

2021 Adjunct Appreciation Essay Contest

As an adjunct professor, who became a parent less than a year before the pandemic began, I was already struggling to find a work-life balance. Working while nursing and raising an infant is enough of a challenge already. When HCC transitioned from face-to-face classes to online classes with no warning or preparation, I had to reconstruct my entire course and schedule. I no longer had a babysitter during my work hours, so I had to find ways to entertain my soon-to-be one-year-old while creating an online course for the first time. Since my class didn't have to meet virtually at a certain point in the day, I would find myself working in 15-20 minute increments several times throughout the day. Because my daughter was still at an age where I must watch her at all times, and I hadn't introduced television to her yet, I often couldn't devote long segments of time to working. This wasn't an ideal option, but it's what I had to do for the time being.

Since one of the learning outcomes of my course is to “demonstrate critical thinking skills in evaluation and application of philosophical concepts to various aspects of life”, it felt obvious that I needed to apply this for myself as well. How could I implement this learning outcome to both my life and embed it into my course?

Developing discussion questions that provoked critical thinking and making sure all learning outcomes were met became challenging. Fortunately, because my class was face-to-face for the first half of the semester, my students already felt comfortable with discussions, so that eased some of the anxiety of a new format.

Since we were currently discussing ethics, it felt obvious to include the pandemic into our discussion. The stay-at-home order implied that we needed to not only stay safe for ourselves, but we needed to stay safe for others, so it led the discussion to ask “to what do we owe others?”.

I knew I owed it to my students to make sure they finished the course strong, and I also had a duty to my daughter, so I had to come up with solutions to make sure that I could succeed in both tasks.

For my students, I felt the easiest way to check on understanding would be to simply ask. I asked “Now that we have made the transition to online learning, what are effective ways to check for understanding?” I asked students to voice any concerns they may have as well as provide examples of assignments that they felt would help them learn the material. This not only helped my students apply philosophical concepts to their own life, but it helped me apply it to mine as well. Some students mentioned that had difficulty understanding material without a lecture or engaging verbal discussions, so that inspired me to create short video recordings of readings to help improve understanding. Along with the PowerPoints that I had already created, I felt confident that the students now had all the tools for their success.

Even though I had to sporadically work throughout the day, I felt that by including my students in these conversations about ethics and learning, I was able to form an effective course, all the while being able to spend more time with my daughter.

We are evaluating essays for:

- Organization
- Strong style and personal voice
- Originality and clarity of content and ideas

How to use the rubric:

Please use this rubric as a measure of what we will be looking for when selecting winning essays. This rubric should provide guidelines, not an unreasonable or rigid standard. You have probably encountered a rubric before, but here is a quick guide to using this one:

- Along the left side of the rubric grid are the criteria for evaluating essays.
- Along the top of the grid, we have scores from 4 (outstanding) to 1 (poor).
- For each criterion, match the essay with the description that best fits it and assign a score in the rightmost column.
- Once you have scored the essay on all the criteria, add those five numbers. That is the score for the essay.

	4	3	2	1	Score
Focus on Topic	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main idea is supported by detailed information.	Main idea is clear, but details are not clearly relevant or connected to the main idea.	Main idea is somewhat clear, but there is need for more relevant evidence.	Main idea is <i>not</i> clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.	
Organization	Details are presented in a way that effectively keeps the reader's interest.	Details are presented in a way that sometimes makes the writing less interesting.	Details are presented in a manner that distracts the reader.	There is no clear structure to the paper.	
Originality and strength of ideas	Formulates a thought-provoking, well-developed, and fairly original perspective on essay theme.	Writer takes a clear perspective on essay theme, though it is not developed fully.	Writer's perspective on essay theme is evident, though it is vague.	Fails to provide a clear perspective on essay theme, or writer contradicts himself.	
Quality of evidence/examples	Provides compelling and insightful evidence/examples that demonstrates the author's perspective.	Offers adequately compelling – though perhaps vague or incomplete – supporting evidence/examples.	Provides compelling but sometimes confusing evidence/examples to support writer's perspective.	Offers only general evidence/examples that are sometimes contradictory to the writer's perspective.	
Voice	Author's voice is strong and engaging. Draws reader in.	Writing attracts reader's interest. Author's voice shows engagement with the topic.	Technically well written; however, author's voice is weak.	Writing fails to engage the reader.	
				TOTAL	

Adapted from Rubric for Editorial – Commentary Essay from LAEP.org and the 6+1 Traits of Writing Rubric from Readwritethink.org

