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Photo Documentation of Co-Curricular Involvement

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Context: Out of class and in-class; College & Life Skills

Keywords: first-year experience, co-curricular activities, visuals

Student Activity Time: 1 hour outside of class; 5 minutes in-class

After participating in a co-curricular activity, students reflected on their experience through photo documentation.

Introducing the Reflection Activity

In their first quarter at Rose-Hulman, all students take a required College and Life Skills course. As part of this course, the educator talked to students about involvement in co-curricular activities in college. Then students were required to get involved in one co-curricular activity and to reflect on their involvement through photo documentation (e.g., attend an organization's meeting, volunteer at a service day, participate in a social event). The purpose of the reflection component of this activity was to encourage students to consciously think about what it means to be involved in co-curricular activities and mindfully choose what they will be involved in during college.

At the end of new student orientation, first-year students were encouraged to attend the student organizations fair. In the first week of the course, the educator discussed the benefits of involvement on campus. After introducing the activity, students had the rest of the quarter to participate in a campus organization and complete the assignment. In this introduction, the educator invited students to think about their involvement in clubs and organizations in high school. Many of these students were incredibly active in clubs and organizations in high school. This initial reflection opportunity created an entrée into a conversation about what it meant to be involved in co-curricular activities during college. This conversation also provided a space to talk with students about the student organizations fair, asking questions like what organizations did they sign up for and why. Throughout the quarter, on their own time, students engaged in at least one co-curricular activity and documented their involvement with photos.

In the 9th week of the quarter students submitted 5-10 photos of their experience. Before the 10th week of the quarter, the educator looked through the students' reflections and compiled a PowerPoint presentation with 1-2 pictures from each student. She also graded the assignment using a credit/no credit approach—if students did what was asked, they received credit. In the last class session, the educator shared the slides with students and had each student comment on their experience and what was represented in the photos in order to reflect on their involvement in the co-curricular activity. During this conversation the educator asked probing questions—how did you benefit from your involvement in that

activity? How else could your involvement in this organization be beneficial? This additional reflection led to a class discussion about the benefits of various co-curricular involvements.

In terms of outcomes, by participating in this activity and associated reflection, there was potential for the students to consciously think about involvement. There was potential for the students to be more mindful of their time and purposefully choose to be involved in activities that not only interested them but also provided benefits. Further, through class discussion students could see other options available and reflect on how other types of organizations may provide other benefits.

Recreating the Reflection Activity

| | Description |
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| 1 | Introduce the assignment to students—get involved in a campus organization and photo document your experience. |
| 2 | Review all the photos and compile the photos into a presentation slide deck (e.g., PowerPoint). |
| 3 | Share the PowerPoint slides with students and encourage discussion as a way to wrap-up the activity. |

In the words of the Educator: Tips and Tricks

Know your audience. An important aspect of this reflection activity is to know your audience. For example, if we were at a liberal arts school in the English department, students would expect to be writing. Since we are an engineering institution, most students have a preconceived perception of writing—uninteresting, not related to engineering, etc. Because of this attitude, and the fact that our students are strong visual learners, I think it is important to try to make reflection activities a little more interesting and appealing. We are not tricking them into doing reflection, but we can disguise it a little bit to make it more interesting.

Talk about activities as reflection. While disguising reflection may be an entrée into getting students to actively engage in reflection, I think it is important to connect the dots for students and engage students in a discussion about reflection. In connecting an activity to reflection, we could talk about what it means and how students can use it in the future.

Consider using this reflection activity in different contexts. This reflective activity is not limited to co-curricular involvement. For example, I actually use photos in another lesson on study skills. I have the students go out in pairs and spend 15 minutes taking a couple of pictures of people studying on campus (to answer the question “what does studying look like to you?”). They come back to class, email me the pictures, I pull them up on the projector, and we have a discussion about those photos. I first have the pairs describe what is taking

place and where the studying occurred. Then we have a group discussion regarding what is good about the setting and what is bad about the setting. Ultimately, the “what is bad” is a trick question. I explain at the end that it is important to find a setting that works for each of them, given that everyone is different.

What was the inspiration for the reflection activity? Throughout my PhD program, we had to focus on a curriculum and different aspects of that curriculum—breaking it down and re-creating. That background has influenced how I designed the course. Additionally, I continue to think about what skills the students need to succeed in college; reflection is an important skill for their academic and professional careers.