



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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ADVENTURES IN LEARNING: BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

It is important that students are well-rounded, have a liberal arts education, and are connected to society and the planet. Students can do some things to make life better and more rewarding, complete their education, and create a more holistic mindset and fuller life. As life becomes more globalized and competitive, it is incumbent on students to reach further. We could say that this process is about upgrading their “off” hours and making time outside the classroom as knowledge-oriented as time inside the classroom. Here are a few suggestions I make to my students.

Readings

Read esteemed newspapers and a variety of magazines and journals: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Utne Reader*, *The New Yorker*, *Natural Health*, and others. The variety of articles informs the reader on a plethora of subjects at home and abroad, connects you to the world, and encourages your civic responsibility. It makes you a creator of bridges and metaphors—you get better at finding the connections in disparate fields of inquiry. You must know about the great debates and matters of importance in order to get involved.

On a practical level, the more you read the more you can figure out what is going on and then can apply that to your present life and goals. Furthermore, you can create a list of great books, new and old, East and West, to read at some point. These works show common human experience and evoke many of the struggles and big questions of life—with answers, too.

Expand Viewing Choices

Expand listening choices on radio and TV: National Public Radio, TV programs such as Charlie Rose and Bill Moyers on PBS, and a host of programs on cable TV, such as History Channel and Learning Channel. Also, watch independent and foreign films. It is a good idea to share what you are watching and where students can go to find these films. Perhaps they will never know, otherwise.

Benefits of Travel

Henry David Thoreau said we can do this in our own backyard—that is timeless advice. But there is another way to discover new places. I recommend that students get a Hostel International Card and buy some travel books, like *Let's Go*, *Lonely Planet*, or *Rough Guide*. Each edition covers a continent or a more focused area. These books give the rundown on travel, hotels, sites, food, culture, language, and more. If students cannot afford a faraway trip, there is always something close to home.

I live near New York City, and do not know if students realize that we are just six hours by car from Montreal, or that cheap flights are available to many places. But few students in my area have even been to the Delaware Water Gap, just an hour away. Of course, it is best to start young and look for bargains on Travelzoo, Kayak, Expedia, and other websites. A semester or summer abroad is one of the best ways to educate and increase cultural awareness. And there are some awards/scholarships for abroad study—even more important than ever in this harsh economic climate. The benefits of travel/study abroad last a lifetime and can even lead to a new way of life or a job. I have met few people who regret their travels.

And last, compile a list of places one must visit: Macchu Pichu, the pyramids, Florence, Taj Mahal, Redwood Forests, Seattle, the Louvre, Angkor Wat, the Ganges, Jerusalem? Create your list.

Healthy and Natural

Stick to a natural, as opposed to an industrialized, diet. There are some great books on the subject; just visit the local bookstore. Exercise, and try mind-body practices such as yoga, meditation, Pilates, and others to gain self-awareness and relax. Exercise and relaxation do not take time away; rather, they add quality to our lives by increasing well-being and happiness, immunity, and even life-extension. Be sure to spend lots of time outside—walking, hiking, or whatever. It is really only in recent times that people have spent so much time sitting and doing so much methodical work, producing abundant stress and injuries caused by repetition. Many doctors and psychologists speak about the necessity of spending time each week among the trees.



Mastering Your Life

Take more control of your own life by taking responsibility, by getting rid of unnecessary debt, by limiting technology obsession. Moreover, common sense (and research studies) show that it is a bad idea to have a steady diet of violent entertainment. And beware of the corrupting aspects of too much advertising. We want to cultivate ourselves, not fall for every new product. There is a tendency to think that more of something is better, that bigger is better, as in large sizes of soft drinks or SUVs. Studies show we are unhappy and stressed the more we pursue excess and have too many choices, often bad ones.

Job Ladder

It is important to consider what other things one can learn to help get a better job. What are some special skills or knowledge one should have? Perhaps learning Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, or world literature will put yours above the other résumés. Here is where thinking outside the box, seeing from new angles, combining knowledge in new ways, or just looking ahead is the best path. Get advice from people in the field, and start buying journals related to the field. Do what the crowd is not, and be the one who has more opportunities.

Here is where the teacher can tell some stories about the path and destination. It may seem obvious how one gets a career and finds fulfillment, but students are young and new at the game of life; misinformation abounds. It is important to tell them that life is not just a series of problems, but a journey and a mystery to be explored. For this journey, it is important to have consistency and mental stability. Slow and steady progress, and common sense, often win the race.

Richard Marranca, *Assistant Professor, English*

For further information, contact the author at Passaic County Community College, One College Boulevard, Paterson, NJ 07505.
Email: Rmarranca@pccc.edu