

## **Originality in the Arts and Sciences**

### **Inquiry I: Go Do Something Intellectually Interesting and Tell Us About It**

For the next three weeks, you are asked to perform a bit of inquiry that exploits the opportunities, knowledge and skills you currently possess as you arrive on a college campus. You will write a paper that details what you have accomplished that proves you are an interesting intellectual. Feel free to employ whatever format or structure makes you comfortable: a lab report, a computer program, an essay, a criticism, a survey, a proof. It is important that you originate the idea that you investigate, that the work product you turn in approximate what you think quality work done over a three week period by an honors student would produce in a college setting, and that you think critically in writing about what you have done. If you don't struggle (if your brain doesn't hurt) in the effort, it will show and you will be called on it.

**Selecting a topic:** Here is the hard part. BE CURIOUS!! Let your curiosity take hold—a big part of getting a good grade on this assignment is the creative part. You will have done your job if your professor actually enjoys grading what you have done.

**Your UGTA:** What better time than now to start to talk with people who have had these same experiences and are the better for them. You will be assigned an Undergraduate TA on Friday and on Sunday night he or she will contact you. Make it a point to engage your UGTA through IM or e-mail or text messaging or however you all communicate these days (maybe even meeting in person?) Understand that your UGTA is NOT to be the originator of your idea, but he or she can suggest improvements to the idea. In the end, it is your inquiry, but your UGTA needs to approve it.

**Format for the write-up:** Whatever you do, it has to be the kind of thing your instructors can access and read easily. Consequently electronic documents must be submitted as pdf files. How and to whom, will follow. If you use a medium not readily amenable to electronic format, contact your UGTA for guidance.

- You will submit your document electronically. Instructions for submission will be provided the week the assignment is due.
- Retain a hard copy of the inquiry for your portfolio, which will be due on December 7.

**Safety:** You will make the decisions on where and how to perform this inquiry so it is difficult to be too specific, but I caution you to use good sense with respect to legal, health and safety and confidentiality issues. This is a serious warning. Use common sense in your efforts and check with an instructor before you do anything potentially illegal or dangerous.

**Grading:** Exhibit an intellect, originality, enthusiasm, solid critical thinking and industry to get credit for the assignment. Otherwise we will hand it back for you to redo.

**Reflection:** Attached below is a single page that you must complete as the cover page to your inquiry. It is a reflection you will do after completing the inquiry that will allow for a bit of self assessment. Keep it real.

**A Giant Piece of Advice:** Get started thinking about the inquiry idea this weekend. If you wait until the last minute on the 13<sup>th</sup>, it will be a good indication that your time management is an issue and that your academic year will be a disaster.

#### **Important Inquiry 1 Dates:**

Wednesday, August 24, 2011—Inquiry 1 assigned.

Wednesday, August 31, 2011 at class time—deadline for having idea approved by UGTA

Monday, September 12, 2011 at class time—deadline for submitting inquiry with appended reflection

## Inquiry 1 Reflection—Append to front of inquiry 1 when submitted

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ UGTA: \_\_\_\_\_

**Inquiry 1 Topic:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Give yourself a grade.** If you were assigning a letter grade as a college teacher in an honors course, what grade would you give your own inquiry 1 (A through F): \_\_\_\_\_

Explain the reasoning for your grade.

**UGTA reflection.** Candidly assess your interaction with your UGTA. Was he or she a help or a hindrance to you in creating a good inquiry. If they were a hindrance, what can be done to turn him or her into an asset for the next inquiry?

**Time Management.** Did you give yourself enough time to do a good job on the inquiry? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Will you make any modifications to the way you manage your time in performing Inquiry II? In particular, what aspect of Inquiry I surprised you in terms of how much time it took you to complete it. What will you do to become for efficient?

**Independent Inquiry.** What do you think of independent inquiry as a way to learn? If you don't care for it, is this because it is fundamentally a flawed way to learn or is it because of the way you were programmed to learn in K-12?

**The Internet and Learning.** Did you rely on solely on what was already in your head in writing up the report or did you go to written sources (books, journals, internet) to supplement and develop a better background? If you didn't get help, what might you have learned about that would have made for a better discussion of your results? Write down a URL that you did use, or should have used.

**Getting ready for Inquiry II.** What were the most challenging issues for you with Inquiry 1 (consider, for example, idea development, background knowledge, poor experiment design, inability to assess data, etc.) What do you plan to do so that this is not a problem on Inquiry 2.

## General Instructor Comments Composed After Grading Last Year's First Inquiry

(Use these hints to avoid having cruel things written about your inquiry)

If you reduce the prompt for inquiry 1 to its essential features, it might look something like this:

1. Inquire (which means to seek information by asking a question)
2. Do something intellectually interesting
3. Having done something, you have to tell us about it.
4. Be original
5. Think critically
6. Show enthusiasm and industry

So when you are handing in your assignment, you might ask yourself, have I done these six things?

Other thoughts on ways that you might fail to achieve these prompts:

1. You are not nearly as interesting as you think you are. Those of you who insisted on self evaluation or were seeking out those most like you, got slammed. Professor Scala and I don't care if you have found a soul mate on campus who likes the same kind of jelly on their PBJ as you.
2. The internet provides access to everybody's opinion about everything. It is not appropriate to begin and end a reference search with a collection of blogs that support a critical argument you are making. If you do your inquiry without leaving your room, you will almost certainly get a giant FAIL.
3. It is wonderful that you felt like writing a poem or a short story or a play and it is reasonable that this effort would satisfy prompts 2, 4 and 6 above. But if you do nothing more than that in your inquiry then you have not answered prompts 1, 3 and 5 and you will be forced to do more work. So write a short story? No. Criticize a story? Maybe. Write and criticize a short story? Sure.
4. College professors spot what you all would call BS a mile away (usually within the first two sentences) and no matter how you much you expand your inquiry with your own unsubstantial meanderings or cut and paste of internet drawings and blurbs, if it looks like BS and smells like BS, it is BS, and you get slammed.
5. Here is a good question to ask yourself after you finish an inquiry: Given a single sentence to describe what was accomplished with my inquiry I can now say: ..... And if you are forced to say something like: "I found out that water is wet" or "I like the Simpsons" or "Thinking critically is hard" then you will know at once the kind of grade you will receive.

Grading Scale: In the end, everyone gets a 0 or a 1. But it is nice to have an idea of how your grade calibrates with others, so used a 0 to 4 scale to sum up our gut sense of the quality of your inquiry. See the other side for details.

## OAS Inquiry Grading System

Each of your inquiries will be given a score from 1 to 4. This handout will help you interpret what each number means. Every score above 1 will pass the inquiry. Though there is no substantive difference between a 1+ and a 4 as far as your grade is concerned, we hope that this number system will help you track your progress through the course and situate your inquiry in relation to your fellow students' projects. If you received a grade of 0 or 1 you will be asked to resubmit your inquiry 1 and should contact Brooke about what you will be expected to do to earn a passing mark.

**Four: Good** You received a four for your inquiry if you showed creative and original thought, substantial effort, and a critical conclusion. You demonstrated critical thinking concerning the planning, execution, and analysis of your project. You seem sincerely interested in and excited about your work. Good job!

**Three: Satisfactory** You received a three for your inquiry if you were lacking in at least one of the three categories mentioned above: planning, execution, or analysis. Perhaps your idea was good but you lacked the time to complete the inquiry well; perhaps you failed to consider important variables in your experiment design but indicated your failure in your conclusion. You might also have earned a three if your idea was unoriginal but you still took the time to explore an idea new to you. Anyone who earned a three demonstrated interest in his or her project and showed critical thinking at times.

**Two: Passing** Your inquiry earned a two if it was substantially lacking in one, or partially lacking in two, of the following three categories: planning, execution, or analysis. A grade of two passes the inquiry without resubmission, but only barely. Perhaps the project was well designed, but the assignment showed little effort. Inquiries that earned a grade of two did not demonstrate satisfactory critical thinking. Usually inquiries earning twos were lacking in the planning and analysis stage, since these are the two stages where critical thinking is most important. An inquiry might also earn a two if the project was submitted in an inappropriate format.

**One+:** Your instructors occasionally gave this grade because even though you should do more work on the inquiry, he or she is on the fence and will simply let you go on to inquiry 2 where you had better do a good job because he or she won't let you get away with this twice.

**One: Resubmit** Inquiries earning a grade of one will be reworked and resubmitted for credit. A one indicates a dramatic lack of critical thinking during at least one part of the inquiry, a dramatic lack of effort, or an unacceptable format for submission. The most frequent reason for resubmission is a basic misunderstanding of what was required to competently complete the inquiry. If you earned a one please feel free to speak to your UGTA, the TAs, or to some to the office hours of Dr. Laude or Dr. Scala to discuss how to improve your project, but first contact Brooke by e-mail to see if there is something specific you can do to finish the work up quickly.

**Zero: Resubmit** You didn't even try. Make an appointment with the instructor who graded your inquiry ASAP and get started on turning around your attitude in this course. Think of the difference between a one and a zero is that a zero means you know what you did was really bad and you turned it in anyway.