will have them available for pickup during exams. If you provide a self-addressed stamped envelope I will mail your journal to you at home.

**How will it be graded?**

I will be looking for two things when grading the learning journal:

- 1) **Completeness.** Are there entries relating to all topics and readings? Has the student incorporated insights and reflections from seminar discussions and from other course / life experience?
- 2) **Engagement:** Are the entries merely outlines of the main points of the readings, or do they demonstrate critical thinking and assessment? Is there a dialogue between the material and the student on a regular basis? Does the student consistently demonstrate reflection on the ideas presented in the readings and discussed by classmates and the instructor in the seminar? Are ideas and insights from other sources included in the entries consistently?

**Spelling and grammar** will **not** be assessed; however, better writing does convey your meaning more fully and clearly.