The Reflective Essay

Critical reflection is the process of not merely observing and describing your experiences, but of asking questions, analyzing, and interpreting them. It is academic writing with yourself as the subject.

As such, the reflective essay is more than a summation of your experience or a series of anecdotes. It is an argument that you’ll make to the St. Mary’s community (broadly defined as your professors, your peers, and your parents) about the larger significance of your experience.

The reflective essay should frame this significance in terms of the learning outcomes for Core 350. With these outcomes in mind, explain to your audience how ELAW transformed, deepened, or challenged something that you’ve learned in the classroom at St. Mary’s. Tell us how the communities you encountered contributed to this transformation. How did you come to understand your own liberal arts experience “in the world” as a result of these encounters? What does this experience tell you about the connections between knowledge and experience? How do the diverse communities in which we learn shape these connections?

Your essay should explore these questions by citing specific details and examples from your ELAW activity. It should explain why this connection between knowledge and experience is important to you, but also to the communities that you will join after you leave St. Mary’s. How has ELAW prepared you to be an active, engaged member of a diverse community?

Reflective essays must be approximately 1600 words in length.  You must submit the essay directly to [corecurriculum@smcm.edu](mailto:corecurriculum@smcm.edu) for evaluation.

Each reflective essay will be assigned a grade of “Pass,” “Pass with Distinction,” or “Fail,” which will be noted on your transcript. Students submitting failing essays will be required to revise their work and resubmit it.

Examples of Distinctive Reflective Essays

CORE350 Reflective Piece Model 1: [Steven Rees writing on his summer research with leeches](http://www.smcm.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2014/07/rees-core350.pdf)

CORE350 Reflective Piece Model 2: [Kristen VanBlargan writing about her time in Japan](http://www.smcm.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2014/07/VanBlarganReflection.pdf) – [Kristen VanBlargan’s Film](http://vimeo.com/5691297)

CORE 350 Reflective Piece Model 3: [Daniel Castle writing about Buddhism and travel](http://www.smcm.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2014/07/castle-core350.pdf)

CORE 350 Reflective Piece Model 4: [Emily Ma writing about her experiences studying at Sciences Po in Paris](http://www.smcm.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2014/07/ma-core350.pdf)

CORE 350 Reflective Piece Model 5: [Chelsea McKnight writing about her internship at The Whole Self Center](http://www.smcm.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2014/07/McKnightReflection.pdf)

CORE 350 Reflective Piece Model 7: [Kevin Ford writing about his Ed Studies placements at Spring Ridge Middle School](http://www.smcm.edu/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2014/07/FordReflection.pdf)