Guide to the Narrative Evaluation System at Hampshire College

Faculty narrative, self-evaluation, contracts, and portfolios

Instead of grades and grade point averages, Hampshire has a system of narrative evaluation that highlights goals, plans, and progress. The most noticeable thing might be that faculty write narrative evaluations instead of giving grades, but that is just part of the system. Students also monitor their own learning, write self-evaluations, develop their own plans through contracts, and reflect on their work at a few points by building portfolios of their work and writing reflective essays.

Narrative evaluation, self-evaluation, contracts, and portfolios have been important parts of a Hampshire education since the college was founded. If you are not used to them, it can take a little time to learn how to do a self-evaluation well and how to make sense of the narrative evaluations you receive and how to curate your work in a portfolio.

Both faculty narrative evaluations and self-evaluations are useful to you in creating your educational plan and in developing the skills, understandings, and abilities that matter to you! Portfolios allow you to think across your work in order to answer your questions, demonstrate your growth, and set your next challenges.

This guide is designed to help you make sense of the system and use it well.

Self Evaluation

Why Self Evaluations

Doing self-evaluation is not simply reporting what you have done. It is reflecting on the meaning you are making of your learning; it is about taking stock of what you have done in the past, making sense of your current accomplishments, and then looking forward to creating new goals and plans for the future in order to get the most out of your experiences. One can think of it as a series of 4 questions we ask ourselves: 1) what did I do? 2) what did I learn? 3) what does it mean/did it change how I think? And 4) how will I use it?

Doing a self-evaluation in a **course** helps put the course in the context of your overall educational plans (How does this learning affect my Divisional work? What do I still need to work on to be ready for the next Division?). Doing a reflective retrospective at the **end of each Division** helps you to look across a number of courses, to see patterns of growth, to see how your ideas have changed, and to set new goals.

Even if you are generally a reflective person and feel as though you have done enough reflecting and talking about your learning during the semester, the act of writing down your reflections is important. Doing so can spur new thoughts and ideas, help you notice patterns you didn't see before, and set goals and make plans in an explicit way. It creates a record for you to review and reflect on in the future.

How to Write Self Evaluations

In any given course, a faculty member might give you specific instructions about how to evaluate yourself for that course. You should follow their instructions. If they do not give instructions, or if you want to get better at self-reflection in general, below are a few different approaches. Pick the prompts that get you thinking about your own learning and experiences in the course. In all cases, be specific and concrete.

1. *Consider the objectives of the course* as written in the syllabus and write about how you did with regards to each of them – what did you learn, what helped you, and what do you need to focus on for further improvement?

2. *Ask yourself a series of questions* to get you writing about your learning experiences in the course more generally. For example:

- What did I do?

- What did I learn and how well did I learn it?

- What does my learning in this course mean for my Divisional work?

- So, what now? What do I see as the next steps in my learning?

3. *Address a number of specific issues* by giving concrete, specific **examples**.

- What do I now understand best about this subject? Least well?

- What are my strongest and weakest points as a student? What did I do to improve the weak points? What will I do next?

- What do I need to learn next about this subject?

- What was most satisfying about the class? Most frustrating? Your responsibility for each?

- Has the course irritated you? Stimulated you? Has it made you uncomfortable about yourself, about society, about the future, about learning? Are you the same person who began the class ten weeks ago? What's different?

- What did you expect to learn? What did you actually learn? More? Less? Why?

Mid-Semester Self-Evaluations

Mid-semester is an important time for self-evaluation. Doing an evaluation at the midpoint allows you to make any necessary changes in your work habits to improve your learning in a course. You are required to write mid-semester self-evaluations in all courses in your first year at Hampshire – many faculty ask all students to do this every year. Mid semester is a perfect time to revisit the course expectations and goals on the syllabus. Think about how you are doing in the course (what are you *doing well*, what can you *do better*, and what *specific strategies* will you use?). Make an appointment with your professor if you have questions about how to improve your work!

How to Use Your Self Evaluations

Write a self-evaluation that is intentional and aims you towards the *future*. Make note of where your writing took you. Here are some **ideas for using what you learned through reflection**: Write the ideas you have about what to work on in your *"goals" section* in your Division II contract or add to your Division III proposal. Write a *letter to your advisor or committee* telling them what you want to work on. *Meet with professors* in their office hours to talk with them about what you need to work on and make a plan for ways to use their course to advance your goals. S*tart writing your Division I or Division II retrospective.* Keep it as an *ongoing file*, making note of your progress each semester.

Narrative Evaluation from Faculty

Why Narrative Evaluations

At Hampshire, we believe that letter grades do not provide an adequate evaluation of your progress. Narrative evaluations help you identify your areas of *growth potential* along with your areas of *strength*. They are not necessarily "easier" to receive than a grade or "more positive," but they are more useful because they provide details about how you are doing in a given learning activity. Since you are crafting your own path at Hampshire, you can use feedback from faculty to know what challenge to focus on next and to know what you have already accomplished.

What to Expect in Narrative Evaluations

End-of-Semester Narrative Evaluations

Expect your end of semester course evaluations to be a paragraph or two (about 150 – 200 words) that really evaluate how well you met the aims of the course. Look at the syllabus to see what the *course goals* are and what the *requirements are for evaluation*. You will get frank feedback on how you did with regards to both of these things by the end of the course. You will want to read the feedback you receive on your early work in the course to be able to <u>adjust</u> over the weeks of the semester to receive the strongest evaluation you can.

Mid-Semester Evaluations

Do not expect a written narrative at the mid-semester mark. Mid-semester evaluation time is really your time to reflect on how you are doing in a course and what you need to do to complete it well. It is also a time for faculty to flag any concerns in order to ensure that you get the support you need if you are not doing well in a course.

How to Use Your Narrative Evaluations

At the end of each semester, read over all your course evaluations. Take note of what your instructors indicate are your strengths and where you still have to develop your skills and understandings. *Look for patterns*. Are there things that more than one professor are saying that you have to work on? *Make a plan* for working on that in the coming semester (e.g. plan on bringing work to the writing fellows or writing faculty; get time management help from OARS or workshops, create your own plan for getting drafts in earlier, etc.). Is there something that stands out as different from the rest? What can you learn from that (e.g. when I take a course with a professor who is strict with deadlines, I get work in on time. How will I keep *myself* to deadlines?)?

Contracts and Proposals

Contracts in Division II and proposals in Division III are where you do your planning along with your faculty committee. These documents create an agreed upon plan that helps guide your path. They start with your ideas that grow as a result of discussions with faculty. You lay out your interests; set goals for what you want to know, understand, and be able to do by the end of the division (these might be informed by your narrative and self-evaluations); and you develop the current plan. The plan guides your choices of courses and other experiences. And it helps your committee suggest appropriate courses, projects, internships, and other experiences. Of course, you plan changes as a result of your work. So, your contracts are editable to demonstrate new directions. Editing your contract regularly keeps everyone on the same page and guides your choices.

Contracts not only keep you focused on your own goals, they also remind you to attend to institutional goals. For example, in your Division II contract, you are asked to consider how you will meet the community engagement (CEL-2) and the race and power requirements. In Division III, your proposal asks you to consider how you will fulfill the requirement for two advanced educational activities (AEA's).

Portfolios

Division I and II portfolios are where you put your learning together. We really do learn by reflecting on our work, not simply by doing it. In a portfolio, you curate your work and reflect on where you started, where you are now, and set goals for your next steps. Doing an electronic portfolio, or ePortfolio, can really help you organize your work in ways that support your reflection. The ePorfolio also helps you make clear to your committee what you found most important in your work and what you accomplished. It is where you can bring your theoretical learning and your practical work together, leading to strong integrative thinking.

You can read more about the ePortfolio process here
https://sites.google.com/hampshire.edu/eportfolios
The site includes reflective prompts that help you reflect.

Ideally, you would build your ePortfolio as you go along – it will help you reflect and make meaning as you progress through your studies. It also means you won't have a huge task in front of you when you are trying to finish your projects at the end of your final Div I or II semester.

Goal Setting

Setting Your Goals

Using narrative evaluations and self-evaluations well is tied to setting goals for your own

learning. Having goals and monitoring how you are doing with regards to your goals are a powerful set of practices for taking charge of your own learning. Your goals are apt to change over the course of your Hampshire career. Here are some questions and ideas to consider that might get you started. And remember, putting your goals into contracts and proposals helps your committee guide you to powerful learning opportunities.

Division I:

From the very first day on campus, you might describe the **hopes** you have for your first year at Hampshire by answering such questions as: What do I hope to get out of Division I? What questions do I want to investigate? How will I develop my skills to succeed in college? How can I become part of the Hampshire community? What types of experiences, clubs, and projects would I like to become a part of?

Division II:

By the time you file your Division II contract, you will know even better what skills and abilities you need to continue to hone. You will also have ideas about **content** you hope to learn more deeply or **disciplines** you hope to understand. You might also have an idea of the kinds of **research methods** you hope to develop or the **production skills** you want to gain, **languages** you want to learn, types of **community-based learning skills** you want to work on, **collaborative skills** you need to improve, **project management skills** that will serve you in Division III, **analytic abilities**, **etc**. Any of these goals can go into your Division II contract.

Putting your goals in your Division II contract helps you and your committee to select the right courses and activities to help you meet your goals.

Division III:

Remember, Division III is still a time for improving your skills – the process of Division III is just as important as the end product you complete! Put your **goals** in your Division III proposal.