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#3 Writing Assignment: Reflection

When I started my college career in 2019, I believed that I was a good writer but my writing would not be the focal point in my degree. Even as someone who was not pursuing a degree in writing at the time, this was foolish of me to think. Once I made the decision to change my major to Professional Writing within Interdisciplinary Studies, I realized that the field of writing and the varying disciplines intertwined within it are extremely relevant to the academic experience. Interdisciplinary studies is a “diverse and growing academic field” that has allowed me to grow alongside it (Repko & Stozak, 2016, p. 42). Communication, critical thinking through research, and work ethic are among the most influential skills that IDS has taught me. Additionally, IDS has broadened my education into various disciplines that I would not have gotten such unique exposure to such as science, technology, and philosophy. I would not have been able to develop the skills that I feel are the most important to me without this exposure.

Shortly after being fully immersed in my courses for IDS Professional Writing, I realized that my workload was much heavier than it was before. Every degree requires writing papers to some extent, but writing is key to the Interdisciplinary experience. This allows Interdisciplinary students to enter disciplines of their interests as “fully empowered writers rather than conventional followers” of the standard practices of academia (Haynes, 1996). With this empowerment comes the need for a strong work ethic: an overarching theme in my coursework. While I had an adequate work ethic in my early years at ODU, the impending deadlines of multiple papers at the same time gave me a wake up call. On average, the essays I write for my Professional Writing courses fall between 1,500 and 2,000 words. On their own, I am able to write essays of this word count within a few days; however, they are never on their own. In the

spring semester of 2022, I took technical writing, writing in the disciplines, and interdisciplinary studies at the same time; and like any other course load, due dates overlapped. Having multiple papers due at the same time forced me to discover what I need to do to work efficiently. I found that I work best when I am not at home, where I don't have the distractions of things that are familiar or comfortable to me. I produce some of my best work in local coffee shops and libraries. I also discovered that designating specific timeframes to do my work improves my work ethic and the efficiency of my writing. College students are notorious at leaving things to the last minute, myself included. However, there comes a point when this pattern does more harm than students realize. From my experience, reaching 400 level classes is a great wakeup call for a student's work ethic. The research aspect of Interdisciplinary Studies requires time for searching, reading, analyzing, and implementing that cannot be done in an all-nighter. I write with a good conscience knowing that I specifically dedicate time toward the content of my papers, making them not only worth my knowledge and time, but the knowledge and time of the reader. I am confident that my transition into a career will be smooth due to the work ethic that I have developed through research papers, reflective essays, and other writing assignments within my degree.

Communication is a relevant and common theme in my coursework and as an introvert, it is a skill that I have to continuously work at. For my Interdisciplinary Studies course, I wrote a research paper exploring how technical writing skills across different disciplines are improved through collaborative writing projects. Through the research I did for this paper, I discovered that technical writing "serves students with different majors and interests and aims to prepare them for workplace communication" (Mateeva, 2008, p. 388). Moreover, the research I conducted makes it clear that communication is a vital skill to have in the workplace and sets potential employees above the rest. I am lucky that within my coursework, I have been given many opportunities to practice and improve my communication skills. At ODU, oral communication courses are an undergraduate lower-division requirement; however my coursework in world

cultural studies furthers the relevance of communication in my college career. The work I have completed throughout my World Cultures and Literatures course allowed me to explore the different ways in which we observe and interact with our world. One of the most memorable concepts I took away from that class is to not presume that people think a certain way, because everyone has had different experiences socially and academically. This mindset emphasizes how important it is to develop communication skills in one's undergraduate degree, because communication skills create adaptable, understanding, and attentive employees. For my IDS e-portfolio, I highlight my communication skills through the artifacts I have produced in my Japanese coursework as well as group projects across various courses. I chose to include group work in my portfolio not only to show my communication skills, but also because the collaborative aspect of the work delivers "important insights into learning effects and student progress" which aids me in the reflection aspect of Interdisciplinary Studies (Tatzl, 2012, p. 279). Considering that I am naturally an introvert, communication being a common theme in my coursework was intimidating at first, but I have learned to appreciate it for its benefits to my writing and character.

Several of the artifacts that I display in my IDS portfolio are research papers from different courses and disciplines. In Interdisciplinary Studies, research is used to "produce new knowledge in the form of more comprehensive understandings of complex problems" (Repko & Stozak, 2016, p.42). With research papers being a recurring assignment in my field, critical thinking is a common theme and skill that I encounter in my studies. Critical thinking stands out as a theme due to its ability to make writing more coherent and concise. When I write a paper, my main goal is to take the information that I have gathered and present it in a way that is persuasive, informative, or entertaining based on the task that is given to me. With a research paper, my challenge is gathering information that is relevant to the question that I am asking. Gathering this information is done through multiple steps and it cannot be done without critical thinking skills. In my largest research paper that I present in my e-portfolio, I developed a

specific question before starting my literature search: How are technical writing skills improved through collaborative writing projects? From this, I identified the disciplines that are relevant to my question and did research to become familiar with the disciplines individually. I was then able to gather the assumptions of each discipline and take that into consideration in researching my overarching theme. While the research process strengthens my critical thinking skills, critical thinking is also necessary to complete the process. In writing numerous research papers I have learned that in order to complete the assignment at hand, being able to consider a large quantity of information and identify which pieces are most relevant is key. When looking to the future, I see that the critical thinking skills I have developed through interdisciplinary research will present in the workplace as open-mindedness, problem solving, and active listening, all of which will allow me to stand out and excel.

While my original plan for my college career was to pursue World Languages and Cultures, I believe that my switch to Professional Writing under Interdisciplinary Studies was a strong choice. The incorporation of multiple disciplines into my degree has not only made my learning experience more enjoyable, but also more beneficial in the long term. The main themes that I have encountered, work ethic, communication, and critical thinking have increased my confidence in my performance as a writer. My e-portfolio has required me to gather all of the artifacts that reflect these skills that I have developed and put them all in one place, allowing me to reflect on the challenges I have faced and worked through. The portfolio is extremely rewarding to look through and though I still have weaknesses, my strengths are highlighted above all else and I am able to see how my skills have developed overtime. I find that these aspects of the IDS eportfolio have allowed me to look forward to my future rather than be nervous about it.

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