

**Dr. Sherry Linkon**  
**ENGL750: Humanities in the Community**  
**Spring 2014**

### **Learning by Doing: Project Organizing and Reflection**

Over the course of the semester, you will work as a team to plan a public humanities event, which you will put on late in the term. As you move through this process, I will give you a series of tasks, and you will learn about project organizing through the experience of completing those tasks. Along with completing these tasks, you'll write – critically and reflectively – about the process. These critical reflections play an important role in your learning, because they ask you to articulate how the process works and how your own actions shape the process.

I'll post the prompt for each critical reflection on the course website. You will submit the reflective writing electronically, as attachments to e-mail messages to me. Write no more than three pages per week. No one except me will read these reflections, although I will draw from your notes, without identifying who wrote what, in framing class sessions. I hope you will feel free to write honestly and critically about what happens in class and in your group. The point is not to complain (though some complaining may feel good) but to identify how the choices you and your colleagues make, not only about your event but in your interactions as a team, affect the project and your relationships. If you avoid discussing difficulties or mistakes, you won't learn as much. I encourage you to consider the old adage about how you can't change other people's behavior. You are responsible for your own. Focus on your own choices and contributions, as well as those you observe in the group.

I will also consider your contributions to your group's project, based on my own observations and your own and your colleagues' reflections. In most cases, however, this matters far less than the quality of your thinking as demonstrated in your written reflections.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

- C = You complete all of the reflections on time, but they don't demonstrate critical thinking or substantive effort; you just barely fulfill your responsibilities on the group project, or you somehow make the group's work difficult
- B = You complete all of the reflections on time and your work demonstrates critical thinking about yourself, the issue at hand, and the organizing process; you do your share on the group project and work reasonably well with the group
- A = Along with completing the reflections on time and in a critical, reflective manner, you identify larger "lessons learned" and consider how this experience might be applied to other situations; you do more than your share, or you do your work especially well, and you contribute productively to the group's collaboration

## Reflection Assignment #1

### What assets, values, and challenges do you bring to the table?

Assets might include

- Prior experience with organizing or project planning
- Knowledge (What have you learned in your courses, through your work, through other experiences that prepares you well for planning a public humanities event?)
- Contacts (Who do you know who might help?)
- Skills (What can you do? What can you do especially well?)
- Character (How might your temperament, personality, style, or attitude help with this project?)
- Resources (Do you have access to funds or materials that might help?)

Values might include

- Your priorities – the things you care about, what you value, what inspires you
- Your ideas about how processes should work and people should interact – the way you want the world, this community, your project group, and yourself to behave and interact
- Your sociopolitical views – not so much where you stand on the political spectrum but your ideas about the relationship between individuals, communities, and institutions, your understanding of how the world operates

Challenges might include

- Character (How might your temperament, personality, style, or attitude interfere with your ability to participate fully or your ability to work well with others?)
- Fears (What anxieties or doubts do you have about working on this project?)
- Skill or knowledge gaps (What skills or knowledge do you wish you had as you begin this project?)
- Situational difficulties (What conditions in your day-to-day life might create difficulties as you work on this project?)

Why it matters:

How do you think your assets, value, and challenges will contribute to the group project? How might they create difficulties for you and for your teammates?

*You don't have space to provide answers for every one of these, so focus on a few that seem most useful or relevant to you.*

## **Reflection Assignment #2 – Submit by January 30**

During your team's first meeting, you used a common planning strategy to identify an idea to develop. What was the process like for you? I'm NOT asking whether you enjoyed the experience. I'm asking you to observe and reflect on your own experience. How did you feel and what did you think about as you worked through this process? What new ideas emerged – about yourself, about working with others, about the local community? Based on your experience, why do you think organizers use this strategy?

## **Reflection Assignment #3 – February 7**

During the group work this week, did you notice any of the following?

- Productive disagreement (discussing disagreements helps to advance the group's work)
- Unproductive disagreement (disagreement stalls the process)
- Unproductive agreement (agreement is false, because some people don't say what they're really thinking, or agreement is reached so quickly that the group does not fully explore possibilities)
- Leadership competition (2 or more people are trying to take on leadership roles, creating conflict or tension)
- Leadership sharing (2 or more people play complementary leadership roles)
- Disengagement (1 or more people simply don't participate)
- Attention to learning needs (moments when the group realizes that they don't have enough or the right kind of information or knowledge)
- Disintegration (the group moves quickly to assign individuals separate tasks rather than working together)
- Creating factions (the group breaks into a couple of unspoken but recognizable groups that see each other as "the problem")
- Overreliance on the group (at a time when it might be appropriate to work separately, the group keeps trying to work as a team, slowing down the process)
- Other patterns that facilitate, obstruct, or complicate the group's work

Identify 1 pattern that you observed, describe what happened, and write about what you think caused it, how the group responded, and what you might do differently, as a group AND as an individual, if you could re-run this week's session

### **Reflection Assignment #4 – Submit by February 28**

At this week's team meeting, you'll create an action plan and assign tasks. I'd like you to reflect on three aspects of your work.

- 1) What do you think of the project you're planning? What do you think it will accomplish? What problems, challenges, or limitations do you expect to encounter?
- 2) How did your group work together? What happened that worked well? What difficulties did your group encounter? How did you resolve them?
- 3) What are its greatest strengths of your plan? What, if anything, do you think needs more attention? What problems, if any, do you see with your list of tasks or division of labor? How will you, as an individual, work with your team to address any gaps or problems?

### **Reflection Assignment #5 – Submit by April 18**

You're nearing the end of the planning process. What is working well? What difficulties are you encountering? How will you address them?

In this reflection, I'd also like you to consider your individual role. How satisfied are you with the role you've played in the group? With your contributions to the project? With your own interactions with your colleagues? What, if anything, would you do differently?

### **Reflection Assignment #6 – Submit by April 25**

For the last reflective writing, write about 2 of the questions below. Be sure to support and illustrate your comments with examples from your experience this semester.

- Revisit your assets, values, and challenges notes from the beginning of the term. Based on your experience with the group project, what, if anything, would you add or change?
- Based on this experience, what do you find attractive and/or uncomfortable about project organizing? Would you want to pursue this kind of work? Why/why not?
- One of the goals of this project is to give you the chance to think critically about working with others – to move beyond “we all get along” to identify the issues involved in collaboration and develop strategies for working *well* with others. Based on your experience, what are the key issues involved in working with others and what strategies work best to make it work well?
- In theory, the work we do in this course should complement the humanities content you're learning in other courses and that you bring from your previous education. As you reflect on the group project, how would you describe the relationship between knowledge of culture and society and working to solve problems in the community?