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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:

1. Introduction – Describe the expectations of the graduate program and the campus residency component for that course. Summarize 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.
2. 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.
3. Reflective Entry - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualization (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?
4. Future Expectations - Continue the journal by addressing questions and concerns you now have relating to the graduate program expectations.
5. Conclusion – Synthesize the three body sections above, evaluating the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals.

# Introduction

SR950, Clinical and Applied Sociology, is a Term 3 course in the DSL program at OGS. Its course curriculum is designed to help faith-based scholar-practitioners understand and implement sociological practices in their professional environment. According to the syllabus, students will learn to differentiate between applied and clinical sociology, evaluate sociological approaches from a faith perspective, and use these principles to advance social change. Furthermore, this class keeps ethical considerations at the forefront of the student’s mind. As such, this class is paired with PHI801 Ethics in Global Society.

This class is positioned near the end of a student’s studies as a type of capstone class. It combines the concepts students have been working on and asks practical questions about how they will apply their learning. Its placement in the curricula is logical as a student is coming to the end of their traditional classwork and soon to start their action research project. That said, understanding more about sociology earlier in the educational process would have been helpful. Adding more sociological required readings in PHI923 or SR968 would have helped set the tone for future classes.

# Personal Growth

This class significantly grew my understanding of sociology and its impacts on society. I was particularly stretched by learning about its humanistic and positivistic roots. Coming from a strong faith background, I’ve tended to throw out dogmatic philosophy with “science only” perspectives. I’m learning how to glean truth out of mixed truth contexts. My desire to bring about social change increased significantly in this class. My passion for God’s people and bringing light into dark areas has grown. The research provided by sociology gave me a better understanding of what is missing from the church and some ideas about how to fix those problems. It challenged me to look past the errors of humanism while valuing the human.

I reviewed nearly 80 resources in this class, which helped me feel more adept at the subject matter. That said, I still feel like a novice. The OGS androgological approach, for me, never leaves me feeling competent. Traditional pedagogy requires students to learn certain subjects, and based on papers and test scores, you can feel competent that you know the material. OGS doesn’t work that way. Even our grades don’t build confidence that we are qualified. “A” is the expected grade for all students, so proficiency can’t truly be measured or compared.

On the other hand, I feel confident in my ability to research and learn. What I’m concerned will happen, and has happened, is that when I speak with other sociologists, social workers, etc., they will mention terms and concepts generally understood within the field but are new to me. The things I’ve learned I’ve learned well, but that doesn’t mean I’ve learned what other schools have taught. This is an uncomfortable feeling.

Regarding new insights gained, I’m more clearly seeing the impact and power of worldview. I’m also thinking more about how to measure change and growth within individuals and churches. I’m excited to start my DSL Action Research Project.

# Reflective Entry

My 100-day assignment focused on the epidemic of childhood maltreatment and abuse. Specifically, I wanted to understand how big of a problem it was and how the church responded. I confirmed what I had suspected: the problem was rampant, and the church, by and large, was not addressing the issue. While many believers outside of the church building were addressing the issue, typically in the form of non-profits, Churches remained focused on preaching the Word rather than meeting the practical needs of society.

I also learned that even though our government has policies, procedures, and institutions to address these issues, they are often ineffective. Research showed that sometimes our laws outpace our implementations of solutions. Further adding to the problem, victims need compassionate people; however, the programmatic nature of our laws sometimes stifles compassion. This is where Christian sociologists fit in. We can develop effective, people-oriented solutions if we can bridge the gap between research and the compassionate heart of God and His people. I’m excited to see how I can fit into God’s solution!

Unfortunately, I’m also learning what is required to make these changes. Culture needs to change. For culture to change, many individuals’ perspectives must change. Leadership needs to change as well. All this takes time. One implementation of Trauma Informed Care (TIC) required three years. That’s a lot of buy-in, time, and money! Additionally, because of the background of sociology and science, the church has become resistant and fearful of much of the good they can glean from these things. So there is an uphill battle of getting leadership and individuals to buy in and make changes.

My current question is, how long does it take to create a grace-based “safe space” for people who have experienced trauma and abuse? More than just a safe space, how can we create cultures that replicate and can embrace the brokenhearted? I find hurting people everywhere I go, with nowhere to turn for help. My wife and I envision a place where people can come and get help: a place of respite to restore souls.

# Future Expectations

As I rapidly approach my Action Research project, a few questions come to mind. Firstly, what will my final research topic be? I’m passionate about inner-healing prayer, but I also realize that IHP is only one component of the healing process. Secondly, what will benefit the church the most? This last paper stirred my heart even more for those with trauma. America seems to be the epicenter of the human trafficking epidemic. Each trafficked person is someone who has experienced significant trauma. More than just trauma-informed learning, we need mature, compassionate believers who can minister to the brokenhearted. The job is far too big for one person or church. We need a scalable, systemic solution. The solution required is more extensive than any one person, yet I believe God can provide the answer, even through me. Lastly, how do I go about the nuts and bolts of reading, researching, and implementing an action research project?

I’ve been stretched so much by OGS, mostly in good ways. However, I continually bump into the bottom-up vs top-down mindset. I’m a top-down thinker. I like to have a rough idea of what we’re doing and where we are going. My brain needs to have categories in which to place things. Too many details without a clear understanding of the overall story make it difficult for me to remember and sort items in my mind. At OGS, I feel like I’ve constantly been in a “follow the breadcrumbs” state, which leaves me spending more time trying to get reoriented before I can begin my work. I would have learned more effectively if I had better understood the overall roadmap ahead of time. My action research project is no different. I realize that I will need a people group with which to partner, but I don’t know enough to know who to be talking to. As such, I will have to wait until my research prospectus class to begin formulating those thoughts. I feel somewhat unprepared for 2024 when I officially start my dissertation work.

# Conclusion

Overall, this class has had a powerful impact on my reasoning and understanding. After ten years of OGS education, I finally feel like I’m getting the swing of things: the learning and research process and the school’s expectations. I feel confident that I can take a subject, research it, and come to understand it. Even more, I’ve become a significantly better writer, which has also impacted my everyday speech. I believe I can more clearly communicate concepts to others. These things added to my ability to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds and are powerful tools for spreading the Gospel.

Considering the suggested course outcomes from the syllabus, this class has met my professional, religious, and educational goals. Before I started this class, I was unknowledgeable about sociology, what it was, and how it fits into my religious beliefs. As I finish this class, I am much more aware of how sociology fits into my education and the OGS andrological scholar-practitioner model. Even more so, I can see why God led me to Omega Graduate School all those years ago. He knew that my calling was to address sociological issues from the micro and macro levels and that OGS would give me the tools to do that very thing. In this way, this class has been vital to my DSL coursework and to fulfilling my life’s calling. Praise God for His faithfulness!

WORKS CITED