

"Personal Growth Report" Final Paper Assignment

Goal: To achieve your own goal for personal growth during this semester.

Due: Finals week, at the exam time (tentatively, Monday, 10 December).

Assignment: As we all know, you learn a lot in school—just not necessarily the things the class is trying to teach. This assignment will give you *course credit* for such "outside" achievements. For this assignment, set yourself a goal for something you personally would like to achieve during this semester. Make a plan about how to achieve it. At the end of the semester, report on your efforts and successes (or lack of success).

Details:

1. Think about how you want to grow as a person through taking this class. Here are some examples of goals you might want to set:

- The idea of debating fills you with anxiety; you want to develop your courage.
- Group work is dreadful; you want to develop your leadership skills.
- You're stressed because you're committed to too many activities; you want to develop your time-management skills.
- In this course, you have the opportunity to work in order to learn, as opposed to working to achieve a grade; that's a challenge, but something you'd like to try.

Come and talk to me in order to brainstorm and clarify your goal.

2. Make a plan about how to achieve your goal. What are you going to focus on—what are you going to try to do? Again, come and talk to me in order to brainstorm and clarify a specific plan! I have readings on each of the above topics that I could lend you, for example:

- Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* (just what it sounds like).
- *Making Meetings Work* and numerous other books.
- Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*: "Put First Things First"—how to stop doing urgent, but fundamentally unimportant things.
- Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*: why having *too* many options actually makes you more unhappy.
- Inge Bell, *This Book is Not Required*, chapter 1 "Grades": on experimenting on not "internalizing" or buying into the grading system; also good chapters on Wisdom and other topics.

3. Make a plan about how you are going to gather *evidence* of your progress. At the end of the semester, I expect you to hand in something that documents your work to achieve your personal growth goal. (In other words, I'm going to be asking you HDYKT?) For example:

- If you want to work on your delivery skills, you might start a journal (or even an online "blog") to record your reflections immediately after each debate—what you did well, what still needs work.
- If you want to develop your group leadership skills, you might pick a specific group meeting, and talk about the challenges your group faced and how you helped meet those challenges.
- If you want to develop your time management skills, you might start setting daily work goals, and keeping records about how you are meeting them.

Again, come and talk to me in order to brainstorm and clarify how you will gather evidence of your progress.

4. If you have a draft of your personal growth report done before Thanksgiving, I'd be happy to look it over and discuss it with you or give you written feedback. Just send it to me by email. But after Thanksgiving break, if you want me to look at it you'll have to bring it to my regularly scheduled office hours.

5. If you absolutely hate this assignment, come and talk with me by the end of September and we will work out an alternative grading arrangement.

6. I strongly recommend:

- **that you do not wait until the last minute to select a goal and make up a report. That strategy will result in failing this assignment.**
- **that you come in and talk to me about your goal, how to achieve it, and most importantly, how to *document* your progress so I can give you a good grade.**

Assessment standards: This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade. You do *not* have to achieve your goal in order to get an "A". You *do* have to show me that you tried, and that you understand yourself better. A good report:

1. Is *worthwhile*. The goal you selected is a significant one for you, and you made significant attempts to achieve it.

2. Is *honest*. If you haven't achieved your goal—say so. We all know what the “standard story” for a student is: start the class with high motivation, work hard, make some mistakes, overcome them, end with success. Ignore that story. Tell *your* story.

3. Is *specific*. Don't say you learned a lot and will remember it forever. Tell me exactly what you achieved (or didn't), and how you achieved it (or what didn't work). Refer to specific evidence that documents your achievement (or failures).

4. Is *well written*, or at least not badly written. Good style, appropriate references to sources, no typos—everything that shows you're proud of your work.