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**120 Day - Course Learning Journal**

The journal is a written reflection of your learning journey while working in each course and is an integration of the essential elements of the course within your professional field of interest. The objective of the course journal is to produce a degree of acculturation, integrating new ideas into your existing knowledge of each course. This is also an opportunity to communicate with your professor consistent with the Tutorial Methodology to express insights gained as a result of the course of study. Submit the course learning journal via DIAL. The course learning journal should be 5-7 pages in length, and should include the following sections:

**Introduction** – Describe the expectations of the graduate program and the campus residency component for that course. Summarise the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate program as a whole, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence.

**Personal Growth** - Describe your personal growth–how the course stretched or challenged you– as well as your progress in mastery of course content and skills during the week and through subsequent readings – what new insights or skills you gained.

**Reflective Entry** - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualisation (or adaptation and relevant application) of new learning into your professional field. What questions or concerns have surfaced about your professional field as a result of your study?

**Future Expectations** - Continue the journal by addressing questions and concerns you now have relating to the graduate program expectations.

**Conclusion** – Synthesise the three body sections above, evaluating the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals.

Cross Cultural Dynamics class was an extension of that previous Sociological Methodology class but you not only had to consider the general makeup of society but the impact of a multicultural society on the global community. I expected that the course would address cultural interactions on a macro level, but I was surprised that the principles could be applied on a micro level. The class placed in Core four is beneficial as it helps contextualises the upcoming DSL action plan project, which focuses on actioning a social cause. As an individual from a multicultural/ multi-religious society, I am now more aware that my outlook may differ from an American standpoint. As I contemplate what I wish to focus my action plan on, I will consider how I perceive the world from a micro and macro cultural standpoint and how my Trinidadian perspective influences my perception.

Throughout the semester, I had first-hand Cross-cultural interactions with immigrants who had recently entered the country. The stretching and insights gained from this course stemmed from allowing me to intentionally analyse my interactions with this new demographic of people with whom I live in close community. During the week of Core, the scoring of the Cultural Intelligence scale was very enlightening as it pointed out that traits and behaviours that I do unconsciously show a high level of cultural intelligence, this was encouraging as I operate in a sphere where I constantly have to interact with people from different backgrounds and upbringings than mine.

An impactful discussion also happened during Core week focused on missionary work and the interactions you have with people in foreign lands and the proper way to do this. The realisation I have had is how much my field of work is my mission; as I go about my day interacting with many people, I must ensure that they can see Christ through me. Including immigrants and refugees in Trinidad and Tobago is another aspect of missions that have been introduced to me as I interact with this new culture and navigate my relationships with them.

The 20-day assignment allowed me to research the Venezuelans and better understand them and the rich culture that these immigrants were a part of before becoming displaced people. The research also brought to light a better understanding of the country’s economic turmoil, which would have prompted Venezuelans to leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere in a land different from theirs with a culture not quite familiar and a language different from theirs. While the 20-day assignment would have made me aware of the differences between Trinidadian and Venezuelan culture despite the two countries’ proximity, the 100-day assignment allowed me to identify the similarities between the two countries. The 100-day assignment involved analysing a programme using the Community Development principles; I critiqued a cultural exchange between the Police Youth Clubs and some Venezuelan immigrants. This exercise allowed me to consider the initiative’s effectiveness and its impact on both the Venezuelan and Trinidadian youth. This interaction was enlightening as it brings to light an essential concept in community development: despite the research, you may do on a particular culture, there is no richer experience than actually interfacing and interacting with a group of people to gain respect and appreciation for their culture. The exercise was very serendipitous as when core week finished, it was only then I became aware of the cultural exchange, so I was able to participate and observe the initially scheduled activity and gain first-hand knowledge of their practices.

Working as a Youth Development Officer (YDO), I am one of the people on the frontline to address the various issues that young people in different communities face. I use a collaborative approach when I go into communities to assist youth-serving and youth-led groups. Multiple stakeholders arecalled upon depending on the project and particular needs of the community; community policing, guidance counsellors, psychologists, businessmen, and other community stakeholders are sometimes called on to assist, dependent on the objective of the project to be developed. The course would have reinforced the importance of an integrative, multidisciplinary approach is needed when working with people. Often a theological approach is ignored, but as Christians, we must remember that we have an advocate in the form of the Holy Spirit when attempting to affect positive social change.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there is a need to address the ever-increasing youth issues however, there is little understanding by the decision-makers of the various factors that contribute to these problems. As a YDO, I straddle bridging government agenda with community or youth needs. Often government agenda overrules the practicality of a programme that is actually needed by the community. Unfortunately, my superiors frequently overlook the “involve the community” principle. I have had instances when higher-ups are planning programmes without my input as the worker on the ground. Later they ask for a needs assessment for that particular community when the event is mainly scheduled. Some programmes are more cosmetic and used for political mileage rather than considering its effectiveness.

Unfortunately, there is not enough attention or seriousness given to youth work and the impact that can be made through positive youth development strategies. Male mentorship is one strategy proven to benefit young men who may not have access to positive mentors in their communities. Recently YDOs experienced retrenchment during a new contract negotiation; most workers retrenched were men in a field that already lacked male workers. Encouraging males to participate in planned youth development programs is more challenging than girls. The lack of male workers will not help mobilise young men to be engaged; therefore, the youth work job will have to become much more dynamic to ensure our young men do not fall behind.

The job now requires me to interact with a much larger demographic of young persons than I previously worked with, while also networking with community stakeholders. Many of these organisations needed to be made aware of the work of a YDO as they were concerned about government interference in their work. The community development principle that comes to mind is; “introduce new ideas after relationships have been established”. Intentional relationship building with these new communities is imperative before I can effectively work in these new environments, establishing trust between myself and agencies and youth groups, which are predominantly grass root organisations I partner with.

Most of the employment offered in Trinidad and Tobago, especially what the government offers, are contract positions with contracts ranging from monthly to the most extensive offered to be three years. This is unsettling for the employees and people we work with; when relationships are formed, networking occurs, community initiatives are started, and there is not a renewal of contracts in a timely fashion or at all, the work suffers. The three years of the contract may be just the right amount of time to get buy-in from young people, and then there is a contract break with no specific timeframe for renewal. Any transformation that may happen with individuals and communities can be halted due to willing workers not being allowed to work. Continuity is essential as people can benefit from whatever work has been done. It is also vital to train and empower those we work with and for so that they are able to continue work started in their communities as one of the community principles; “train trainers who can train others.” This principle was tested during the pandemic when many youth groups could not pivot to virtual settings; as in-person sessions have resumed, some of these groups have had to start from scratch with their membership.

I hope that I continue to be an effective change agent who is able to impact communities that sometimes don’t have an advocate on their side; in doing so, I hope that, ultimately, I will be able to point them to Christ as they see how I effectively perform my job. One of the most rewarding occurrences I have had professionally is when a once rude and socially dysfunctional teenager meets you years later and greets you with respect. Through their interaction, they let you know that they are well on their way to being a fully functional adult. This change that is exhibited in young persons rarely occurs unless there is an intervention by adults who previously poured into them and invested their time in mentoring or guiding them.

As I come to the end of this course and I am into my second year of the Doctorate degree, I look forward to what is to come in the future core weeks and more insightful discussions. The Cross-Cultural Dynamics course allows the Christian scholar-practitioner to gain an appreciation for their work as ministry and the people they serve as a missionary field. I appreciated the practical principles studied that can be applied to my current work. I also liked the contextualisation of a real-life event/ project; it allowed me to critically examine and take note of what can be improved for future similar projects. The course has made me further appreciate the privilege that I have been entrusted with, where I have been allowed to directly impact and change the mindset of communities and their youth. The verse “do not be weary in well doing” has been my motto since I began working with young people, especially with the red tape that sometimes accompanies the work that my colleagues and I are trying to do.

Educationally OGS has continued to surpass my expectations as the entire atmosphere set by the professors is one of welcome and encouragement. The coursework allows for insightful discussions and thoughts about our work and how it aligns with kingdom building. It encourages evaluating your work and ways to be implemented to ensure effectiveness. As Christians, we are responsible for working with excellence in whatever sphere we are called to.