

Integrative Learning Essay Excerpts

These excerpts were taken from “Integrative Learning Essays” written during the 21-22 AY by rFLA 300 level students at the end of their general education capstone course. These students wrote these essays as they were completing their rFLA coursework and reflecting on how their liberal arts education has prepared them for their futures. They discuss skills gained, meaningful experiences, being pushed beyond their comfort zones, complementary connections to their major, and foundations for their career ambitions.

My RFLA100 “Food Democracy” sparked my interest in politics. This class introduced me to some of the major problems and issues this current world order inherits, such as poverty, discrimination of minorities, and lack of education and food in developing countries. Learning about these problems and never having taken a politics class or having an interest in politics, “Food Democracy” might be a major influencer in why I decided on my major.

What I appreciated most about the RFLA program is that it forced me to step outside of my major and comfort zone. I took classes that I never would have taken without this program, and I learned things about myself that I didn’t know before. For example, I realized that I enjoy computer science and have an interest in programing. This newfound interest stemmed from my “Computers in a Non-Geek Zone” class as we had an introduction to basic programming using the Python software. Through this class experience, I learned that coding is something that I may wish to incorporate into my future life or career.

The RFLA program has essentially taught me to never stop listening, never stop discussing, and never be blind to the plights of those who society would like to disappear...

In my Humanities designated course, Portland Cities Go Green, we examined Portland, Oregon, and Orlando, as east west bookends for sustainability efforts. Portland is one of the leading cities in the United States for sustainability efforts, and Orlando has taken note of this, and is making similar strides. During my time in this course, we conducted research to show the positive impact of Orlando’s sustainability initiatives, went on frequent trips to areas designed with sustainability in mind, and even met with local officials responsible for implementing this change. With everything I learned during this course, I expect myself to think more sustainably in my future actions and in my future career.

In the “Sing your Heart Out”... we mainly focused on working on our singing voice; this was done by doing live performances. This daunting task of having many of my peers’ eyes focusing on me was frightening but ultimately, I was courageous enough to be able to perform in front of my peers. It is this same courage that I continue to carry with me through my everyday life.

From my point of view [Sing your Heart Out] is probably the most interesting RFLA I have taken. In this course we had to learn how to use our voice. The proper use of the voice is fundamental for any job, but especially for the business world and presentations. In addition, we worked on our breathing, which is fundamental for life.

Swamps, Springs, and Sinkholes will help me on my career path in real estate due to the conservation projects I was able to do. I learned that some lands cannot be built on because of either what is underneath them or if there is a farm nearby that is polluting the water and affecting everyone's health and wellbeing.

The second RFLA 200 class I took, Science of Superheroes, taught me how to use logic when solving problems and helped me understand how to solve complex problems through both math and critical thinking. One of the assignments that helped me develop these skills was the Great Debate paper I had to write. For this paper, our class was assigned to find a debatable topic and provide scientific evidence for both sides of the argument. Both these classes I believe contribute highly to my ability to critically think about a concept.

The first class I think of when it comes to having prepared me for field work is Natural Habitats of Florida, which is an ecology class focusing on the various habitat types of Florida. This class is led by an Ecologist, and the information gained throughout that semester and the associated field trips is such that I will carry with me into my professional career whenever I use vegetation to determine habitat type. Throughout our lessons, I learned to think about the different natural habitats not as something that exists within a vacuum, but as connected parts of a greater system, and that changed the way I think about nature to a more interdisciplinary approach, preparing me for productive success in an ecology-related field.

When I started the rFLA program as a freshman, I was completely unfamiliar with academic terms like integrative learning, metacognition, and even liberal arts. Throughout my education at Rollins however, I have become familiar with these terms through rFLA classes and have developed a greater understanding of learning, the science behind it, and how the classes I have taken have helped me to develop and hone my analysis and critical thinking skills. Classes I have taken have achieved this through not only class debates and discussions such as in my Global Ethics class, but also through assignments where I have had to make sound arguments or present scientific research as in my Ecology of Environmental Issues class, which are important not only within the education system, but will also be vital as I embark on a professional career path.

This specific rFLA course that I am taking now, Performance Ethnography, has nothing at all to do with what I am majoring or minoring in. I never would have even thought to take this class, and I had no idea

that performance ethnography was even a thing. I am an Elementary Education major and a Sociology minor. I would say this class has truly helped me in both of those fields.

I have learned how to be more open and understanding to who people are, and I have learned to truly listen to the way that people speak. I have also learned to look at body language and mannerisms and try to decipher what those mean. I believe this is going to benefit me in both my major and my minor. The writing assignments in this course have allowed me to develop my writing skills, and the discussion posts have allowed me to learn how to effectively communicate with my classmates in a more professional manner. All of these things are going to help me when I start teaching. I am going to need social skills; I am going to need to know how to communicate with people. It is my job to get through to children and to help them learn and grow. With that being said, I also need to know how to professionally communicate with parents. I am going to have to write very professional emails to them, and the discussion posts have prepared me for that very thing. I am going to have to be a great listener to my students, their parents, and the school administration. Teachers are at the core of many communities and having the global perspective from these rFLA courses has really helped me to grow into the type of person that should be at the center of a community. It has allowed me to look at the world in a different light. I value the things that I have gained from this class, and I plan to use them in the future. I have been able to learn about so many topics, but I have also been able to learn about how to be a good human being. This rFLA course has allowed me to open myself up to a world of new possibilities, and I am a better person because of it.

The first rFLA I took was called "Food Democracy". It was about the global food system, poverty related to food, inequality, and food shortages. I remember one assignment in which we played a computer simulation in which we were an African family and had to create food security for our family in order to survive. It was extremely hard and there were constant setbacks like droughts or heavy rain. Overall, this class connected very well to my major, which is International Relations, as I learned about global poverty, food dependence, how poverty emerges, and overall the global system. On many of my politics classes, I could refer back to this class and bring up examples we learned in this class. Furthermore, I really took some of the aspects covered really personally, especially the food waste aspect, and since then I am really curious how much food I throw out and how much I really need to buy.

In Ecological Design, we had to create a final project based on a question and research related to architecture. I found myself using skills I learned in Visual Journals to create a striking final project that I have now used as an example of past work for interviews and speaking to employers. These two classes and disciplines approached problems in a similar way that resonated with me. I enjoy being creative and finding creative solutions to problems, which is what I was able to do in these two classes.

I found connections through many of my classes that aided in my ability to contribute to discussions in the majority of my classes. For example, in one of my ENV major classes, we learned about Neoliberalism and Globalization. The next week, in my Otherness in World Music humanities rFLA, we were speaking on the same topics, but as they related to music, and not the environment. I was able to have a very good discussion with my group because of the knowledge I gained from the ENV class, and I was also exposed to an interdisciplinary view of a global topic.

Going in order from first class taken to the most recent class taken, my rFLA experience included the following classes: World Religions (H), Mass Media and Society (C), Cancer: where is the cure? (S), Music in Europe (A), and Make Some Noise (300). Each of these five courses played a hand in helping me form an entirely new opinion on how the liberal arts contribute to making people's career's productive and their lives, meaningful. To give an example, I never would have taken the science class, "Cancer; where is the cure?" if it was not a requirement. Science has never been a subject I was good at, and therefore I never found I very interesting. Looking back at it now, I am thankful I took that course because my professor really helped me to understand human biology for the first time, which inspired me to become a more health-conscious person. Life and science go hand in hand; to have a meaningful life, it is important to know your body, and to provide it with everything it needs to work as productive and efficient as possible.

Through all of these amazingly creative classes, I learned skills of public speaking, improvisation in a business setting, how to analyze and look for key details, community engagement, and appreciation of the arts. I hold these skills dear to my heart and feel very prepared to enter the professional world due to my education at Rollins College.

I learned how to have a real debate and have an effective conversation with those that disagree with me.

I think the RFLA courses also allowed me to invest more into my hobbies. For example, I had a chance to take a "Fashion through film" RFLA course and a "21st Century Filmmakers" RFLA course. I am a full-time student at Rollins, however I also do photography on the side. After taking the fashion RFLA course, I was much more educated about the history of fashion and could better style my models on various campaign shoots. In addition, I also produce videography and make short films. Taking the RFLA film class has allowed me to progress my videography skills while fulfilling a gen-ed requirement simultaneously. The RFLA classes allow me to improve other skills that might be desired in job positions. Although I am an Asian studies major and Chinese minor, I will now also be able to offer other talents such as producing images and videos.

Taking so many RFLA classes in different departments had made me realize that I don't have to settle to just study/or pursue one career. The RFLA department has allowed me to explore not just one, but all of my interests. I have been able to take super interesting classes in the Asian studies/Chinese department, while still pursuing other interests of mine such as fashion, photography, and videography.

The greater understandings I have gained about different people and cultures throughout my RFLA courses so far is gearing me to become a more mindful and empathetic person that will be entering the workforce. I feel as though all too often a lot of problems occur just because at least one side

misunderstood the other, very rarely the intention that starts most conflicts is malicious and on purpose. I am a business management major, so learning about all these cultural aspects will aid me in my decision making when I am overseeing people of all different walks of life and backgrounds.

* * * *

The interesting thing that I have learned is that even though I am majoring in biology, there is a need for biologists everywhere and in most fields. Even in food democracy, there is an importance of understanding human biology to develop plans to conquer malnourishment and starvation.

* * * *

In the last course that I took as a part of my RFLA series, I took “make some noise”, going into this class I thought it might have been about singing and the production of noises, but to my surprise it was about physics and the physics of making noise. This was one of the best classes that I have taken at Rollins, something that I thought would not be fun at all. I learned about different problems with sound pollution and how to help control the noise that continues to pollute our planet. But the most important skill I gained from this class was the ability to integrate my passions into something I was not so sure about in the beginning. I was able to take my love for sports and really understand the mechanics of how sound improves athletic abilities. I can take this to the workforce by taking tasks that I may not have a lot of knowledge or experience of and look at them from different angles to solve them.

* * * *

The rFLA program at Rollins has taught me many lessons over the years, some more than others yet they all seemed to lead to a better experience in my busy business class heavy schedule. Beginning with my RCC Create Your Best Life, at first, I did not really see the point of having a class where I take time and meditate with such a busy schedule yet the underlying theme from the class has stuck with me throughout my Rollins career. As I look back on that RCC freshman year as a senior one main lesson I learned was to not take the little things for granted. While I may have thought it was a little silly at the time meditation from that class has also stuck with me and the main ideas of relaxing your mind to be yourself has been a very important part of my daily life for a while. Another rFLA class I took that helped me seek out the little things was Music Meets Life. In this class I learned how music can be anything which was the point of the class, yet the underlying messages such as quieting your mind and appreciating the little sounds and even sounds in nature and even that is music. Through the use of these seeking out the little things I was able to apply that in many of my business classes. Business can tend to be pretty qualitative and straight forward which is sometimes the issue. In being creative and seeking out the little things it allows me to think outside the box and find solutions to problems I may have not thought of before. Certain ideas from my rFLA 300 Technology & Society like data collection have also been discussed in many of my business classes such as marketing and supply chain. Seeing the technical side of data collection also gives me insights into many business ideas as well as to how businesses should improve their marketing and strategic planning.

* * * *

Visual poetry was the next rFLA I took and could be my favorite too. This class I took online as we transitioned through COVID, but I this class in particular was well suited for the online format. I was pushed in my ability to think creatively and utilize multiple mediums to create pieces of art that told stories I cared about. I got to share my art with the class and discuss my thought processes, what it meant to me, and also take a peek into other student's projects. This class taught me how to think mindfully about my life, experiences, and the things around me, and then translate these things into visual art forms that expressed and told their story.

This idea of interconnecting disciplines and ideas is what I think the rFLA program is all about. Each class offered in the program is so unique, many are only offered seasonally or for just one semester ever at all! I feel like utilizing many perspectives and disciplines will be a very useful skill to have in my life and career. Many challenges we face in life, whether personal or work related, can benefit from having many different perspectives taken. There may be times an engineer is needed to solve a health problem or an artist can be used to solve a science problem. Being able to think of problem solving from many perspectives can allow us to find solutions that haven't been found before. I think being creative and utilizing problem solving with many different assets is with a liberal arts education is all about.

These courses have prepared me for a productive career because I have learned important technical skills in all of these courses that I can apply to my work in the future. One of the skills that was a major factor in all of the courses I took was research. In some of my classes, like genetics, the research was more fact based and based on scientific experiments. In other classes this research was more about the human experience. Research is a skill that comes into play in every career so it is extremely helpful to have been able to learn so many different research styles and techniques.