

Virtues in the University Classroom: Implementation and Assessment

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- My aim: to describe and illustrate what it might look like (1) to implement a virtues focus in a university-level course and (2) to attempt to assess students' progress relative to carefully selected virtue-based goals.

I. The Importance of Goals

- Assessment always occurs *with respect to* certain goals or standards.
- Therefore, prior to formulating assessments, we must think concretely and realistically about the kind of impact we can hope to have on our students' characters.

“Will not the knowledge of [the good], then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object.” -- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

I. The Importance of Goals

- Three initial steps:
 1. Identify a manageable number of “target virtues.”
 2. Articulate concrete and realistic goals related to these virtues.
 3. Share the goals with students (e.g. in the syllabus).

II. Types of Goals

1. Knowledge Goals

- Students learn *about* the target virtues and why they are valuable.
- Can help students spot “opportunities for practice”
- Can enhance student motivation

Examples of knowledge goals:

- “All students will have a firm grasp of the *nature* and *value* of the target virtues.”
- “All students will be able to *identify, define, provide examples, and explain the value* of the target virtues.”

II. Types of Goals

2. Self-Knowledge Goals

- Students will develop a richer and deeper understanding of their *own* character strengths and weaknesses as these relate to the target virtues.
- Can help students spot “opportunities for practice”
- Can enhance student motivation

II. Types of Goals

Examples of self-knowledge goals:

- “All students will develop a richer and deeper understanding of their own character strengths and weaknesses as these relate to the target virtues.”
- “All students will be able to explain their own character strengths and weaknesses as these relate to the target virtues *and* provide at least three concrete examples of how these qualities tend to manifest in their lives.”

II. Types of Goals

3. Character Growth Goals

- More ambitious: actual growth in target virtues
- Less ambitious: well-supported opportunities to practice target virtues

Examples of *more* ambitious character growth goals:

- “All students will experience significant growth in all of the target virtues.”
- “All students will experience significant growth in at least one target virtue.”
- “All students will experience significant growth in the *skills/abilities* and the *motivation* proper to at least one target virtue.”
- “All students will experience significant growth in the *skills/abilities* proper to all of the target virtues.”

II. Types of Goals

Examples of *less* ambitious character growth goals:

- “All students will be given frequent, well-supported opportunities to practice all of the target virtues.”
- “During every class session, all students will be given at least one well-supported opportunity to practice at least one target virtue.”

III. Interventions and Assessments

- What can I do to help my students achieve the specified goals?
- How can I assess my students’ progress relative to these goals?

III. Interventions and Assessments

1. Knowledge Goals (e.g. “All students will have a firm grasp of the *nature* and *value* of the target virtues.”)

Interventions	Assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mini-unit on the target virtues: e.g. definitions, slogans, examples. • Target virtue bookmarks* • Class motto or mission statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exams or quizzes • Pre/post or end-of-semester survey items (e.g. defining, matching, identifying)

[*Indicates that a copy of this item is included with the handout.]

III. Interventions and Assessments

2. Self-Knowledge Goals (e.g. “All students will develop a richer and deeper understanding of their own character strengths and weaknesses as these relate to the target virtues.”)

Interventions	Assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target virtues self-assessment* • Weekly journaling • Self-reflection project* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of journals • Evaluation of self-reflection project • Narrative self-assessment • Pre/post survey items (e.g. “I have a good grasp of my character strengths and weaknesses as these relate to the target virtues of this course.”)

III. Interventions and Assessments

3. Character Growth Goals (*less* ambitious; e.g. “All students will be given frequent, well-supported opportunities to practice all of the target virtues.”)

Interventions	Assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent opportunities to practice target virtues <i>in class</i> (e.g. individual or small group exercises; quizzes and exams). • Frequent opportunities to practice target virtues <i>outside of class</i> (e.g. papers and projects). • Supportive assistance and feedback with these opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-documentation of opportunities provided (e.g. a table linking opportunities and target virtues for each week of the semester). • Items in an end-of-semester student survey (e.g. “I was given frequent, well-supported opportunities to practice the target virtues for this course.”)

III. Interventions and Assessments

3. Character Growth Goals (*more* ambitious; e.g. “All students will experience significant growth in the *skills/abilities* and the *motivation* proper to at least one target virtue.”)

III. Interventions and Assessments

Interventions	Assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Skills</i>: create and call attention to frequent and well-supported opportunities to practice target virtues inside and outside of class. • <i>Skills and motivation</i>: (a) modeling; (b) exposure to exemplars of target virtues; (c) provide virtue-based feedback (verbal and written) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Skills</i>: evaluation of assignments and exercises that require practice of the target virtues (e.g. including virtue terms/concepts in evaluative criteria and rubrics). • <i>Skills and motivation</i>: narrative self-assessment (e.g. journal entries or self-reflection project). • <i>Skills and motivation</i>: self-report items in pre/post survey (e.g. “I have a hard time admitting when I am wrong”; “I enjoy learning about new ideas”).”

IV. Additional Resources

1. <http://intellectualvirtues.org> (a wide variety of resources about and for educating for intellectual virtues)
2. *Educating for Intellectual Virtues: An Introductory Guide for College and University Instructors* (3 chapters, several appendices, 69 pp. total), available at <https://jasonbaehr.wordpress.com>.
3. *Cultivating Good Minds: A Philosophical and Practical Resource Guide to Educating for Intellectual Virtues* (34 chapters, several appendices, 562 pp. total), available at <http://intellectualvirtues.org>.



INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES
ACADEMY

Curiosity: Ask questions!

A disposition to wonder, ponder, and ask why. A thirst for understanding and a desire to explore.

Intellectual humility: Admit what you don't know!

A willingness to "own" one's intellectual limitations and mistakes. Unconcerned with intellectual status or prestige.

Intellectual autonomy: Think for yourself!

A capacity for active, self-directed thinking. An ability to think and reason for oneself.

Attentiveness: Look and listen!

A readiness to stay focused and on task. Notices and attends to important details.

Intellectual carefulness: Avoid errors!

A sensitivity to the requirements of good thinking. Quick to notice and avoid intellectual pitfalls and mistakes.

Intellectual thoroughness: Go deep!

A willingness to probe for deeper meaning and understanding. Unsatisfied with mere appearances or easy answers.

Open-mindedness: Think outside the box!

An ability to "think outside the box." Gives a fair and honest hearing to competing perspectives.

Intellectual courage: Take risks!

A readiness to persist in thinking or communicating in the face of fear, including fear of embarrassment or failure.

Intellectual tenacity: Embrace struggle!

A willingness to embrace intellectual challenge and struggle. Keeps its "eyes on the prize" and doesn't give up.

www.ivalongbeach.org

**INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER
SELF-ASSESSMENT**

For each of the following statements, rate yourself from 1 to 5 using the scale below. Be as honest as possible (there's not point in distorting the truth here!). Do not turn the paper over until you have assigned a number to each statement.

- (1) Very different from me
- (2) Different from me
- (3) Neither different nor like me
- (4) Like me
- (5) Very much like me

1. I am eager to explore new things.
2. My classes often leave me wondering about the topics we discussed.
3. I am interested in a lot of different topics.
4. I often think of questions about the things we're learning in my classes.
5. I am an independent thinker.
6. It is easy for me to come up with my own ideas.
7. When I get stuck on a problem, I am usually able to work through on my own.
8. I think differently from my classmates.
9. It is easy for me to admit when I am wrong.
10. I feel okay when I don't know the answer.
11. I have a lot to learn.
12. I am slow to correct other people's mistakes.
13. I enjoy paying attention to details.
14. I like to look closely at things.
15. I can usually remain focused on what I am learning.
16. I tend to notice things that other people miss.
17. I like to get things right the first time.
18. I always read the directions before starting an assignment.
19. I always double check my work.
20. I rarely make careless mistakes in my schoolwork.
21. I am good at explaining things to people.
22. My answers on written tests and assignments tend to be on the long side.
23. I'm not content until I understand what I'm learning.
24. I often make connections between the different things I am learning.
25. I am willing to change my beliefs.
26. I feel comfortable being around people who disagree with me about important topics.
27. I enjoy learning why people believe what they believe.
28. I tend to think about issues from multiple perspectives.
29. I am willing to answer questions even if I think my answer might be wrong.
30. I stand up for what I believe.
31. When my opinion is different from others', I still share it.
32. I'm not afraid of asking questions in class.
33. When I get frustrated with a problem, I stick with it.
34. I continue thinking about difficult problems even when I can't find a solution.
35. When I can't figure out a problem, I keep trying.
36. I enjoy challenging assignments.

- Add #1-4: _____. This is your **curiosity** score.
- Add # 5-8: _____. This is your **intellectual autonomy** score.
- Add #9-12: _____. This is your **intellectual humility** score.
- Add #13-16: _____. This is your **attentiveness** score.
- Add #17-20: _____. This is your **intellectual carefulness** score.
- Add #21-24: _____. This is your **intellectual thoroughness** score.
- Add#25-28: _____. This is your **open-mindedness** score.
- Add #29-32: _____. This is your **intellectual courage** score.
- Add #33-36: _____. This is your **intellectual tenacity** score.

Graph your scores below:



Curiosity | Autonomy | Humility | Attentiveness | Carefulness | Thoroughness | Open-mindedness | Courage | Tenacity

PHIL 1800 Self-Reflection Project

The primary aim of this assignment is to encourage you to develop an honest and detailed understanding of your own intellectual character strengths and weaknesses and to “own” these strengths and weaknesses (and therefore to work on developing more intellectual autonomy and intellectual humility).

There are two main parts to the assignment: (1) an initial narrative-based self-examination followed by weekly journaling; and (2) a final narrative-based assessment.

Part I of the assignment is due in hardcopy form at the beginning of class on **T 1/26** (this is one class period later than what is listed in the syllabus); Part II is due at the beginning of class on **T 4/26**.

Part I

In this part of the assignment, you will do two things:

First, you will write a 3-5 page (double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman type) narrative essay in which you address the following questions:

- Drawing from the list of nine “master virtues,” what are your top two intellectual character *strengths*? What, specifically, do these look like in your life? How have they benefited you in your life as a student or otherwise? Illustrate with some honest, concrete, and detailed examples.
- Similarly, what are your top two intellectual character *weaknesses*? What, specifically, do these look like in your life? How have they hindered or harmed you (or others) in your life as a student or otherwise? Illustrate with some honest, concrete, and detailed examples.
- When you look back over the course of your life (at where/how you were raised, at the community and/or culture in which you grew up, your role models, formative experiences, etc.) how do you think these intellectual character strengths and weaknesses *came about*? Illustrate with some honest, concrete, and detailed examples.
- In one substantial paragraph, describe the kind of intellectual character you would *like to have*. Be detailed and specific.

Second, on a weekly basis, spend at least 20 minutes each week reflecting on and journaling about your intellectual character strengths and weaknesses, for example, by answering questions like: Which intellectual virtues did I find myself (or others) practicing this week? What exactly did this look like? How did it feel? Which intellectual virtues did I find myself (or others) failing to practice this week? What exactly did this look like? How did it feel? These journal entries are also a good place in which to set some modest goals for yourself regarding the practice of specific virtues and to report back on whether these goals were met (and, if so, what the effect was; and, if not, why not). (For instance, if you’re interested in practicing intellectual courage, you might set the goal of asking at least one

question or making at least one comment in each of your classes during the coming week.) Your journal entries must be dated. They must be thoughtful, concrete, and detailed. And it is your responsibility to ensure that they are preserved (e.g. that they don't get lost or erased). At a few points during the semester, you will be asked to submit the journal entries you have completed to date. These "journal checks" will contribute to your overall grade on this assignment.

Part II

In this part of the assignment, you will write another 3-5 page (double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12 point Times New Roman type) narrative essay that addresses the following questions:

- Looking back at your initial description of your intellectual character strengths and weaknesses, how has your understanding of these strengths and weaknesses *changed* over the course of the semester? Be specific and detailed. Illustrate with concrete examples.
- Discuss your experience with the *reflective journaling*? Was this difficult? Easy? In what ways was it helpful? In what ways was it challenging? Did you get better at it over the course of the semester?
- What have you *learned about yourself* in this process?
- Moving forward, describe again the kind of intellectual character you would *like* to have, being very specific and detailed.
- Finally, describe *three specific practices, habits, or activities* that you think would help you grow in this direction and explain how or why you think they would have this effect. (Again, these should be specific and concrete, not vague or general.)

Grading

This is, in many respects a "subjective" assignment. However, it will be rigorously assessed. While grading, I'll be asking myself the following sorts of questions:

- Were the papers turned in on time? Do they conform to all of the specifications noted above? Do they clearly answer all of the relevant questions?
- Were the papers carefully proofread? Do they exhibit strong grammar, mechanics, diction, spelling, etc.?
- Are the student's answers to the questions clearly thoughtful, honest, specific, and detailed? Or do they seem rushed, contrived, or surfacy?
- Did the student keep up with journaling?
- Are the journal entries thoughtful, specific, and detailed? Or do they seem surfacy, rushed, or contrived?
- Overall, do the student's answers and entries demonstrate careful, honest, and thorough reflection?