

Strategies for Incorporating Vocational Reflection into Lesson Design

Presented by the Center for Faith and Vocation

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Below are several ideas for how to incorporate ways for students to make connections between what they are learning in a course and their own sense of purpose and direction. Some will work better for different educators than others. They are not meant to be one size fits all or directly applicable without some alterations or adjustments. Faculty know their courses, their students, and their own skill sets best. These strategies are meant to assist in affirming and expanding the toolbox for faculty.

Note on Language: “Vocation” for the CFV is a broad term that we use to articulate people’s purpose, their meaning, the contribution to society they can make, and/or how they live into their values. While the term originates out of a Christian context, at Butler we use it more broadly; a religious faith is not a prerequisite to reflection on one’s meaning and purpose. However, language matters and sometimes using other words can be helpful. Consider words that may relate to your field that connect to purpose, meaning, personal mission, direction, authentic self, passionate living, etc.

Instructor Vocational Narrative

Description: The professor or instructor spends time in class telling their own story of how they came to dedicate significant time or energy to the field or subject matter of the course. Some key questions the professor could think about:

- Why is this subject compelling to you? Why does it matter for the world?
- What big questions is this subject asking? Why are you asking those questions?
- What solutions to which problems is your subject proposing?
- In your research, what are you trying to find out and why does it matter?
- Who has helped you chart a path to becoming an expert in your field or this subject?
- What personal life experiences were pivotal in your path to dedicating a portion of your life to this subject or these issues (people, texts, travel, experiences, courses, etc. etc.)

Next steps for students: After the instructor tells their story in class, students can be invited to ask questions. There could be an exercise for students to interview each other on the vocational stories based on key questions. There could be an assignment where students write out a brief account of their vocational story leading them to this field or subject.

Student Writing – Vocational Narrative

Description: After explaining what vocation means or providing an example of a vocational narrative, students are asked to write out their own vocational journey. This can include a broad approach to their life in general and also request them to connect to the subject of the particular course. Some key questions students should think about:

- Who has been most influential in your life?

- What experiences have led you becoming who you are?
- What would you say is the intersection between what you love to do and what the world needs done?
- What influences have led you to pursue the major or course of career path that you envision yourself pursuing?
- How does the learning in this course impact your future learning and actions?
- How does the learning in this course relate to the contribution you hope to make to the world after you graduate?

Next steps: After students do this writing, either as a short informal write or as an outside of class short essay, students can discuss what they wrote in class. Students can share in pairs, do round robins, or discuss as a whole group as a way to build community in class and further provide a chance to verbally articulate how the learning in the class relates to the individual trajectory.

“My Story” Moments

Description: This is a quick write for meaning making. At the end of a lesson or the end of a unity, create a few minutes for students to quickly write about how the topic of the day relates to the student’s own story, which can mean a career path or personal goals. These are short. They do not need to be shared with others, although they can be. They are meant to be a practice that is incorporated several times throughout the semester so students get used to writing connections between the learning and their own vocation. This can be adapted as a verbal exercise, where students do it as a “Think, Pair, Share” and they first jot down some ideas, then speak to a partner, and then some share with the wider class.

“My Strategy” Moments

Description: Create quick moments of meaning-making as small short assignments that relate both to the course material and to the individual identity of the student. These can be short writing exercises, mapping out particular ideas, graphic organizers, etc. The notion of a “my strategy” moment is to encourage students to identify their own life strategy as informed by the course material. They should be about 15 minutes at the end of class, don’t grade their quality but simply completion, and stipulate that students cannot leave early if they finish early and cannot use technology; it is a time to think and reflect.

Example: In the strategic capstone class in the Lacy School of Business, Dr. Marleen Pritchard McCormick has designed a series of “My Strategy” moments uniquely tailored to her course:

Course Content Topic	My Strategy Moment
1. Intro to class	1. Mapping students own vocation story
2. Companies make decisions, set priorities and have trade-offs	2. Writing about personal trade-offs and priorities
3. Vision and mission of firms	3. What is your vision/mission and values?
4. Analysis of competencies, SWOT	4. Self-analysis: what do you offer, SWOT
5. How do you grow partnerships and alliances	5. Who are your mentors, partners, and supporters?
6. What is “success” for the company?	6. What is “success” for you?

Next Steps: Over the course of the semester, professors can collect these short assignments, give students credit, and also return them as a vocational portfolio or ask for further meaning-making writing on the full body of the “moments” at the end of the semester.

Values Sort

Description: Connecting the values of the students to the issues related in the course can be very important. Using a Values Sort process can help do that. Students are given 52 cards, each with a value written on the card. They go through 3 steps, laid out one at a time, by the facilitator. First: pick 20 values most important to you. Second: sort your 20 values into 3 categories that make sense to you, any categories. Third: pick one category that is most important as your core values. Then students discuss in pairs or small groups: what was hard, what came easy, what do you see about yourself, how did you sort the categories, how does this define you, what is missing, etc. Then draw connections to the course explicitly by asking in groups: what values do you have that align to the content/discussions of our class, what values do you have that connect you to this field, would working or serving on the subject matters of our class align with your values (why or why not), etc. A list of the values ready for print and further consultation on this exercise can be obtained at the CFV or by email (dgmeyers@butler.edu).

Class Discussions or Assignments that Put the Students into Context (i.e. Case Studies)

Description: Class discussions or assignments that are framed in a way where the student is asked to place *themselves* into the context of the course subject matter causes students to think how *they* relate to and respond to the issues of the course. Some examples of how to do this:

- Use a **case study** of a real example that pertains to the subject matter. Discuss the details of the case but also ask students how *they* would respond if they were in the role of a particular individual in the case. Give students a chance to articulate their own values as they relate to the subject of the course and to defend those values and decisions with peers in discussion.
- Use an **editorial article or text** with a clear opinion. Discuss the details and content of the article but also ask students how *they* would have written this opinion. There are always questions of do you agree or disagree. Can students also reflect on *how* they would have made the arguments using the experiences, values, and pursuits of their own life?
- Create a **scenario** where students take on different roles in a fictional situation where they are faced to address a situation, make a decision, or arrive at a solution to a problem that pertains to the content of the class. Have students work from their own personal identities, experiences, values, etc. as though they themselves were part of this situation and had to address it with the tools they currently had. This is not role play. It is a chance for students to put themselves into a scenario related to the course material and engage with it.

In all cases, professors can design an output that requires students to write or share how *they* would respond. The main goal with these discussions or assignments is to create an opportunity for students to imagine themselves in the complexity of the subject matter and pull

from their own vocational reference points (identity, values, community, experience, mentors, etc.) to identify a response.

One-on-One Conversations with Students

Description: This can sound tedious, however there are some ways to build it into the course if you have a group of 25 or less students. One option is to make 1 office hours visit a requirement that is graded during the course of the semester. You can allow students to come with any topic: help on an assignment, discussing a reading, etc. etc. However, make it part of your practice to ask in those 1:1 conversations, “What is your big goal as you think about how you will spend your life after college? How does this class relate to that, for you?” or a version of this question. Using some of the time to learn more about the perceived vocation of your students and asking them how the class you teach is relating to that is a terrific practice that can lead to further discussion with you. Alternatively, faculty could require an office hour visit for this particular purpose and have a sign up process so as to not blend questions on readings or assignments with this distinct purpose.

General Practices for Vocational Meaning Making in Course Design

Based on the text Helping College Students Find Purpose by Robert Nash and Michele Murray, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Tell Stories

Tell your own stories, encourage students to tell their stories through writing or discussion, find the stories in literature, sciences, and the arts that relate to the subject at hand. Tell stories of success and challenge. Ask students to identify the 4-5 most significant moments of their lives that have shaped what they believe, how they think, and what they value; then ask how those stories relate to this course, their community, their future goals. Vulnerability begets vulnerability – the educator will set the tone of how deep storytelling can go (Nash and Murray, 128-136).

Ask Philosophical Questions

Avoid being the “sage on the stage” and instead strive for the “guide on the side,” someone who is intellectually curious about the content and asking students to weigh in. Good philosophical questions will invite students to navigate the intellectual strengths and weaknesses of the discipline (Nash and Murray, 136-141).

Create Purposeful Silence

Relentless distractions and the pace of busy college life can make it difficult to process and digest the information and learning of a challenging course. A few minutes of silence at the beginning or end of class can provide a chance to clear the brain for the learning or pull out a key take-away. This can be accompanied by a journaling practice. Some common questions for a 5-minute silent reflection at the end of a lesson might include:

- What is your reaction to this?
- What questions do you still have?

- How is this related to your life?
- How is this the same or different from your experience in the world?
- What surprised you?
- How does this challenge your perspective?
- How does this align with your perspective?

(Nash and Murray, 142-149)

Tackle Tough Topics

Faith, race, politics, poverty, war, religion, gender, and much more are all challenging and complex topics and can derail a well-managed class if not part of the plan. As a result, some faculty will avoid these topics. Nevertheless, these topics have the potential to create the most meaning-making and make direct connection between class content and personal identity/vocation. Some faculty feel they are not experts in these kinds of topics or discussions, however, the experience as a facilitator and one's own human empathy can often be the right place from which to come in letting conversations move into tough uncharted territories (Nash and Murray, 149-155).

Connect Content and Context

Context allows for learning to come to life. The best approaches to incorporating real-world context into a course relate to service learning, such as the Indianapolis Community Requirement and the work done by the Center for Citizenship and Community. Any service learning needs to be followed up with reflection in order to create meaning. If service learning is not possible, consider strong case studies. Asking students how the content of a course excites or confuses a student based on their context can help this process. Asking students how the lesson disrupts their previous notions of the world will require students to connect the lesson to their context as well (Nash and Murray 155-159).