

## Field Study 1: The Power of Questions & The Art of Reflection

*Once you have learned how to ask questions—relevant and appropriate and substantial questions—you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want or need to know.* —N. Postman and C. Weingartner

The subject of this initial field study is **you!** This assignment has THREE parts.

**Part I—100 Questions:** Michael Geldman in his book, Discover Your Genius, invites readers to rediscover what geniuses from Plato and Socrates to Leonardo da Vinci have known: namely, the cultivation of a questioning mind leads to self knowledge and wisdom.

To *crack yourself open* to your own life questions we ask that you *make a list of 100 questions that are important to you*. Your list—handwritten—can include any kind of question as long as it’s something you deem *significant*: Anything from “*How can I save money?*” or “*How can I have more fun?*” to “*What is the meaning and purpose of my existence?*”

Create your entire list of 100 Questions *in one sitting*. Write quickly; don’t worry about spelling, grammar, or repeating the same question in different words (recurring questions will alert you to emerging themes).

*Why 100 questions?* The first twenty or so will be off the top of your head. In the next 20 themes often begin to emerge. And in the later part of this exercise you are likely to discover unexpected and profoundly important personal questions.

**Remember:** Your questions are to be directed to yourself—i.e., you are literally asking YOURSELF questions—good questions!

Part of the richness of this exercise will come through studying your questions, detecting the themes, and paying special attention to those questions that seem to bubble up from some deep place inside you—e.g., the questions that surprise or excite or mystify you.

### ***Specific Instructions:***

- Set aside 1 hour to ask yourself 100 questions about you—your life, cares, beliefs, values, fears, sorrows.
- If you get stuck, remember, there are many ways to begin a question: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Do? Does? Is? Can? Could? Will? Would?

**After you are done, look over your questions and offer a one-page reflection (typed and single-spaced using standard margins and font size), considering such things as:**

- The feelings you had as you were doing this exercise.
- The patterns or unifying themes you see in your questions.
- The things (perhaps unexpected) that your questions reveal about you.
- Which questions are most important—i.e., which ones hold the most energy for you?
- What step could you take right now to begin to answer these “most important” questions?

**Part II—The Evening Review:** The objective of Part II of this Field Study is to ask questions that have direct bearing on **your life** as a Penn State student. In this vein, some questions worthy of attention might be:

- Why have I come to college, anyway?
- How do I best learn?
- What am I learning while I am here?
- Is what I am learning worthy of my time/effort/money?
- And, if I find these kinds of questions irritating, why might this be?

With these kinds of questions in mind, I ask that you do two "**evening reviews**" at the end of two school days.

Each review should consist of a typed **reflection** wherein you take note of what, if anything, you learned that day, both in and outside the classroom. In cases where you **didn't** learn anything, reflect on why not? *Note: This is not about blaming; it's about taking time to ask: What's going on in my life here at PSU?*

In cases where you **did** learn something, consider: i) **Where** did I learn it? ii) **Who/what** was my "teacher?" (e.g., Maybe you, yourself, were your teacher or maybe your teacher was a book or perhaps it was a friend or even a mistake you made; and iii) **How do I really know** that I learned this thing?—i.e., What's my proof?

In this assignment you will, in effect, be taking time to **study yourself** to determine how, if at all, PSU is serving you needs as a learner. Note: There is no *right* answer, only your own truth.

Your write up for Part II should consist of TWO discrete (i.e., clearly labeled) "evening reviews," each at least ½ page (type, single-spaced, standard margins and font) in length.

**Part III—Questions and the importance of Reflection:** A good question merits a thoughtful, **reflection-based** response. So it is that in all the questions that we pose to you in BiSci, we will be emphasizing the importance of reflection. Indeed, if you are to benefit from this course, it will be important, at the outset, that you are able to make a clear distinction between **reflecting** and **reacting**. As I see it, it doesn't require much thinking to **REACT**, but **REFLECTION** is another matter entirely. In order to reflect you must dig down underneath your initial *reactions* to discover within yourself something more profound and more true.

In an effort to guide you toward experiencing, firsthand, this distinction between *reflecting* and *reacting*, I ask that you engage with the following question: *What does it mean to you to live in a Universe?* Your "engagement" process should consist of the following 4 steps:

Step 1-Write down, in a few sentences, your initial "**reaction**" to the question--*What does it mean to you to live in a Universe?* No REFLECTION, just REACTION!

Step 2-Explore your initial **reaction** to this question, asking, Why did I REACT, initially, the way I did? In other words, think about your reaction—i.e., *think about your thinking*—and write down what you come up with. Note: this will require more effort than Step 1.

Step 3-Next, accept (for instructive purposes) that the **reaction** you offered in Step 1 is *not* your deepest truth. And go back and ponder this same question--*What does it mean to you to live in a Universe?*--for at least 15 minutes, firm in the conviction that you have within you a

better, deeper, more profound response to this question than what you offered Step 1. Persevere. Be prepared to be surprised by your own brilliance. Summarize what you come up with in 1-2 handwritten paragraphs.

Step 4-Not done yet! For a final time, go back to this same question—*What does it mean to me to live in a Universe?* This time, rather than answering from your head—e.g., in a pragmatic, rational way—answer the question from your whole being. In other words, allow this question to inhabit your entire mind/body. ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL THE QUESTION ALIVE IN YOU—and then simply be attentive to what arises in response to this question and write down your reflections. Better yet, go out into the dead of night and pose this question to the heavens....

When you have completed Steps 1→4, type up your findings in a one page single-spaced essay (standard margins and font). In this essay, do not simply summarize what you have handwritten. Instead, **reflect** (there's that word again!) on your experience on moving from reaction (Steps 1) to cerebral reflection (Steps 2 and 3) to full-bodied reflection (Step 4). What was this process like for you? Why? What did you learn through this process?

## Field Study 2: *The Ecology of the Belief*

### Background

Our beliefs **are not** immutable facts. Rather, our beliefs are *opinions* about things that we are not able to have knowledge of through direct experience. For example, absent of our ability to know directly whether life exists on other planets or if there is life after death, or even if there is a ‘God,’ we can formulate beliefs about these things but that’s about it.

We are all, to varying degrees, loaded down with beliefs. This is simply part of the human condition! It is not good or bad. But it is **IMPORTANT** to be aware of our beliefs, because they often determine our actions. This is true in both little and big ways. On a small scale, take the case of childbirth that we discussed in class. If you **believe** that childbirth is a painful and possibly dangerous process, then it is logical that your **action**, at the time of birth, will be to go to a hospital emergency room and to ask for pain-relieving drugs and a doctor’s intervention.

On a much grander scale, our individual and collective **beliefs** about *Earth* inevitably influence our relationship with *Earth* and, perhaps, even our own survival as a species, not to mention the wellbeing of Planet Earth, itself.

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| <p><b>This Field Study consists of three parts. Think of it as an opportunity to engage in three explorations of your beliefs.</b></p> |
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### **Part I—Beliefs and Personal Identity**

**STEP 1:** Lao-tsu is reputed to have said, “When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be.” To explore this statement, take out a pen/pencil and for five minutes write a description of yourself. *Who are you?*

When you are done, read over what you have written and for each of your statements consider: *Does this statement really capture the essence of who I know myself to be?* For example, if you wrote that you are a *Penn State student*, is this **really** who you are? Said differently: Studying at PSU describes *what* you are doing at this time in your life, but is *Penn State student*, who you really are? For example, if you weren't a student, would the *essence* of you still exist? Or suppose you wrote that you are a female (or male)... Again, is this **really** who you are? Does your biological equipment and hormonal constitution, compressed into the label *female/male*, comprise the essence of who you know yourself to be?

**Think! Feel! Experience! Question!**

As you ruminate in this way, cross out all those statements that, though they may *describe* you, are not essential to your personal essence.

**Stop! Don't read any further until you complete Part I. Why? Because you will learn more if you go one step at a time. Trust me on this.**

STEP 2: When you are ready, take out a second piece of paper and once again describe yourself but, this time, without mentioning anything that you included in Part 1. Take your time. When you finish, stop and, again, take time to reflect, crossing-out any statements that fail to capture the *essence* of who you know yourself to be. If your brain is hurting, that's a good sign. Deep pondering is hard.

**OK, time for a break! Put this assignment aside for a day. Sleep on it. IMPORTANT: Don't read further until tomorrow.**

STEP 3: (Next day) For a third and final time engage the question, Who/what am I? Again have a fresh piece of paper ready to write down what you discover. But this time, don't *think* your way to an answer. Instead, *feel* your way toward understanding. Allow yourself to actually experience this question in your body.

Look at your hands—Who am I? Place your hand over your heart—Who am I? Take your pulse—Who am I? Lie down in the grass and gaze up to the heavens—Who am I? Turn over and place your face down into Earth—Who am I? Bring your awareness to the fact that there are millions of micro-organisms living on and in you—Who am I? Ask, what does the body—my body—*want*...? and then let your body—your whole being—have its way with you? Sink down into your core—*Who am I?*

**Essay:** When you're ready—taking into consideration all three rounds of your work—compose your *deepest most heartfelt* response to the following four questions:

- 1) *Who am I **not*** that I thought I was?
- 2) Who am I in the most profound sense?
- 3) How does (or might) my relationship with myself, with others, with Earth change if I were to assume the personal identity I described in *Part 1*? In *Part 2*? In *Part 3*? And..
- 4) What is the connection between the well being of Earth and my understanding of who/what I am?

Shape your responses to these questions into an essay, between 1 and 1.5 pages in length (typed, single spaced, standard margins (1"), and font 12pt).

## **Part II—Beliefs that Underlie the False Self**

Most humans, it seems, strive to be sincere and authentic. And, yet, it is exceedingly rare to find a human being who doesn't **pretend** in some ways. Often times the pretending we do is subtle... we may not even be aware that we are pretending. How about you? For example, do you sometimes pretend that:

- You have it all together
- Everything is OK when it really isn't
- You are happy when you aren't
- You like certain people who, in actuality, you find irritating
- You know more than you really know?

To explore the human tendency to pretend, get a blank sheet of paper and write down "I pretend....." ten times along the left margin and then, in the interest of "truthspeaking," complete each of your ten "I pretend....." prompts by acknowledging ten ways in which you "pretend." If you are struggling, reread the "Truthspeaking" essay from Week 3. Make no mistake: This is not easy; it requires that we have the courage to be honest with ourselves.

When you have your list, look over your ten "I pretend" statements and pick one of your ways of pretending that is particularly troubling to you. For example, perhaps you pretend to like someone who you don't care for. Circle the statement—whatever it is. Next, offer your reflections (in essay form) on the following four questions:

- First, how does *pretending* in the way that you circled serve you? After all, you wouldn't be pretending in this way unless you **believed** it served you (benefitted you) in some way!
- Second, what is the *cost* (e.g., in terms of integrity, relationships, vitality, etc.?) you pay for holding this belief that keeps you *pretending* in the way that you circled?
- Third, how might your life change if you were to let go of your belief that keeps you pretending in this way?
- Finally, what is a new possibility—a new belief—that you could substitute for your old belief and, in so doing, free yourself from your pretending?

Summarize the outcome of your reflections on these four questions in a **one-page essay, typed, single-spaced**. Important: Include in your reflection a consideration of how your pretending, either directly or indirectly, affects the wellbeing of Planet Earth. It may be hard to see any connection so be patient with yourself and understanding will arise.

## **Part III—Articulating Your Worldview**

Our stories, accumulated over a lifetime, constitute our beliefs and our beliefs strongly influence what we do, day-to-day. Gandhi said it best: **"What we believe, we become."** Yes, our beliefs (our stories) do, to a significant degree, determine our destiny. The point, of course, is that without conscious awareness of our beliefs, we aren't nearly as free as we imagine ourselves to be.

It is possible to identify, in a preliminary fashion, the beliefs that comprise your worldview by responding to the six open sentences below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ created the world.

2. The universe is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Earth is here to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Earth's plant and animals are here to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Human beings purpose in being here on Earth is to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. The good and bad things that happen on Earth are the consequence of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**“Worldview/Story 1”:** Write down on a piece of paper you responses to each open statement. Consider that your responses to these six questions comprise a kind of story that influences, at least in part, the way you understand and live your life.

Then, combine your response to these six questions to compose YOUR STORY in one paragraph followed by your reflections on the following three questions: 1) Where did this story of yours come from? 2) How does this story leave you feeling? and 3) In what ways does your story influence, and possibly restrict, your day-to-day decisions and actions?

**This should be typed and at least 250 words in length.**

### Creating a New Story

There is more to be learned from this exploration. So, when you are ready, write your responses to each of the six open sentences for a **second time**, but this time answer each question in such a way that your responses **lead you to inhabit an entirely different story**. So, for example, if, in the first round, you wrote, “*God created the world*” now conjure another possible answer to this question. Your job—and **this is the important part**—is to **make this second set of six responses more mind-expanding, more exciting, more revolutionary than your first set of responses**. I am not asking you to believe your new response, just to exercise your innate creativity—your fecund imagination—your playfulness—to come up with a new round of responses that create a measure of excitement and intrigue within you. Take your time with this, trusting that you have within you an alternative story that is more compelling and more true than the status quo story that you have lived by up to this point in your life.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ created the world.

2. The universe is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Earth is here to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Earth's plant and animals are here to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Human beings purpose in being here on Earth is to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. The good and bad things that happen on Earth are the consequence of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Worldview/Story 2:** When you are satisfied with your second set of answers, compose a typed response (250-word minimum) growing out of your reflections on the following questions: 1) How does this second *worldview* leave me feeling? 2) What do I believe would happen to me if I began to act as if this story were true—e.g., What would I lose and/or gain? 3) How would living this new story benefit affect the wellbeing of Planet Earth?

## Field Study 3: Listening

*Can something as simple as listening and being heard liberate the world?  
And would it be too much to agree, once and for all, that the heart is the  
country to which we all belong, and love the only state we owe our  
allegiance?* Patti Digh, *Life is a Verb*, 2008

When humans are asked what we most want from others, our most common response is that we want to be seen, to be listened to—taken seriously. Herein lies the tremendous power of listening for healing our fractured world. Given the enormous latent power unleashed through the simple act of listening it is surprising that universities don't offer courses in the art & practice of listening. Maybe some day they will. For now, I can, at least offer you this field study designed to help you see how listening can bring us into more caring relationship with ourselves, fellow humans and the more-than-human world.

### Part I: Listening to Yourself Using Freeze Frame.

Think about a problem in your life—a place where you are stuck—e.g., a place in your life that is creating moderate stress and/or anxiety for you. Note: Given that this will be your first experience with “Freeze Frame,” avoid any problem that is super-stressful.

Now, once you have identified a stuck place that creates moderate stress for you, frame it as a **QUESTION**. For example, if you are unhappy because you are not getting along with your roommate, a possible question could be as simple as, “What might I do to improve my relationship with my roommate?” Whatever the question, write it down.

Once you have your question very clearly in mind, experiment with the technique, **Freeze Frame** (see description in box below), as a way of gaining insight into your problem/question.

#### **Freeze Frame Approach for Listening to Your Self**

1-Bring your problem to mind and, as you do so, notice the stress and anxiety associated with this problem and allow yourself to really **FEEL** this discomfort in your **BODY**—**don't think about it, feel it!** (1 minute)

2-Holding onto your feelings of discomfort/stress, shift your awareness to the area around your heart and now imagine that you are literally breathing in and out through your heart region. (1 minute)

3-Next, recall a good/happy experience that you have had sometime in your life and re-experience the **FEELING**—e.g., joy, appreciation or love—that you had during that time. Allow yourself to really **experience** this good feeling in your body while you continue to breathe in and out through your heart region. (1 minute)

4-Next, keeping your attention on your heart and bringing to mind the **QUESTION** you are seeking an answer for, ask yourself: “What is an answer to my question that would minimize future stress and offer me genuine wellbeing?” (1 minute)

5-Finally, continue breathing in and out through your heart as you **LISTEN—really LISTEN!**—to what your heart says to *you* in answer to *your* question. Be patient. An answer won’t come right away but it will come.... Give yourself at least 5 minutes for this listening. This requires patience and a bit of practice along with the trust that within you lies an answer to your question.

Engage in the five Freeze Frame steps, as described above, on at least **TWO** separate occasions—i.e., use it for two different problems/questions. In each case, devote at least 15 minutes to the Freeze Frame practice.

When you are done, **compose a one-page reflection (typed, single-spaced)** describing the two issues you explored using Freeze Frame, your 5-step practice of listening, and what you learned.

**Note:** If you are feeling skeptical about this Freeze Frame practice, consider that recent research in neurobiology reveals that the human heart has its own innate intelligence—as evidenced by the presence of more than 40,000 neurons arranged in a structural formation similar to the brain’s cortex. Indeed, people in other cultures have recognized and experienced the intelligence of the heart. For example, when the renowned psychologist Carl Jung, visited *Chief Mountain Lake* of the Taos Pueblo, the tribal elder told him he judged the *whites* to be quite mad. “Why is that?” Jung asked.

“They say they think with their heads,” the chief replied.

“Of course,” said Jung, “What do you think with?”

Mountain Lake pointed to his heart: “We think here.”

With this in mind, I hope that you will suspend, for a time, any skepticism you might be holding and open to this idea of *thinking from your heart center*.

## **Part II. Listening to the Human Other**

For Part II, Do **EITHER Option 1 OR Option 2** below:

**OPTION 1:** Identify someone in your life that is causing you stress—it could be a roommate, a parent, a brother or sister, a boss. Begin by calling to mind all the things about this person that are upsetting to you and simply write down in one paragraph what you think of them. Follow this with a second paragraph summarizing what is it about them that angers, disappoints or confuses you, and why? Finish this with a paragraph on how you want them to change? Let yourself really rant away.

When you are done, read over what you have written and consider how some of your judgments about this person might not be true. After all, judgments are just beliefs and beliefs are just opinions. So see if you can soften a bit. In a similar vein, open yourself to considering how some of your judgments about this person might also apply to yourself. For example, if you are upset with your roommate because she ignores you, see if you can find times/instances where you ignore others in your life, including your roommate. Again, the idea is to see if you

can soften a bit. This “softening” is not easy because our egos are hugely invested in being right and they love to blame and judge. So, this may take some time. When you are ready type up a short essay (250 word minimum) summarizing what you discovered.

Now for the really challenging part. Make arrangements to spend at least a half hour with this person (an hour if possible) with the sole intention of understanding them.... free of judgment, free of the need to be right, free of your ego’s agenda. Your only purpose during this time is to listen to understand this person. You are *not* interrogating. Rather, you are just asking questions about them, their life, their concerns and struggles with the sole intent of gaining an understanding of what it is like to be them. LISTEN with the intention of coming to see and understand the world through the eyes of this other person. If the person says something that you disagree with, avoid the inclination to enter into a debate, and instead simply say, “I am confused by what you are saying; please help me understand you.” In carrying out this project you will be, in effect, testing a hypothesis—namely that *it's impossible to be curious about someone and judge them at the same time.*

After your time together write an essay (250-word minimum) reflecting on the following questions: 1) What did you feel and how did your feelings change during your encounter? 2) When were you at your best and at your worst during your encounter? 3) What did you learn about yourself through this exercise? 4) What did you learn about listening? 5) What did you learn about the relationship between curiosity and judgment?

Your two short essays (each a minimum of 250 words) taken together should comprise, at least, 1 single-spaced typed page. *Note: This field study is inspired by the PSU Non-Judgment Day Project.*

**OPTION 2:** A woman by the name of Fran Peavy once traveled around the world. In every city she visited, Peavy plopped herself down on a park bench. Then, she set out a paper sign which read: "American Willing to Listen." Eventually—maybe after ten minutes, maybe after 20, someone would come to sit with Peavy. It never failed. Someone always came. Perhaps they were tired. Perhaps they simply wanted companionship ... because everyone who sat with Fran Peavy talked to her, sometimes at length. Option 2 is to open yourself to listen to the stranger a la Fran Peavy. Here’s how:

- A. Create a sign of some sort that offers an invitation similar to that of Peavy’s
- B. Find a seat in a public place, post your sign, and wait.
- C. When someone comes, LISTEN. Important: Do not listen to reply; listen to understand. And as you listen to understand, listen with acceptance. ***"Accept their truth."*** Even though you will not formally “know” this person, treat them as a long-lost cousin... because, when you get down to it, we are all related—all made of the same stuff—much more similar than we are different.
- D. Listen to at least two people. Of course, you may certainly listen to more than two; in fact, the more the better!
- E. **Compose a response piece to your experience (1 page, single-spaced, typed)** reflecting on what happened. Consider, but don’t limit yourself to, questions such as the following: What were you thinking and feeling as you sat waiting for someone to approach you? What, if anything, did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about the people who approached you? Make this **more than** a superficial accounting. Give yourself the gift of your own brilliance.

### Part III. *Listening to the Natural World*

*Listen to the natural world!* You have to be kidding! What does the natural world have to say to me? After all, animals can't speak... plants can't speak...

But think again: Mammals—e.g., elephants, prairie dogs, dolphins—do communicate with one another; bird vocalizations are a form of communication; bees, using “dance” movements, tell their hive mates, in precise terms, where to find rich sources of nectar and pollen. Even plants are able to *message* each other using chemical signals.

What's more, there is a growing body of research revealing that different species are able to communicate with each other. This is referred to as *interspecies communication*. If you are a dog owner, you may have already experienced times when your dog “spoke” to *you*. For humans, learning to **listen** to the life forms that we live among here on Earth is the key to *interspecies communication*.

As you walk around PSU campus you may notice different plants and animals, but when was the last time you actually took time to: *Stop, Look, and Listen*... I mean to really LOOK and to really LISTEN? Just because we don't speak each other's language doesn't mean that we can't *understand*, in some ways, the messages from Squirrel or Crow or Dragonfly and that these “others” don't, in some measure, experience our presence, as well.

So, for this final phase of this “Listening” field study, I ask that you open enough to explore the possibility that you can be in “conversation” with the *more-than-human world* that you are enmeshed in. Again, the key to such communication lies in your willingness to: 1) suspend your skepticism for a time; and 2) Stop, Look & Listen.

Begin by taking a short field trip to a nearby natural area. It could be the PSU Arboretum or one of the semi-wild parks within walking distance of campus (e.g., Sunset Park—just a few blocks down McKee Street which is just across Park Avenue OR good-ole Walnut Springs Park off of University Drive) OR, if you are feeling more adventuresome, visit the forest trails leading out from Shingletown Gap (located just 3 miles from campus—see Purple Lizard Map for sale in HUB bookstore for trail map).

Once you arrive at your chosen location, take a moment to breathe and to be *present* ... and then begin walking. Don't decide where to go. Instead wait until you feel strongly drawn in a certain direction and then begin walking, slowly... paying attention. Give yourself permission to wander off the trail if you feel a pull to do so.

As you explore, experience your surroundings using all of your senses: vision, smell, touch, hearing, taste. Be fully attentive. Go slow and gradually allow yourself to be drawn to a particular “Other”—maybe it will be a tree, or a bush, or a rock, or a stream, or an insect, or a bird, or even the wind or a cloud. As you sit or stand there, *bring your attention to your own limber and sensitive body, becoming at ease with yourself and the slow rhythm of your breathing, and then just commence to talk to the other being. That's right: Talk! Why? Because if you speak honestly, the audible modulations of your voice, along with the alterations in your visible musculature, and the olfactory emanations from your skin will all be of a piece with the patterned meaning of your words, and therefore will readily convey something of your intent at a palpable, visceral level to the keen senses of the other beings around you.*

*Note: Even when simply addressing a maple tree, or a boulder strewn hill, you can be sure—if you are honest, and relaxed within your flesh—that there are sensate presences out and about that are affected by the sound and the scent and perhaps even the sight of your gestured intent, whether they be squirrels, or a swarm of termites chewing its way through the resonant hollow of a fallen trunk, or a silent bat flapping erratically through the night air, or even the*

*impressionable air itself, absorbing your chemical exhalations and registering in waves the sonorous timbre of your voice. And so your speaking is heard, or felt or sensed* (From D. Abram, Becoming Animal, 2010).

Continue speaking until you feel interrupted in some way by the “Other” you have chosen to be with. Then, it is time for you to LISTEN to this “Other.” Don’t expect to hear English words, but if you are attentive you may receive subtle messages in the form of: i) images (e.g., either things you literally come to *see* with your eyes or things that arise in your imagination); ii) body sensations (e.g., surprising ways that your body feels or wants to move); or iii) memories that seemingly emerge out of nowhere, catching you by surprise. Be patient with this process. Go slow... Revelations will very likely come to you.

When you sense that your “conversation” with your chosen “Other” is over, make some sort of offering—a song, poem, a touch, a sprinkling of water, a bow—as a form of respect and gratitude to this “Other” (inspired in part of B. Plotkin, Soulcrafting).

## Field Study 4: Breaking Patterns

I remember one, in my forties, coming to the shocking realization that my life had become a “pattern.” Who I was, more than anything, was a pattern! It was important for me to see and acknowledge this. Indeed, a prerequisite to any change is the awareness of the problem.

In this field study I invite you to bring the light of awareness to the patterns that you live within with special emphasis on patterns of living that cause both ecological and personal harm.

### **Part I—Recognizing Patterns in our Daily Lives**

Have you ever observed a tree up on a mountain that is stooped over and blown to one side? When still small, the tree probably stood erect, but as tree grew taller the patterned/prevailing winds buffeted it from one side and pretty soon the tree was locked into a lopsided form. It is the same with us: If we enact the same patterns day-after-day, eventually we become rigid, inflexible... more a *pattern* than a *life*.

How is it with you? What are the patterns that you enact in your daily life—the patterns that might be constricting your life, sapping your freedom, keeping you from growing in important ways? As a means of exploring this, take fifteen minutes to *describe, in writing*, the beginning of a typical day in your life here at PSU. How does your day begin? What side of the bed do you rise from? What is the first thing you do once you are on your feet. Break your morning routine into small steps describing them so that someone else could enact them just as you do. Better yet: Imagine you are writing an Instruction Manual for someone from another planet who has no idea how to begin a day.

Expand your thinking to consider your patterned behaviors associated with eating, studying, electronic media, music, your daily physical movements, and so forth. As part of your *pattern detection*, consider drawing a map to depict the daily pattern of your physical movements. Then, once you have a clear idea of your patterns, experiment with changing three of them. So, for example, if you always walk to class listening to music, with your head straight ahead break that pattern for one day by putting away your music device and looking all around (even up at the sky) as you walk to your classes.

The idea is to notice your mindless patterns and *mix it up* by breaking three of the routines that govern your life. This is about surfacing your patterns so that you can, if you so choose, change them. Be playful. Be curious. Be fearless.

After you have completed the “field work,” take some time to compose a **one-page, typed, singled spaced, essay on your experience *including*** your reflections on some, *if not all*, of the following questions: 1) What are some of the *beliefs* that your patterns are grounded in? 2) Where do these beliefs come from? 3) What was it like to break your patterns? 4) What was hard about it? 5) What was surprising about it? 6) What does this exercise have to do, if anything, with personal freedom, growth, and change? 7) What does this exercise have to do with your relationship to Earth?

### **Part II—Our ‘Yeses’ and our ‘Nos’ Create the World**

Whether you recognize it or not, you are making decisions moment-by-moment throughout each day. For example, suppose you buy something in a store. This entails making a

decision—i.e., to buy or not to buy? If you are like most people, you probably don't pause very long before making your purchases. If you want something and you have the cash, you simply buy it. Done deal! That's the ***default pattern***.

But for Part II of this field study I ask that you buck this ***pattern*** by pausing on TWO OCCASIONS before making two different purchases. After pausing, and this is the important part, consider what values of yours would be ***affirmed and/or violated*** if you were to proceed with your purchase. Specifically, I ask that you literally STOP after picking out something that you intend to buy—i.e., ***STOP*** when you literally have the desired object in your hand—and, then, ***BEFORE*** making your purchase, that you consider three things that you would be saying 'yes to' AND three things that what you would be saying "no to" if you were to proceed with your purchase. For example, suppose that you are preparing to buy a box of pop tarts. With that purchase, what are three things you would be saying "yes to" and what are three things you would be saying "no to" in making (or not) the purchase? *Then, go deeper and consider what are the VALUES implicit in your 3 "yeses" and your 3 "nos". In other words, with your yeses and nos, what are you declaring as important to you?*

After your deliberations on the two items you pick, and depending on what you arrive at, go ahead and buy (or not) the item in your hands. Finally, ***compose a 1-page (minimum) typed/single-spaced*** essay describing your ***patterned ways*** of shopping along with your experience testing out this new ***values-based deliberation process***. Include in your essay your thoughts on the assertion that "*Our yeses and nos create the world.*"

### **Part III: Distinguishing Needs from Wants**

During your Ecological Footprint Lab you were asked to create a table ***distinguishing your Needs from your Wants*** as follows:

*Draw a line lengthwise down the middle of a sheet of paper. On the left side list your ESSENTIAL MATERIAL NECESSITIES—i.e., the things that every human being needs to live (e.g., air to breathe, food... ) Write "Essential Material Necessities" as the heading for this column and list 5-10 things.*

*Now, on the right side of your paper, in Column 2 list all of your NON-ESSENTIAL MATERIAL POSSESSIONS—i.e., the things you own and use but that are NOT absolutely necessary for your survival—( e.g., television, toothpaste, bed). Write "Non-Essential Material Possessions" at the top of this right column. Write down 20 items in this column.*

*Next, select 5 items from Column 2 that you would be able to give up for a while without too much difficulty if you had to. Put the letter 'A' next to each of these 5 items. Next, select an additional 10 items (bringing your total to 15) from Column 2 that you could give up but to do so would cause a fair amount of inconvenience and/or discontent for you. Place the letter 'B' next to these 10 items. Finally, put a 'C' next to the remaining 5 items in Column 2 because to give these up would cause you even more inconvenience and perhaps even outright suffering.*

Now, with your completed table in hand, pick a 'C' item—i.e., an item that for you really ***feels like*** an "essential necessity" and GIVE IT UP! For three days ***live without this item*** and, as you live without your imagined *essential necessity*, pay close attention to your reactions.

In this vein, note that psychologist, Chellis Glendinning, maintains that many of us are literally ***addicted*** to the modern conveniences that we surround ourselves with. If Glendinning is

right, you should experience “withdrawal” (i.e., pain, upset, confusion, anger, unbalance) when you suddenly deny yourself of your daily “fix” to you chosen Category ‘C’ item. To evaluate if this is true for you, carefully observe your mental, emotional, and spiritual state, day-by-day, as you engage in this 3-day ‘eco-fast.’ Pay attention to how your perception of things around you changes. Note the ways that eliminating this one thing from your life either **separates you from** or **brings you into fuller relationship with** yourself, others, and/or Earth.

Based on your experience, compose a 1-page minimum (typed/single spaced) reflection summarizing what you learned during your 3-day *eco-fast*.

## Field Study Five: The Hero's Journey

*Growth is no accident. Growth is a process. We have to want to grow. We have to will to move away from the stones [stories] that entomb us in ourselves. We have to work at uprooting the weeds that are smothering good growth in ourselves.* (The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages).

### Background

As touched on many times during this course, we humans, whether we like it or not, live, to varying degrees, in accord with a cultural *story*. In America, this *story* is comprised of the messages transmitted by our culture about what constitutes success, happiness, freedom, maturity, intelligence, love, and more.

The prevalent *story*—transmitted, day-by-day, by media outlets, families, schools, churches, business and government—proclaims that our principal purpose in life, as human beings, is to work hard to earn money that will, in turn, ensure our individual security, material comfort, and happiness. This is the story of *Homo economicus*—human being as cog in economic machine. For many of us this story is so familiar that we don't even think to acknowledge it, much less question it.

But what if there is another way—another story? What if we are here for an altogether different purpose? In this vein, the philosopher/historian Joseph Campbell suggested that we might conceive of our lives as a *Hero's Journey*. In the classic scenario, the “hero” leaves home (just as one does when coming to college). Then, in the second phase of the journey, the *hero* gains sufficient awareness to begin questioning his/her cultural conditioning (as I have invited you to consider doing in various moments in this course). Through this questioning process, according to Campbell, the “hero” is gradually reborn—not as a conditioned cog in the global economy, but—as a free, creative, and self-actualized human being.

So it is that in this culminating BiSci field study I invite you to explore what happens if you allow yourself to think about your life in this more mythic and heroic sense... Please know that, from my perspective, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers here. As with everything in BiSci, my invitation to you is that you simply experiment with a different way of imagining what it might mean to be a fully enlivened human being.

### **Challenge 1: Slowing Down**

It is hard to imagine, much less enact, anything different in our lives unless we take time to slow down. Indeed, as the pace of contemporary life accelerates, there is less time for reflection—less time to ask questions. Consider that between 1973 and 2000 the average U.S. citizen added approximately 200 hours to his/her annual work schedule. Think of it as working an additional five weeks each year. This helps to explain why dual-income couples carve out only about 15 minutes a day to talk to each other and why the pace of many people's weekends has become as frantic as that of their weekdays.

As I think about all of this, it occurs to me that the faster we go the more we consume, and the more we consume the more harm we cause Earth and, by extension, to ourselves. Though it may at first seem paradoxical, I believe that to avoid an ecological meltdown, we will need to cultivate the practice of slowing down.

How? In his book, *In Praise of Slowness*, Carl Honore invites readers to slow down to *smell the flowers*. In his view a slow, more sane, life would include slow food, slow education, slow sex, slow doctoring, slow conversation, slow parenting, and more. Honore's message is that *slow is beautiful* and that slowing down can awaken us to what really matters in life.

As a way of testing Honore's ideas about the benefits of slowing down, spend a *slow* hour or two exploring "The Slow Movement" website <http://www.slowmovement.com/> by reading about "slow travel," "slow cities," "slow food," "slow living," "slow books," etc. Based on your explorations of this website and your own personal leanings, pick one thing that you normally do *fast* and then switch to doing that thing *slowly* for a one-day period. Then repeat this process for a second thing that you tend to do fast—again, doing this second thing slowly for a one-day period. For example, if you tend to multi-task, you might decide that you will do one thing at a time for a day, giving your full attention and presence to each thing that you do. There are many, many possibilities. Just decide on two and dedicate a day to each one.

For each day of this experiment, make a point of pausing three times as the day unfolds to note down how things are going. In these pauses consider questions like: What am I noticing? How is slowing down affecting my experience of being alive? What internal resistance am I encountering as I endeavor to slow down? What's this resistance about?

**Write up:** When you are ready compose a 1-page, typed/single-spaced—reflection summarizing what you did and what you learned in the process.

**Important:** If this experiment with slowing down feels like a "waste of time" to you, it will be important to reflect on why this is so for you.

## Challenge II: Cultivating Independence

One of the ironies of contemporary education is that spending more years in school doesn't necessarily mean the acquisition of more practical life skills. For example, college graduates often have very limited skills when it comes to building things, making and mending clothes, growing food, repairing things that break down (e.g., appliances, cars, leaking pipes) and so forth. One who is lacking in such basic construction and repair skills is largely dependent on others for his/her basic survival. Of course, this need not be so. Each of us can begin—LITERALLY—to take things into our own hands by making things and repairing things. So, when you are ready, give some thought to something you would like to have for yourself and, instead of buying it, MAKE IT! That's right: Use your hands and your innate creativity to make something meaningful for yourself—**something that will last AND that has some utility** (this excludes food). In this vein, consider that approximately 99% of everything we consume as a society is trashed within six months. That's right 99%! So, again, make something **that will last and that is useful in any way that you choose to define utility**.

**Alternative—Repair Something:** There is a **second option** if you are really struggling with the idea of *making something* from scratch. The alternative is **to repair something** that is part of your life and that is broken, but it has to be something that normally you would just throw away if it were broken. But now, instead of throwing it away, fix it so that you can continue to use it over and over into the future.

And there is even a **third option**—*up-cycle* something! By “up-cycle” I mean take something that is destined for the trash and invent a new use for it. For example, rather than down-cycling your plastic bottles by tossing them into a re-cycling bin, imagine a whole new use for them (See examples at [http://toponlineengineeringdegree.com/?page\\_id=116](http://toponlineengineeringdegree.com/?page_id=116))

When you are ready, compose a one-page (typed, single-spaced) essay describing the processes you went through in making (option 1) or repairing (option 2) or recycling (option 3) something. Be sure to include commentary on the feelings you experienced in the various phases of your actions.

**Important:** Be sure to bring the thing you made/repared to your December 6-7 lab and be prepared to show it to those in your circle.

### Challenge III: Finding Yourself in Clay

Poet e.e. cummings once said, *It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are*. This quote begs the question, Who are you really? And how might you find out? You began this process of self-inquiry ten weeks ago as part of your “Beliefs” field study. At that time I asked that you to go deep inside, using your intellectual powers, to figure out your answer to the question, *Who am I?* Now, as our course comes to a close, I invite you to use an entirely different, more open-ended and humble, approach to explore the question of your identity and purpose.

As odd as it may seem, it is possible to find the answer to this question by asking Earth! Think about it: You come from Earth, animate for a time as a human being, and then return to Earth. Indeed, if you dig your hands into the earth, you are digging your hands into the very stuff of you. So it is that I have found that working my hands into dirt, and especially clay, is a powerful medium for self-discovery. Indeed, as the famous psychologist Carl Jung said, “Often the hands know how to solve a riddle that the mind has wrestled with in vain.”

So, get yourself a hunk of clay. Where? Just a foot below the top soil here in Central Pennsylvania is red/copper clay. Construction sites (even on the PSU campus) often have piles of this clay subsoil. Just use your paws to pick up a softball-size clod and put it in a plastic bag to keep it moist. If you are having trouble locating clay, ask your TA for help.... Note: We will also provide some for you in 100 Thomas a week before this assignment is due.

Once you have your clay, make a ‘date’ with your self to explore it. Begin your exploration by simply placing your hands on your lump of clay; feel its coolness and stickiness. Next, bring your attention to your breath. As you inhale, imagine that you are taking in the energy of Earth up through the soles of your feet and then allow this energy to expand throughout your body. On the exhale, release all the tension in your body allowing it to drain out your feet and into Earth.

Then, when you are ready, immerse your hands in a bowl of warm water and then pick up the clay, sensing the weight and texture and smell of it. Now, **close your eyes** and begin to explore the clay with your moistened hands, noting the contours, depressions and bumps, the wet and dry places, the warm and cool places. Then, **with your eyes still closed**, begin to work the clay. If it seems a bit dry (not elastic), it is fine to put your hands back in the water to bring more moisture to your clay.

Don’t think about what to create, rather, simply allow your hands to have their way with this clay. Perhaps they want to pound the clay or poke it or mold it in some undetermined way. That’s all fine... Clay is strong and flexible and will stand up to whatever you give it.

Leave your thinking mind behind and allow your hands to take the lead, working with the clay spontaneously in ways that simply feel good. As you sink deeper into this creative process, say to yourself: “This clay is me and I am creating myself.” Continue, with eyes closed, in this open and receptive manner, always allowing your hands to lead you. Don’t rush this process. It may take 15 minutes; it may take a half hour; it may take an hour. If you think you are done, wait for a bit, allowing your hands to decide when you are truly done. And then open your eyes and behold your creation. *What do you see?* Run your fingers over and around your clay object, both looking at it and feeling it, attentive to any feelings that arise. If further sculpting is called for to complete the form, go at it.

Then when you are finished, consider: *“What insights, longings, visions, fears, etc. are embodied in my sculpture? What is this clay—shaped by me—telling me, revealing to me?”* Be patient. Place your creation on a stand to dry.... Look at it from time to time—e.g., before you sleep, when you wake up...

Then, when you are ready, take time to compose an essay (one-page, typed, single spaced) about your process of working with clay and any discoveries, feelings and/or leadings that arose, both during the molding process and in your reflection period afterwards.