

Integrative Statement

Education is often characterized as a gateway for success. However, for a person that characterizes education as a continual life long process, I often find it difficult to locate connections between knowledge and life through traditional education. In my exploratory process, I began discovering a discipline in which my own life lessons and knowledge would intertwine. Through this process, I realized I cannot be compartmentalized, but instead I need to foster opportunities to spread my interests across various disciplines. By freeing myself of confining learning objectives, I was able to kindle my desire for knowledge. My quest leads me to my emphasis area: a self reflective examination of feminism, culture, and social tribulations.

My defined emphasis area focuses on themes of civil rights, cultural differences, self-reflection, women's issues, critical thinking, and an overall exploration of social dilemmas. Through these themes, I am able to achieve a more integrative and synthesizing observation of feminism, culture, and social tribulations. In addition, by focusing my studies across common themes, I am enabling myself to create connections of great importance and purpose.

The most encompassing part of a liberal education is connections. Through connections, one is able to make sense of the world and act within it in creative and innovative ways. Thus, through my quest, I have formulated various connections between coursework, learning skills, and employment. In addition, these connections have helped me promote experiences outside of the classroom that stimulate practical applications and civic engagement. Furthermore, the connections that I have created provide ways for me

to synthesis knowledge, therefore, as a learner I can better articulate, listen, and reflect upon my experiences.

Throughout my quest for integration, I have linked my educational process to contain three purposes of respectful engaged dialogue, deeper understanding of self, and diversity. Thus, through these three purposes, I have integrated coursework that supports exploring my "self" and others, relational pluralism, contextual knowing and knowledge, and mutually respectful dialogues among cultures and multiple meaning systems.

Ultimately, these purposes are providing synthesis for an academic arena of participatory democracy. Nevertheless, all of my courses create a ground for participatory democracy and intense class participation. Courses such as Autobiographical U.S. Civil Rights Era, African American Women's Studies, Introduction to Gay and Lesbian Studies, and Race and Ethnicity provide extremely necessary experiences because they provide and encourage diverse atmospheres.

By creating elaborate connections in my emphasis area, I realize that my ultimate goal is to connect knowledge and experience. Therefore, through work and outside of the classroom learning, I have been able to provide a forum for life long learning. Women's Issues Volunteer Corps, Women's Center Advisory Board, and YWCA Domestic Crisis Center have provided me with community involvement. These organizations and volunteer opportunities have given me a sense of democratic learning. Every student organization and volunteer opportunity has offered or enhances the sharing of lives to encourage humanity, education, and experience. In addition, working at Gordon's Food Service, Grand Valley State University Fieldhouse, and Kohl's Department Store have helped me experience life not as a student in a classroom, but as a woman trying to be

treated equal in the workforce. What I learn from being employed helps me comprehend connections between my education and how we are materialized, marginalized, and the implications of American culture in our daily lives. All of these places of employment provide me with complex reflections on my emphasis area: a self-reflective examination of feminism, culture, and social tribulations. Overall, the connections that I have formed between my education and life have helped me develop a perspective of my "self" in relation to knowledge and the world.

In addition, to creating connections between life and education, I propose to further explore these connections through meaningful action-oriented applications. As part of my Liberal Studies program, I am completing a practicum that is designed to give me a practical application of previously studied theory. I am proposing to complete my practicum through the McNair Scholars Program at Grand Valley State University. My research topic for summer 2005 is Education for Democracy. This topic will consist of further exploring my interest in Jane Addams and her thoughts on democracy and education. Overall, my practicum proposes a critical question for the world today. How can we reform education for the benefit of society? Through this examination, I hope to enhance my skills in self-reflection, critical analysis, writing, and theoretical thought. In addition, I hope to promote deeper connections between inside and outside the classroom learning. Through such efforts, I will promote that one of education's fundamental purposes is to prepare students for lives as active citizens.

In conclusion, the broader meaning of my liberal education reflects life long learning, thus, a liberal education is not something any of us ever achieve. Rather, "it is way of living in the face of our own ignorance, a way of groping toward a wisdom in full

recognition of our own folly, a way of educating ourselves without any illusion that our educations will ever be complete" (Cronon 142). Hence, providing an emphasis area that stimulates connections inside and outside of the classroom promotes a more in-depth and fulfilled learning process. Finally, when I combine community and education, I realize that education for freedom is also education for community.

Works Cited

Cronon, William. "Only Connect...The Goals of a Liberal Education." American Scholar, Vol. 67-No.4 (1998): 135-143.