

SOAN 324: Learning Contract Guide

The assignment:

“At the beginning of the semester, you will write a 2-3 page summary of what you want to get out of this course, plus another 1-page evaluation of the ways that you already know how to learn. In these three pages, you will lay out your personal goals for the course in three areas:

- Content learning
- Expanding your range of learning strategies
- Personal growth

I am particularly interested in having you shift from a child-centered form of learning (“pedagogy”) to an adult-centered form of learning (“andragogy”). See the Pedagogy vs Andragogy page* at the course web-site for details.”

The background:

Education always has at least three parts. There are **the things we learn** (content). There are **the ways in which we know how to learn them** (learning strategies). And there is the **personal growth** that inevitably occurs in the learning process. Most of us know about the first of these; fewer know about the second; most people just assume the third will happen automatically.

This learning contract asks you to embrace the second and third kinds of learning in a conscious way. It asks you to evaluate your current knowledge about the course content and to outline your current learning strategies. It then asks you to describe in some detail what content you want to learn from the course and what additional learning strategies you will practice. Finally, it asks you to make some comments about the kinds of personal growth you hope to achieve.

Content:

Hunger and homelessness are natural results of the American class system. This course is thus—inevitably—a course about class stratification. It attempts to answer five key questions:

1. What is life like for the hungry, the homeless, and the near-homeless in the U.S?
2. How many homeless and near-homeless are there?
3. What are the major and minor causes of homelessness and hunger?
4. What are individuals, small organizations, and governments doing to help? What can they do to help?
5. What does it take to solve these problems? What can governments, organizations, and private citizens contribute?

You may already know something about some of these matters. If, for example, you have already had a course on class and stratification (e.g., SOAN 325), you will already know a great deal about the class system (though this class will teach you more). If you have taken a course in poverty policy (perhaps as part of Redlands’ Public Policy major), you will know a great deal about government programs designed to help poor people. If you have worked in a non-profit organization helping the poor, homeless, or hungry, you will know something about the challenges that these organizations face and how

* http://www.coolsociology.net/SOAN324WP/?page_id=109

they attempt to meet them. If you have worked in any non-profit organization, you will have a sense of how these organizations are structured, what works well, what does not, and so on.

The point is, you should identify what you already know and then identify those content areas of the course that you are most interested in knowing. The course gives you a chance to adjust the value of some of the grading elements so they best match where you wish to put your effort.[†]

Learning Strategies:

People have different strategies for learning. Some people are great at memorizing. Others know how to think through an issue. Some people learn best from books; others from course lectures; still others from experiences. Some people work best alone; others work best in groups. None of these ways of learning is any better than another; they're just different.

This assignment asks you to evaluate how you have learned how to learn. It then asks you to identify one or two new strategies that you will try to master this semester. This part of the course is as important to your education as is the course content. If you can leave the course—and the university—with more ways of learning than you entered, you will be a success.

Think about it: is your (future) boss going to respond positively to your claim that you aren't good at book-learning? that you don't work well in groups? or that you need a textbook where you can look up the answers? I don't think so! Your job, if you choose to accept it, is to expand your skills now, in a safe environment. In this assignment, please describe which new learning strategies you will embrace for this course.

Personal Growth:

Obviously, people grow. Most people do so unconsciously, unintentionally, by sleep-walking through life. Others do so consciously, by figuring out how they need to grow and then seeking out opportunities to do so. This assignment asks you to do the latter.

Are you afraid of speaking in front of crowds? Use this course to practice doing so. Are you timid about meeting new people? Then get out there and practice meeting them. Do you have trouble expressing yourself in class? Practice it now! Do you have trouble listening to others, especially when they aren't very articulate? Listen to what they meant to say and encourage them to speak out more often. Each of these is a matter of personal growth.

It doesn't matter what choices you make. I may have preferences, but I won't grade you on them. I shall, however, grade you on your willingness to reflect on your own life. I don't expect you to change everything. Please identify the particular growth areas on which you wish to work in this class.

No Right Answers:

In each of these three areas, don't worry about "getting the right answer". This assignment is about you, not about what you think your instructor's expectations might be. You can always change your learning goals and at any time. You can report on these changes as part of the evaluative Reflection Paper that you will write at the end of the semester. The point of this assignment is not to set something in stone. The point is to start you thinking about your education in a new way.

[†] http://www.coolsociology.net/SOAN324WP/?page_id=187#Adjust