THE VOICES PROJECT: Disability

ASSIGNMENT DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this assignment is to experience and share the life stories of people from “groups of difference” within the framework of psychological theories and principles. The assignment is called *The Voices Project* because it allows students to hear the ”voices” and life stories of people from cultural groups with which they may be unfamiliar. By getting to know people of different cultures and hearing their stories, students in the class will be able to identify and critically analyze the stereotypes and the roots of prejudice and discrimination that are prevalent in social norms and how they affect people’s lives.

Your task in this assignment is to document the life of a person considered part of a “group of difference” in society focusing on themes related to this Intro to Psychology course. You and a partner will be assigned a person to interview (your “interviewee”). You will have three, one-hour meetings with your interviewees to gather information about his/her life. In addition to the interview meetings, you are required to attend one “cultural event” that reflects important aspects of the groups’ cultural values, rituals, or community. Based on the information gathered during these events, you and your partner will collaborate to write a mini-memoir of your interviewee’s life as it relates to themes of difference. These memoirs will be shared in class and during a campus-wide program called *The Voices Project* held on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_in the Lemmond Auditorium at Misericordia University.

The project contains several different parts that will occur over the entire Spring 2012 semester. The guidelines and grading criteria for each part are presented in this handout.

**Part I: Attitude Survey #1**

As part of this project, students will complete two survey packets asking about your attitudes towards groups of differences: one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. These surveys will help you evaluate the impact of the assignment on your attitudes across the semester. The surveys are not graded but are required as part of the experience of the assignment and can be referred to in the essays. **The first survey packet will be distributed in class on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and collected on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.** Students who are absent on these days are responsible for contacting the instructor to arrange alternative pickup and drop off times. ***Students who do not turn in their surveys will receive half credit for their papers.***

**Part II: Interviews**

Students will work in pairs to interview a person from a “group of difference” in the community. The “groups” represent a wide range of aspects of diversity including race, religion, ethnicity, language, nationality, gender, social class, health conditions, and sexual orientation. The guidelines for interviews include:

* Pairs must meet 3 times (for one-hour each time) with their interviewee. The purpose of the first meeting is for students and interviewee to get to know and become comfortable talking with each other. During the second and third meetings, the student pairs should gather information about how being a member of that group has affected his/her life. Each student pair will develop their own set of interview questions based on the directions for the mini-memoir. Pairs should ensure that their questions are broad and specific enough to gather the information required to write an effective mini-memoir (see guidelines in Part III for topics to cover in interview).
* The second and third interviews will be tape recorded so students can focus on listening instead of writing everything down during the interview. The tapes will be kept in a locked place and erased immediately after students are done listening to them. Students will listen to the tapes in a private room in the library (see Part VIII section on *confidentiality)*.

**Part III: The Voices Project Paper: A Mini-Memoir**

Based on the information gathered from the interviews and cultural event, each student pair will write a 5-page biographical narrative about how being a part of this cultural group has influenced the life of their interviewee. Students should write the mini-biography from the first person perspective as if *you* are the person (using the word “I” instead of the person’s name) using your own words. These papers are due to be uploaded to the Blackboard Assignment Dropbox by the start of class on ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. The essays should reflect well-developed and clearly expressed content (e.g., ideas, thoughts, and arguments), logical organization, appropriate grammar and spelling. *Students who turn in papers after this deadline will have 1 point deducted for each late “day” ( defined as a 24-hour period). Papers turned in more than a week after the deadline will not be accepted.*

1. **Memoir content: the mini-memoirs should address ALL of the following topics somewhere in the narrative:**
2. **Childhood experiences of difference:**

* First experience of recognizing or realizing your “difference”
* How school experiences (academically and socially) were affected by your “difference”
* Changes over time from preschool through college
* Consider interactions with adults (e.g., teachers, principals) and peers
* First moment when being “different” affected you in a negative way
* First moment when being “different” affected you in a positive way

1. **Family experience of difference**

* how parents initially reacted to your “difference” (if applicable) and any changes in their response over time
* how family experiences (e.g., parents, nuclear family, extended family, grandparents) have been affected by your “difference”
* how family experiences (e.g., parents, nuclear family, extended family, grandparents) have affected *your* feelings, thoughts, and behaviors regarding your “difference” and yourself in general

1. **Experience of difference with outside community**

* First moment when being “different” affected you in a negative way
* First moment when being “different” affected you in a positive way
* Assumptions, stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs that you have encountered about our group of “difference”
* Experiences of prejudice and /or discrimination you have encountered because of your “difference”
* How portrayals of your group of “difference” in the media and/or popular culture have impacted how others view or treat you
* How portrayals of your group of “difference” in the media and /or popular culture have impacted how the person view’s or feels about himself/herself

1. **Experience of difference within your community**

* Level of connection or disengagement with group’s culture and norms
* Conflicts that exist within the community and how they relate to you (e.g., also consider generational difference within the group)
* Any values, practices, rituals, beliefs, and/or activities that you feel are important to maintaining and preserving the group’s culture
* Any ways in which you wish to distance or disconnect yourself from identification with the group and the rationale

1. **Your experience of your difference**

* How different does this person feel they are compared to others and what effect do these perceptions have on his/her life (e.g., job, school, relationships, health, psychological happiness, etc.)
* Has the person’s perceptions and emotions regarding their difference changed over time, and if so , in what ways?
* Best or most enjoyable aspect of being “different” in this way
* Worst or most difficult aspect of being “different” in this way
* Would the person change anything about themselves if they could
* Would the person change anything about society if they could
* 3 wishes the person has for improving the quality of their life or the lives of others who share their “difference”

1. **Memoir content:** students must also incorporate and integrate 3 principles, theories, or concepts from the Intro to Psychology course into the paper. These 3 principles cannot include stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination and must be smoothly reflected in the story yet clearly apparent to the instructor. Students should put APA style citations to these three concepts in footnotes or endnotes and can provide a brief description of why the concept is being used in the memoir.
2. **Memoir style and mechanics:** students will write the memoir from the FIRST PERSON perspective using the word “I” to adopt the identity of their interviewee. Students should express the person’s story in their (students’) own words instead of using the actual words of the participant. If essential, students can insert brief direct quotations for accentuation purposes’ however, 98% of the words should be in the authors’ (students’) voice. This transformation of expression from participant to student will “fictionalize” the story and give students’ their won venue to express the ideas and meaning of their interviewee’s story. Students must strike a balance between maintaining *accuracy* of the information shared by their interviewees and demonstrating *creativity* in their unique communication of the person’s life as it relates to the themes of the memoir.

Although the memoir is a fictionalized story based on true events, the paper should reflect well-developed and clearly expressed content (e.g., ideas, thoughts, and arguments), logical organization, appropriate grammar and spelling. Students are highly encouraged to have their papers reviewed by a member of the Writing Center (x6191) and can earn points for extra credit to be added to their papers.

**Part IV: Reflection Journals**

As a Service Learning course, this class emphasizes the development of student writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills through reflection. As defined by the Service Leadership Center,

“Reflection is a guided process of exploring and clarifying values identified during service learning experiences. Reflection provides the student and faculty with the opportunity to state ideas; hypotheses and feelings that develop based on the service learning experience. According to Dewey (1933) reflective thought has five stages: 1) perplexity, confusion, doubt; 2) attentive interpretation of the given elements; 3) examination, exploration, and analysis to define and clarify the problem; 4) elaboration of the tentative hypothesis; 5) testing the hypothesis by doing something overtly to bring about anticipated results.” (p. 7)

Students will keep an electronic reflection journal throughout the semester as a means of enhancing self-awareness of emotions and thoughts related to their interviews, cultural event, in-class and out-of-class diversity programs, and their overall experience with the project. **You will have 10 journal entries in total and the journal is worth 10% of the final grade in the course. Journals are due to the Blackboard Assignment Dropbox on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by the start of class.** Student journals will be evaluated based upon their level of self-insight, critical thinking, integration of psychology knowledge and course material, and clarity of expression.

Templates for each journal entry will be available on Blackboard and should be downloaded and save in ONE file to be uploaded by the due date. Please label your file **Last name Reflectionjournal** before upoloading. See the “Project Overview” and “Timeline” for the list of dates and activities to journal.

**Part V: Attitude Survey #2**

**The second round of surveys will be distributed in class on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and collected in class on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.** Students who are absent on these days are responsible for contacting the instructor to arrange alternative pickup and drop off times. *Students who do not turn in their surveys will receive half credit for their papers.*

**Part VI: Related Issues**

**Confidentiality:** the participants in this project will be sharing personal information with you, so it is important for everyone in the class to keep all documents, notes, audiotapes, and materials related to this project *private* and *confidential*. In order to ensure privacy, please keep all materials in a private place that cannot be easily accessed by other students, parents, coworkers, etc. Here are recommendations to ensure privacy and confidentiality:

* Do not leave notes or documents related to this project in public places that are easily visible to others (e.g., library tables, computer labs)
* To protect the identity of your interviewee, give the person an alternate name and refer to that person by that name throughout the interview, discussions in class, and the memoir paper. Please do not use the person’s real name in any document.
* Audiotapes will be kept by the Psychology department secretary, Rose Hometchko, and can be signed out for reviewing in a private room in the library. Tapes should be returned to Rose immediately after reviewing is completed. Once tapes are reviewed, please rewind the tape and record over it for the next interview.
* Keep any documents related to the project on the Blackboard course server and ONE other computer source (e.g., personal computer hard drive, one flash-key). Be sure to back up your documents but do not keep more than two copies.